2024

Using Asset-Based Community Development to Increase Student Engagement and Improve Student Experience in Schools

Jacqueline Hopkins
Virginia Commonwealth University

Using Asset-Based Community Development to Increase Student Engagement and Improve Student Experience in Schools

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

By

Jackie Hopkins

Chair: Hillary Parkhouse Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Teaching and Learning School of Education

Dissertation Committee:

David Naff Ph.D.

Gabriel Reich Ph.D.

Fantasy Lozada Ph.D.

Virginia Commonwealth University

Richmond, Virginia

August 15, 2024

Acknowledgments

This dissertation would not have been possible without the absolute and unconditional support of my father, Tom Creel. He was instrumental in motivating me to complete my program and helped me financially as well. In fact, he bounced back from what could have been a terminal illness just to make sure he was here to see me finish. I also could not have completed this without the support of my amazing husband and the strong women in my life, my mother and daughters. My family is absolutely everything to me and were there for me every step of the way. Melvin Hopkins was also a huge support and never missed a writing session.

I would be remiss if I did not mention my mentor, advisor, and committee chair, Hillary Parkhouse. I have grown as a researcher and writer under her guidance and will always be grateful for this experience. My committee was also instrumental in my success. Dr. Naff gave me the foundation and guidance to be an effective qualitative researcher. His thoughtful direction throughout my learning process allowed me to grow as a researcher and writer. Dr. Reich taught me everything I needed to know about how to write a practitioner's article and gave me the confidence to look at the research through a different lens. He is the first one to make me feel that I really could be a researcher. Finally. Dr. Lozada's thoughtful insight gave me the feedback I needed to adjust my literature review and find my focus. Two sentences during my prospectus shed light on my entire study. I was so grateful to have her on my committee. I could not have imagined a more supportive team inspiring me through this rigorous process.

Table of Contents

Abstract

The following is a dissertation in the three-paper dissertation format. The first section will give background information on the issue of alienation in schools and how asset-based community development (ABCD) could be an effective tool for educators to combat alienation and disengagement, especially with students with marginalized identities. This first section will also show the significance of the three papers as a whole and how they connect to one another. The first paper is the conceptual literature review, the second paper is an empirical study of the ABCD model in schools, and the dissertation will end with a practitioner's article based on the findings of the empirical study.

Connecting Paper

Statement of Problem

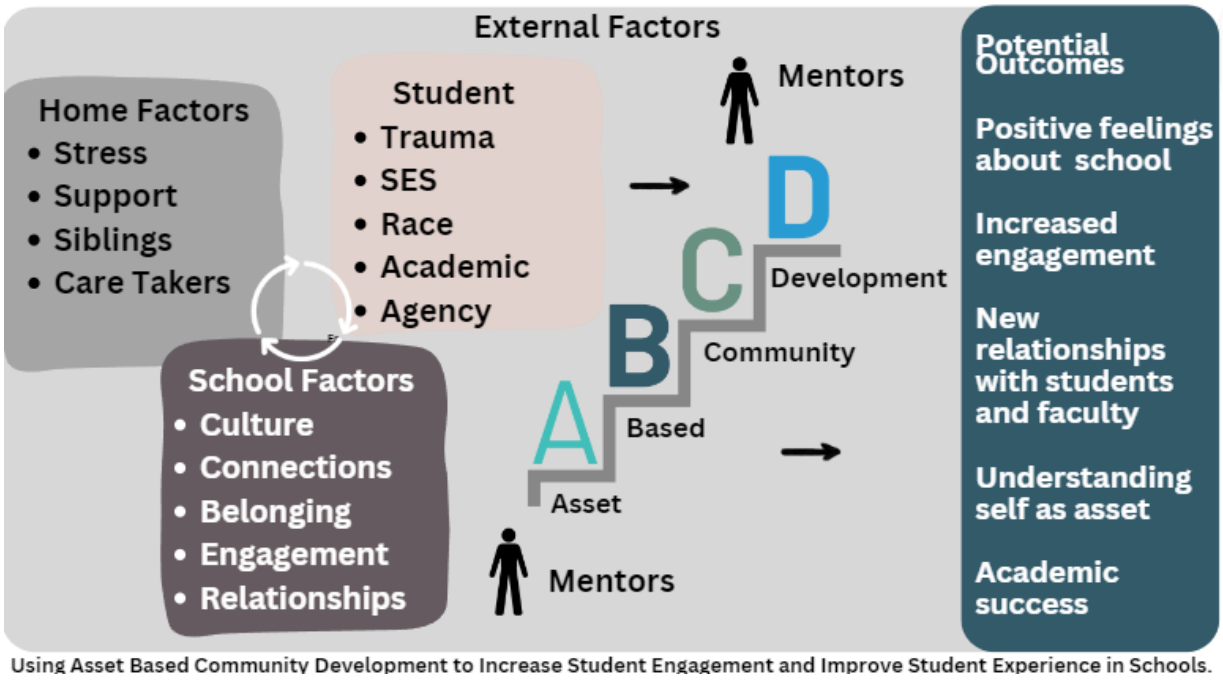
Many high school students are experiencing adolescent alienation due to their school experiences (Henry et al., 2012; Morinaj et al., 2023). This issue is a particular problem for students with marginalized identities (Caraballo & Lyiscott, 2020 who do not fit in with the dominant White, ablenormative culture that exists within American schools and is pervasive in American culture (Johnson et al., 2001; Welton et al., 2015; Henderson et al., 2023). Marginalized students include "lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer or questioning (LGBTQ) students, students of color, and culturally and linguistically diverse students, young people with serious mental health issues, and those with serious problem behaviors and school failure trajectories, including students with disabilities" (Scherr, & Mayer, 2019). The educational system in the United States was not created to support students with marginalized identities and fails to create a community in which these students can flourish (Healey & Stroman, 2021). Although many educators acknowledge the need for support for marginalized students, traditional deficit approaches have often exacerbated the problem , traditional deficit approaches have often exacerbated the problem by blaming students for their academic struggles, rather than addressing systemic issues or providing constructive support (Davis & Museus, 2019). Students from marginalized communities who are viewed from a deficit perspective are often unfairly viewed as academically inferior to the students in the dominant culture (Williams et al., 2020). Regular practices within the schools continue to exacerbate deficit thinking in schools (Lasater et al., 2021).

Asset-based approaches have gained traction due to the recognition of the positive impact of culturally relevant pedagogies. Educators increasingly understand that leveraging the cultural

wealth of communities is crucial for fostering a supportive environment for students with marginalized identities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Grounded in critical pedagogies, asset-based approaches like youth participatory action research (YPAR) have become popular for amplifying students' voices and celebrating diversity within educational settings (Caraballo & Lyiscott, 2020). With this same principle in mind, asset-based community development models (ABCD) could significantly impact student engagement and school experiences when adapted to the school setting. Figure 1 shows a conceptual framework I developed for this line of research.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Based on this conceptual framework, the significance of the empirical study is evident in the potential outcomes for implementing an ABCD model in schools. The larger gray area indicates the external factors that impact students as they move through their daily lives, such as media or stereotypes. The circular arrows indicate how the home experiences and school experiences all interact with the student and all impact each other. If a student has a bad

experience at school, it can impact how they feel at home and vice versa. The straight arrows lead to the ABCD program led by the mentors and the potential outcomes of the ABCD program. The students carry with them all of the factors from home, school, and society in general and move through the ABCD program with those factors in tow. When the student moves through the ABCD program with the mentors' guidance, the possible outcomes are listed to the right.

The research on a specific ABCD model in schools is limited to YPAR and similar student-driven pedagogies. This study could add to the existing research on asset-based approaches to education and YPAR. The following sections will outline the papers and show their connection.

Paper 1

The first paper in this line of research is the conceptual literature review created for my comprehensive exam. This paper reviews the current research on alienation and engagement and attempts to justify the need for an ABCD model in schools. The literature review discussion includes all students but focuses on students with marginalized identities to address the issues of increasing adolescent alienation and disengagement in these specific populations (Johnson et al., 2001; Ng, C. et al., 2018). The literature review examines the history of deficit approaches used when working with students with marginalized identities due to socioeconomic factors, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability status, or religion (Ladson-Billings, 2007). The review discusses deficit approaches' impact on these students and introduces asset-based approaches founded in culturally relevant pedagogies. From the discussion of asset-based approaches, the literature review proposes how the ABCD model in schools could be a tool for educators to improve school experiences for all students, especially those with marginalized identities. Paper one then explains the background of ABCD as a model in communities and how those basic

principles could adapt to the school setting. The review gives examples of what ABCD looks like in the community and then gives a detailed description of what this model could look like in schools. The review ends with implications for further research, including how this program could vary when used in different schools with different demographics.

Paper 2

This paper is an empirical, qualitative study, grounded in the preceding literature review, of an ABCD model used in schools. This case study draws on interviews with the School Community Project (SCP) coordinator and four mentors who delivered the ABCD-inspired curriculum to students in two local high schools and acted as mentors throughout the project. SCP (pseudonym) is a program that connects schools to community partners to give support to students on their caseload. The study also analyzes secondary data using a program evaluation feedback form completed by students who participated in an ABCD program. While the surveys were part of a program evaluation, the SCP coordinator was looking to obtain a well-rounded understanding of the student experience; therefore, the surveys provided information that helped triangulate data from mentor interviews and gave more insights into the impact of the ABCD program from the student perspective. The study attempts to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model program on students' feelings of belonging in school?

RQ2: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model program on students' level of engagement in school activities and class activities?

RQ3: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model on students' academic self-confidence?

RQ4: How does the context of each case influence the perceived impacts of the ABCD model on student experience in school?

Paper 3

Based on the empirical findings of the ABCD model study, the practitioner-facing article is a first person account of my experience with SCP and a practical overview of how the SCP team implemented the ABCD and the experiences that the staff shared to help other teachers or school leaders who may want to attempt a similar program in their schools. The article can serve as a practical tool and resource for educators who may want to try the ABCD model in schools and need a place for reference. The article begins with the background of the issue and how the ABCD program, called Community Works (pseudonym), came about. The article gives a narrative of the program as well as some of the pitfalls. The focus, however, is on the program's outcomes that align with the empirical study findings and practical advice for interested practitioners.

All three papers explore the possibilities of ABCD in schools. First, the conceptual literature review discusses the literature surrounding alienation and asset-based pedagogies that educators have used successfully. The review then discusses how ABCD could be a tool to help educators combat alienation and improve the student experience, especially for those with marginalized identities. Then, the empirical study seeks to understand an ABCD program's impact in a specific case study. Finally, the last paper is a practitioner's article that gives background and recommendations based on the experiences of the students and mentors from the empirical study for implementing a similar program in any school setting.

Researcher Identity and Positionality

I am a White female educator with over 20 years of experience working in schools in communities of varying socioeconomic statuses. The discrepancies in student experiences within these schools moved me to understand my role in addressing these discrepancies at the school

level. I witnessed, throughout my career, students who felt defeated because of the deficit approaches and felt that they could not do the work. Seeing students resign to failure and blame themselves was deeply upsetting. At the time, I lacked the framework to understand that the education system was treating these students as problems rather than addressing their needs. I was unaware that it was my responsibility as an educator to develop effective solutions. As I worked more closely with these students, I recognized their potential and began encouraging them to strive for academic awards, while also acknowledging their interest in improving their grades. It became clear to me that in education, building strong relationships is crucial to fostering successful teaching and learning.

My interest in ABCD in schools began with an introduction to the coordinator of an organization, SCP, whose mission is to bring community resources into schools through mentors who work inside the buildings. Their goal is to ensure that all students can meet their true potential, regardless of any factors such as race, socioeconomic status, where they live, gender, or anything else. As a part of an unpaid internship, the coordinator of SCP asked me to write a curriculum that would adapt the community-based model of ABCD to a school setting. I had no familiarity with the ABCD concepts when SCP asked me to write the curriculum, so to understand what ABCD looked like in the community setting, I went through training with a local nonprofit organization. This training took me through the steps of the ABCD model. From the training, I adapted the ABCD steps into something that would fit into the school setting with school-based mentors to guide the way. I plan to partner with the program mentors as they progress to improve the curriculum and work through any lessons that need adjustments. These same mentors will be asked for program feedback to ensure the program's success. I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to become involved with the SCP team. I plan to

continue to volunteer to work with them on this program and an adapted program for middle and elementary schools.

My goal with this study is to evaluate the Community Works program's impact on students' perceived sense of belonging and academic success in addition to its limitations based on the lived experiences of the various students participating.

Definitions of Terms

1. **Alienation -** There are several different variations of alienation. Alienation can include "individual perceptions of powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, cultural estrangement from societal values, self-estrangement through a lack of intrinsically motivated activities, and social isolation."

   (Hascher, & Hadjar, 2018). Non-alienating activities are associated with happiness and positive emotions, whereas alienating activities are associated with isolation and negative emotions. (Hascher, & Hadjar, 2018).
2. **Asset-based approaches -** Asset-based approaches focus on the strengths and potential of individuals rather than the shortcomings. Asset- based approaches seek to foster those strengths and allow people to do for themselves. This approach focuses on the assets and not what is missing or needs to be fixed (Rippon, & Hopkins, 2015; Moser, 2006).
3. **Asset-based community development (ABCD) -** A method of community development that focuses on the assets within a community and the cultural wealth of the community members (Cunningham & Mathie, 2002). Asset-based community development is focused on connecting people within communities to create change from within (Klee et al., 2014). The concept began with John McKnight and Jody Kretzman and has been

proven successful in communities across the country and internationally (Klee et al., 2014).

4. **Deficit-based approaches -** approaches that aim to "fix" what is broken within a school, group, or community. Rather than looking toward the strengths of a group, person, or school community, deficit approaches focus on what is missing or what they perceive as broken. The focus is placed on the outside force coming in to "save" the person or community rather than empowering the person or community to help themselves (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Davis & Museus, 2019).
5. **Youth participatory action research -** Grounded in critical pedagogy, YPAR allows students to research a problem that is having a direct impact on their communities and schools and work with a team of adults to come up with a presentation for school leaders, district officials, or city officials that shows possible solutions for the issue (Edirmanasinghe, 2022). YPAR utilizes the knowledge of the local players with the most investment in the project to take collective action against something directly impacting them (Caraballo & Lyiscott, 2020).
6. **Culturally relevant pedagogies -** Pedagogical approaches where students' knowledge, strengths, languages, values, and beliefs are considered assets and are considered when creating lessons (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Dee & Penner, 2017; Flint & Jaggers, 2021, p. 254).
7. **Marginalized Students -** students who feel or are from an underserved, persecuted community, and it carries over into their school experience (Dept. of Education Best Practices Clearinghouse, np.). Students may feel unsafe or harassed. Implicit bias that exists can favor one group over another, causing further trauma and exclusion.

References

Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(1), 163-206.

Caraballo, L., & Lyiscott, J. (2020). Collaborative inquiry: Youth, social action, and critical qualitative research. *Action Research, 18(2), 194-21*

Cunningham, G., & Mathie, A. (2002). Asset-based community development: An overview. *Coady International Institute. Retrieved February 4, 2009.*

Davis, L. P., & Museus, S. D. (2019). What is deficit thinking? An analysis of conceptualizations

Dee, T. S., & Penner, E. K. (2017). The causal effects of cultural relevance: Evidence from an ethnic studies curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, *54*(1), 127-166.of deficit thinking and implications for scholarly research. *NCID Currents*, *1*(1).

Edirmanasinghe, N. (2020). Using youth participatory action research to promote self-efficacy in math and science. *Professional School Counseling*, *24*(1), 2156759X20970500.

Flint, A. S., & Jaggers, W. (2021). You matter here: The impact of asset-based pedagogies on learning. *Theory Into Practice*, *60*(3), 254-264.

Hascher, T., & Hadjar, A. (2018). School alienation – Theoretical approaches and educational research. *Educational Research (Windsor)*, *60*(2), 171–188. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2018.1443021

Hascher, T., & Hagenauer, G. (2010). Alienation from school. *International journal of educational research*, *49*(6), 220-232.

Henry, K. L., Knight, K. E., & Thornberry, T. P. (2012). School disengagement as a predictor of dropout, delinquency, and problem substance use during adolescence and early adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *41*, 156-166.

Henderson, D. X., Baxter, S., Gordon-Littréan, B., Bingham Flemmings, J., & Edwards, C. (2023). "Push through everything": using phenomenological inquiry to investigate how Black males' socioecology and identities promote perseverance in the U. S. public education system. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *26*(5), 602–622.

Healey, K., & Stroman, C. (2021). Structures for belonging: A synthesis of research on belonging-supportive learning environments. *website: https://selcenter. wested. org/resource/structures-for-belonging-a-synthesis-of-researchon-belonging-supportive-learning-environments*.

Johnson, M. K., Crosnoe, R., & Elder Jr, G. H. (2001). Students' attachment and academic engagement: The role of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Education*, 318-340.

Johnson, R. M., Strayhorn, T. L., & Parler, B. (2020). "I just want to be a regular kid:" A qualitative study of sense of belonging among high school youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *111*, 104832-. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104832

Klee, Mordey, M. M., Phuare, S., & Russell, C. (2014). Asset-based community development – enriching the lives of older citizens. *Working with Older People* (Brighton, England), 18(3), 111–119. https://doi.org/10.1108/WWOP-06-2014-0017

Ladson-Billings, G. (2007). Pushing past the achievement gap: An essay on the language of deficit. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 316-323.Social Emotional Wellness - ed.

Lasater, K., Bengtson, E., & Albiladi, W. S. (2021). Data use for equity?: How data practices incite deficit thinking in schools. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *69*, 100845-. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100845

Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2003). From clients to citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, *13*(5), 474–486. https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452032000125857

Morinaj, J., Marcin, K., & Hascher, T. (2019). School alienation and its association with student learning and social behavior in challenging times. In *Motivation in education at a time of global change: Theory, research, and implications for practice* (pp. 205-224). Emerald Publishing Limited.

Moser, C. (2006). Asset-based approaches to poverty reduction in a globalized context. *Global Economy and Development Working Paper*, (01).

Ng, C., Bartlett, B., & Elliott, S. N. (2018). Engaging in Learning: The Challenges and Consequences for Students from Challenging Backgrounds. In *Empowering Engagement* (pp. 1–16). Springer International Publishing AG. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94652-8_1

Rippon, S., & Hopkins, T. (2015). Head, hands and heart: asset-based approaches in health care. *London: The Health Foundation*.

US Department of Education. (n.d.). *Dept. of Education Best Practices Clearinghouse*. Best Practices Clearinghouse. https://bestpracticesclearinghouse.ed.gov/resource-library.aspx

Welton, A. D., Harris, T. O., La Londe, P. G., & Moyer, R. T. (2015). Social Justice Education in a Diverse Classroom: Examining High School Discussions about Race, Power, and

Privilege. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *48*(4), 549–570. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2015.1083839

Williams, K. L., Coles, J. A., & Reynolds, P. (2020). (Re)Creating the Script: A Framework of Agency, Accountability, and Resisting Deficit Depictions of Black Students in P-20 Education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *89*(3), 249–266. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.89.3.0249

Paper 1

Using Asset-based Community Development to Increase Student Engagement and Improve Student Experience in Schools

Abstract

The school system in the United States was not designed to serve all students, specifically those with marginalized identities (Farrington, 2020). Because of this design flaw, secondary education in the United States faces a significant issue with student alienation that leads to increased student disengagement (Henry et al., 2012). Research shows that adolescent alienation can lead to various deviant behaviors and truancy, which all are precursors for eventual dropout (Brown et al., 2003). In response to the increase in adolescent alienation and disengagement, essential reform needed in secondary education is to create better school communities that foster support and care for adolescents (Hargreaves et al., 1997). Historically, educators have used deficit approaches to address the lack of connection marginalized students have to the existing curriculum and school staff (Comber & Kamler, 2004). As a counter to these deficit pedagogies, asset-based approaches, like youth participatory action research (YPAR) and culturally relevant pedagogies (CRP), have been used in schools across the country to re-engage students, reaffirm their sense of belonging, and make them feel as though they have a place within the school communities. Using an asset-based community development (ABCD) model in schools could complement these proven approaches and create realistic, practical solutions to disengagement and alienation at the school level.

Keywords: asset-based pedagogies, culturally relevant pedagogies, deficit-discourse, asset-based community development, YPAR

Using Asset-Based Community Development to Increase Student Engagement and Improve Student Experience in Schools

Jackie Hopkins

Virginia Commonwealth University School of Education

Using Asset-Based Community Development to Increase Engagement and Improve Student Experience in School

The history of public education in the United States has created a system that is not designed for all students (Farrington, 2020). As a result, many students with marginalized identities based on factors such as culture, race, ability, and socioeconomic status feel alienated and disengaged (Henry et al., 2012; Lasater et al., 2021). For this paper, student engagement refers to how involved students are in their learning and the amount of time and effort they put into their own educational experience, which is directly connected to their academic experience (Trowler, 2010). Achieving authentic engagement means students must be physically, cognitively, and emotionally invested in their schoolwork (Axelson & Flick, 2010). Disengagement can range from physical disengagement, which can be more easily observed, to less apparent emotional disengagement potentially caused by an overwhelming feeling of alienation, being othered, repeated disciplinary suspensions, and general lack of connection with the school community (Axelson & Flick, 2010; Buzzai, 2020). Alienation can range from students feeling like they have no power or control, a lack of meaning in their educational experience, that they are not normal, and that they do not share the same values as the school community (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018). Hascher and Hadjar (2018) explain that students become isolated due to disconnecting from the school community and losing motivation to participate, pushing them further away from social interactions. The Covid-19 pandemic exacerbating the existing barriers many students experience in school and had a major impact on the feelings of alienation as students moved to more isolated online learning (Telyani et al., 2021). Research shows that adolescent alienation may lead to truancy and other disciplinary infractions that can be precursors for eventually being pushed out of school completely (Brown et al., 2003; Shute &

Cooper, 2015; Sobba, 2019). In the current state of schools, a caring student community can rarely flourish, and many students with marginalized identities are disengaged or pushed out of school before they are genuinely prepared (Henderson et al., 2023). In response to the increase in adolescent alienation and disengagement, essential reform is needed in secondary education to create better school communities that foster support and caring for adolescents (Hargreaves et al., 1997).

Historically, educators have used existing deficit approaches to address the lack of connection between marginalized students and the existing curriculum and school staff (Comber & Kamler, 2004). Deficit thinking considers anything outside the norm of society as problematic and "discourages teachers and administrators from recognizing the positive values of certain abilities, dispositions, and actions" (Sharma & Portelli, 2014). Students with marginalized identities witness norms within the school in which they do not fit, and it harms their school experience (Healey & Stroman, 2021). For example, when students are physically different based on a disability or weight or socially different based on income level or sexual orientation, it can be socially problematic for students (Juvonen et al., 2019). As these students seek to find belonging, they may become weary and disengaged (Healey & Stroman, 2021). Many researchers agree that education is the place to combat inequities and deficit views (Keefe, 2022). So, as a counter to these deficit pedagogies, asset-based approaches, like youth participatory action research (YPAR) and culturally relevant pedagogies (CRP), have been used in schools across the country to re-engage students, reaffirm their sense of belonging, and make them feel as though they have a place within the school communities (Caraballo & Lyiscott, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Using an asset-based community development (ABCD) model could complement these approaches and create realistic, practical solutions to school

disengagement and alienation.

The purpose of this literature review is to bring together the emerging literature on ABCD with the literature on asset-oriented and deficit-oriented approaches in schools to explore how applying the ABCD model to schools may be a promising means of enhancing student engagement and sense of belonging. I will begin the discussion with the background of the problem and then discuss the tradition of deficit discourse and pedagogies that have exacerbated alienation. Once I have discussed the deficit pedagogical approaches, I will discuss the counter to those approaches in the form of asset-based approaches, such as YPAR and CRP, that show the benefits of asset-based approaches and set the foundations for ABCD. Then, I will discuss the history of ABCD, explain how it would be applied in schools, and discuss the potential benefits of an ABCD model.

Background of the Problem

To fully understand the potential impact an ABCD model could have in schools, it is essential to understand the environment within schools in the United States. Schools have failed to create an environment in which students can thrive and feel as though they are included in the school community (Healey & Stroman, 2021). Many other factors can contribute to students feeling alienated in a school setting: lack of control, little connection between curriculum and real life, poor teacher/student relationships, and schools that fail to make connections with parents (Buzzai et al., 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valenzuela, 2005). For students with marginalized identities, these factors are often exacerbated by difficult home situations due to low socioeconomic status, not having the same educational opportunities, already feeling othered and pushed away due to a disability, and not feeling connected to the dominant culture due to racial or ethnic differences (Buzzai et al., 2021; Henderson et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2007;

Valenzuela, 2005).

Student Alienation

Alienation, or adolescent alienation, has historically been a sociological concept that focused on the non-involvement or non-attachment during adolescence (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010). The study of alienation focused on three main areas: social isolation, the feeling of being powerless, and the feeling of being abnormal (Brown et al., 2003). Hascher (2010) explains that, while there are many different definitions of adolescent alienation, the common thread between them all is that students who are experiencing alienation do not see the value of schooling.

Alienation from the school community leads directly to disengagement socially and academically (Comber & Kamler, 2004). The current research suggests a positive relationship exists between student engagement and increased high school completion rates, decreased alienation, and improved academic achievement (Harris, 2011; Tomaszek, 2023). As students feel increasingly alienated, they tend to disengage more and more (Klem & Connell, 2004). The psychological aspect of engagement is a powerful element of a student's sense of belonging and perceived connections to other students within the school (Willms, 2003). This psychological aspect of engagement is also strongly connected to how much value a student places on education; therefore, if the student does not feel that they belong, then there is little motivation to engage in academics or with any extracurriculars (Willms, 2003). A sense of belonging within the school community is essential to student success and specifically linked to a student's sense of self-worth and mental health (Gray et al., 2018). Students who have more of a sense of belonging tend to have lower dropout rates than those students who are not connected to their schools or have no sense of belonging in their schools (Johnson et al., 2001; Allen, 2018). If students do not feel that they belong or feel distanced from the school community, they may not

feel comfortable enough to engage (Allen, 2018; Johnson et al., 2020). When students become estranged from the school community, it is difficult for these students to accept the school goals as shared goals (Brown et al., 2003). With no connection to schools and no shared goals, student experience burnout that leads to truancy (Brown et al., 2003; Tomaszek, 2023).

Deficit Discourses Exacerbate Alienation

Within the current Eurocentric, ablenormative version of education that exists in the United States, deficit approaches are common when working with students with marginalized identities, and these students' cultural backgrounds and experiences are ignored and devalued in the classroom (Flint & Jaggers, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valenzuela, 2005). Deficit approaches aim to “fix” what the outside person or group feels is broken and does not focus on the assets within the community or person who is perceived as having a deficit (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Davis & Museus, 2019). A deficit approach in an educational setting creates the dynamic of the student being perceived as problematic and something that needs to be fixed (Flint & Jaggers, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valenzuela, 2005). Deficit approaches do not factor in the social and historical inequities that these marginalized students and communities have experienced (Dudley-Marling, 2007). Specifically, deficit views of students of color, compounded by a history of structural racism, may contribute to educational disengagement (Alvarez, 2020). When educators filter conversations regarding families from Black and Brown communities through a deficit lens, the deficit discourse follows these students throughout their educational experience, exacerbating the feelings of alienation and possible disengagement (Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001). Conversations regarding poor students of color blame the students' "culture of poverty" and claim that parents do not care enough to expose children to educational opportunities before school because they do not care about education (Henderson et

al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2007) Discussing marginalized students in terms of a deficit impacts their feelings about their abilities, frames them negatively, and distances them socially from their White, able-normative counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2007). Current research also suggests that educational deficit discourse may lead educators to lower their expectations for students they may consider "at risk," which does them a significant disservice when attempting to compete with their more privileged White middle-class counterparts (Davis & Museus, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2007). The deficit approaches continually focus on the achievement gap based on the White, able-normative standards without considering the history of structural racism and other factors contributing to the so-called gap (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

In addition, school policy often targets marginalized students, which is problematic because students can infer from school experiences whether they fit into the school community based on rules and regulations that may favor a particular group (Healey & Stroman, 2021). As a result of these inferences, students may end up feeling othered by school policy, which can lead to alienation, academic disengagement, academic failure, and eventually, issues with behaviors (Valenzuela, 2005). A prime example is instances where overly strict school policies on dress codes that favor one cultural group over another, making students feel as though they do not fit into what has been normalized by the dominant culture (Healey & Stroman, 2021). When rules and policies like a dress code are put in place that target one particular group, the students can see that this puts them on the periphery of the norm and targets them for more punitive consequences (Bottiani et al., 2017). According to Barrett (2018), many school dress code policies are more discriminatory against females and are usually written from a White-centric perspective. The school dress codes do not typically take into account culturally significant factors that impact how students dress and wear their hair (Barrett, 2018). This alienation has

significant implications for a student's social experiences because many stigmas outside of school follow the student inside the school (Gray et al., 2018). For many marginalized students, their daily existence is constantly placed in juxtaposition to the dominant culture and viewed through negative stereotypes, and assimilation into the dominant culture threatens their cultural identities and social connections within their peer groups (Valenzuela, 2005). To compensate, these youth will often reject the norms of the dominant group. In turn, this rejection exacerbates the lack of connection and deepens the disengagement with the school community (Booker, 2004).

Deficit Views of Multilingual Learners

Another prime example of deficit approaches to education impacting marginalized students is in approaches when working with multilingual learners (ML). Deficit approaches cause MLs to feel alienated, and teachers often perpetuate the sense of alienation with the best intentions but do not see how the dominant culture influences their own positionality in the classroom (Liggett, 2005). MLs are regularly mis-leveled into classes well below their ability due to the emphasis placed on English language proficiency rather than content knowledge (Shapiro, 2014). This withholding of opportunities affects students' sense of belonging, ability, and motivation (Shapiro, 2014). In addition, loss of opportunities can lead to tensions between different racial groups when comparisons are made, and the educational discourse revolves around a deficit (Shapiro, 2014). MLs also face issues because the education system in the United States is focused primarily on standardized testing and curriculum that focuses on the dominant culture of the country, leaving the students who may not fit into this category to struggle with culturally biased testing and a curriculum that, once again, leaves them in the fringes (Borrero et al., 2012). To make matters worse, the high-stakes tests are often

administered in English, which automatically disadvantages the ML student (Abedi & Gándara, 2006).

Deficit Discourse and Ability

In addition to the deficit discourse surrounding students of color, MLs, and students who are socioeconomically disadvantaged, there is a significant stigma associated with special education labels that "others" students with disabilities and separate them from the student body (Smith, 2001). Traditions of separate education for students with disabilities have contributed to this stigma that many students feel they carry with them as they move into mainstream classes, despite ongoing efforts to accentuate their abilities and not focus on disabilities (Werner & Scior, 2016). Ableism, "the discrimination and oppression that many disabled people experience in society," follows students with disabilities throughout their schooling (Hehir*,* 2002, p.3*)*. Ableism can be seen in the lack of access and separation from the general population (Timberlake, 2020). The devaluation of one's humanity based on comparison to a student without disabilities is common in education and alienates students with disabilities regularly (Hehir, 2002).

Normalization of Whiteness Adding to Deficit Discourse and Alienation

Adding to the difficulties that come with being othered by school policy and deficit discourse, students in the dominant culture may not fully understand their privilege because of the normalcy placed on Whiteness and ability (Burleigh & Burm, 2013). Social identities are created around race, socioeconomic status, ability level, religious and cultural backgrounds through people’s social and discursive practices (Smith, 2001). Many White, able-normative students do not see the privilege that comes with Whiteness and being an able person because it is ingrained in their daily lives, while those who are not benefiting from this same privilege do

see it (Burleigh & Burm, 2013). What this lack of awareness does to marginalized students is that it reinforces the sense that they will always be seen as something other than the norm, and it perpetuates the stereotype of marginalized students not being as academically strong as their White counterparts (Yared et al., 2020). Yared et al. (2020) explain that when the normalization of Whiteness is not seen by those benefiting from its privilege, the marginalization and negative feelings about the school can be exacerbated.

Students, especially disenfranchised students, could benefit from a different form of support that does not position them as "others." The school system in the United States was not designed to create any sense of community within schools that would support and celebrate the diversity within the schools and has failed to create a positive experience for the students, especially those with marginalized identities (Farrington, 2020). The ABCD model described below emphasizes the social component of community development that could allow students who have historically been othered by their community to feel they have an important place within the school. Before describing ABCD, I will first review other asset-based pedagogies that have historically been proposed to address the deficit perspectives toward marginalized students.

Asset-Based Pedagogies as Alternatives to Traditional Schooling

Asset-based pedagogies offer a counter to the deficit discourse in education (Flint & Jaggers, 2021). Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) describes culturally relevant pedagogies as "oppositional pedagogies" designed to help students achieve academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness that would allow them to question and challenge the status quo (p. 160). Culturally relevant teachers recognize the antagonistic relationship that marginalized students have with society at large and do their best to teach them how to deconstruct and reconstruct the current curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2008). CRP empowers

students to look critically at educational content and use their culture to understand their place in the world (Milner, 2011). Milner (2011) explains, "Educators who create culturally relevant learning contexts are those who see students' culture as an asset, not a detriment to their success" (p. 254) and use student culture when building curriculum and planning what the material will cover. The research regarding marginalized students indicates that they perform better when they are "in classrooms where their knowledge, strengths, languages, values, and beliefs were recognized and embedded within the curriculum" (Flint & Jaggers, 2021, p. 254; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Dee & Penner, 2017). Students appear to perform better when viewed as assets and not problems (López, 2017). López (2017) refers to this phenomenon as the self-fulfilling prophecy where students perceive the lowered expectations from the teacher and respond with the understanding that they are unable to meet higher expectations. Research has also focused on the cultural wealth of communities, referring to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks in Communities of Color, which are used to combat institutional racism and oppression (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). Highlighting the cultural capital of a community is essential in combating deficit discourse surrounding marginalized students (López, 2017). Asset-based, culturally relevant pedagogies are practical tools in the classroom that can help historically marginalized students flourish (Dee & Penner, 2017). Asset-based pedagogical approaches are essential for educators to positively impact students' school experiences, especially those with marginalized identities (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

YPAR as a Model for Community Development in Schools

One asset-based approach that has grown in popularity is YPAR. Grounded in critical pedagogy, YPAR allows students to research a problem that is having a direct impact on their communities and schools and work with a team of adults to come up with a presentation for

school leaders, district officials, or city officials that shows possible solutions for the issue (Edirmanasinghe, 2022). YPAR utilizes the knowledge of the local players with the most investment in the project to take collective action against something directly impacting them (Caraballo et al., 2017). One criticism of YPAR is that adults may control too many aspects of the YPAR experience, minimizing the exposure to many of the critical aspects of YPAR, such as data collection and analysis (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010). Ideally, YPAR would share the knowledge and power with the students participating in the YPAR project; however, there are times when adults may interfere with the project due to their position of power through what Clay and Turner III (2021) refer to as Managerial Subterfuge. An example would be when the adults may become too controlling over a project, favoring what they feel is the best solution rather than what the students desire (Clay & Turner III, 2021). While YPAR is a successful tool for engaging students in social change, there may be a way for educators to create something similar for action that specifically targets the school community through an ABCD model in schools.

Asset-based Community Development as a Community-Based Concept

Asset-based community development is a model of community development that empowers low socioeconomic communities and looks to use their own assets and resources to address problems and make essential improvements within the community (Clear Impact, 2017). John McKnight (2017), the founder of the Asset-Based Community Development Institute, emphasized that rather than viewing the community as a problem, ABCD leverages assets within the community and lifts community members to leadership roles. The goal of an ABCD movement in a community is to address the community issues that matter the most to the members of the community, not what an outsider thinks should be important (Asset-Based

Community Development, 2016).

Because schools are a microcosm of the community around them, it stands to reason that a tool that has been used to amplify the assets within a community would also do the same in a school. Although the ABCD model was not developed for application in schools and has yet to be explored for this purpose, in this paper, I outline the reasons the ABCD model could be successful when used in schools.

The Beginnings of ABCD

John McKnight (2017) and Jody Kretzman founded The Asset-Based Community Development Institute in 1988. These two men worked in the Center for Urban Development at Northwestern University (McKnight, 2017). According to McKnight (2017), he and Kretzman developed the asset-based model when they realized that the 24 other faculty members' "implicit view of neighborhoods was that they were full of problems and victimized people" (p. 1). Disturbed by this notion, McKnight (2017) began to think about how communities could be empowered with assistance, rather than control, from an outside group. Asset-based community development is a strength-based alternative to the deficit-based models that would have outside groups tell the community what they want and attempt to "fix" what they see as broken, often leading to superficial solutions or no real solution at all (Ennis & West, 2010). McKnight (2017) felt strongly that the beginning of community building should initiate with the neighbors, who are often left out of conversations when outsiders come in to launch a community program. The deficit-based programs brought in by outside organizations overlook the cultural wealth that existed within these communities. Asset-based community development has received criticism for being idealistic and naive when considering the structural barriers faced by low-income Black and Latine communities (Ennis & West, 2010). However, McKnight's (1995) model

includes assistance from outside organizations to give the community the support they need for their project until they have gained the momentum needed to succeed.

Discoveries made through intimate conversations with neighbors led McKnight (p.2, 2017) to develop the main assets that are at the core of ABCD:

- individual resident capacities
- local associations, neighborhood institutions - business, not-for-profit, and government
- physical assets - the land and everything on it and beneath it
- exchange between neighbors - giving, sharing, trading, bartering, exchanging, buying, and selling stories

McKnight (2017) also demonstrates that the main concepts behind ABCD are straightforward and applicable in many situations. One of the most significant aspects of ABCD is that it connects people who have not been connected and reveals assets within a community that deficit views have hidden. ABCD treats relationships as social capital and uses relationships to create networks within the community (Cho et al., 2019). The primary purpose of ABCD is to allow residents to recognize their assets and facilitate relationships with other people inside and outside of their community to make positive changes for their community (McKnight, p.3, 2017). While the deficit model tends to keep communities apart and in need, ABCD empowers communities and allows them to understand how to help themselves once proper support is implemented. While the deficit approaches see the communities as the problems and outsiders as the saviors, the ABCD model sees that most community problems are created by big companies and a history of structural racism (McKnight, 1995). McKnight (1995) developed the ABCD model to challenge this deficit perspective of socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. In the same way ABCD can build communities and inspire its members, it could do the same thing when

used as a pedagogical tool.

The Steps in ABCD

Obtaining a complete picture of how ABCD could impact school communities requires understanding the steps involved in an ABCD project as it appears in a community: the listening project, asset mapping, and the final project. The very first step in the ABCD model is the listening project. The listening project is a gathering of stories from the community conducted by the leaders of the ABCD project. These stories are the community's cultural capital (Asset Based Community Development, 2016). According to Nurture Develop (2018), a strategic partner of the Asset Based Community Development Institute, through these conversations, it is possible to learn about individual talents and assets and the significant things important to the community. This listening project is an informal conversation between the gathered members of the community and the outside partners (Cunningham & Mathie, 2002). Listening projects can begin with older community members who have lived in the community for an extended period and have many stories to tell. This listening project is meant to uncover the group's gifts and talents and understand what the community members want for their neighborhood (Cunningham & Mathie, 2002). From the listening project, people will begin to show leadership skills and interest in seeing their community grow. The core group of community members will emerge from this group of people to begin the final community project (Haines, 2014).

Once the listening project is completed, this core group of community members will begin asset mapping for local talent, associations, the local economy, and natural resources (Haines, 2014). The most crucial part of ABCD is making connections within the community and creating lasting relationships between people who can help each other and the community (Haines, 2014). When in communication, it is easier to mobilize and create a project that will

benefit the community. Traditionally, community development has been founded in a deficit view, placing the outside organization as the change agent (Nel, 2018). When approaches to community development focus on what the outside change agent feels are the community's needs, the solutions often leave the community isolated from each other and dependent on outsiders for continued assistance (Nel, 2018). In the asset-based model, the community members decide what the community needs and settle on a project to help realize their vision (Asset-Based Community Development, 2016).

At this point, the community can begin its final community project, explore relationships within the community, and accept support from outside organizations whose role would be supporting only. This allows a partnership to begin that could lead to more positive outcomes for the communities involved (Asset Based Community Development, 2016).

Asset-based Community Development in Action

A non-profit organization, Community First, spearheaded an ABCD project in 2008 in a local community in a major city in Virginia. Riverside Court (Embrace Communities, n.d.). This neighborhood is a 446-unit public housing complex overseen by the Local Redevelopment and Housing Authority. Riverside Court neighborhood has 99% African American residents, 1% White, and 90% of the households are single female head of household. The average household in Riverside Court has an annual income of $8,500 and the community has an unemployment rate of over 70% (Embrace Communities, n.d.). Community Works launched a listening project in this community through a pizza party thrown for its residents. The conversations in this meeting led to the understanding that these residents were most concerned about the same thing. This community united through the common desire to protect their children (Embrace Communities, n.d.). A well-respected community member volunteered to head this project, and

the development began there. Through more listening projects, Community Works discovered that one woman in the community was a competitive cheerleader in high school. She wanted to share her gifts with the community's young girls to help them build self-esteem and keep them off the streets. The men formed a men's group, eventually leading to a football team for the boys of Riverside. When community members saw what was happening, they began to ask what they could do, and several other community-based projects emerged. Patricia Shelby (pseudonym), the initial volunteer, took over where the Community Works team started and founded a non-profit, the Riverside Court Group. Shelby says, "So many organizations come into Riverside and then leave, but my thing has always been to follow through. Once I get started, we keep going until we make it happen, and we make sure the community has ownership" (Embrace Communities, n.p.). Riverside Court currently has a competitive cheer team, a youth football team, a family team to support each other with various issues, a hospitality team who provides fellowship within the community, a men's group, and a seniors' group, all of which stemmed from that original listening project where neighbors gathered to talk about what they wanted for their community. Could the ABCD-based model, like the one conducted in Riverside, be a valuable tool for schools to improve engagement and increase students' sense of belonging, especially students with marginalized identities?

Asset-based Community Development Model in Schools

Applying the ABCD principles to schools would be similar to how they are implemented in the community. The only differences would be how the students are selected for the core group and the size of the projects. In the community model, participants are discovered through conversations with the community members (McKnight, 2017). In the school model, students may be selected by mentors or staff to begin as the core group of participants. The process is

similar because the mentors seek students interested in improving their school community.

The mentors would guide these initial participants through an ABCD curriculum to help them understand what ABCD is and why it can help their school experience. As the mentors move through the curriculum, they will support the students through the various stages of ABCD. As the core group moves through the curriculum, the group would grow naturally based on the interests, leadership, and strengths of the students involved. The core group of students, around ten students, would lead a listening project. The listening project would lead to connections, relationship building, asset mapping, and the final project. The final project would be based on qualitative data gathered during the listening project. This data would be collected in a larger group conversation, in smaller groups, or through one-on-one interviews with individual students. The purpose of these interviews would be to work towards a better understanding of the wants and needs of the student body. For example, there may be a need for a student-led mentoring or study group that they discover through the listening project, or they may find that several students interviewed mentioned not having a place to go before or after school that made them feel comfortable.

The students would then lead and launch the final project, designed to make their school a place where they genuinely feel they belong. This final project would vary depending on the outcome of the listening project. It could range from starting a student-led peer mentor project to starting an international food day in the cafeteria to represent and highlight students' cultures. Through the entire process, students could learn to use their voices for change, become involved in school, and potentially move past some of the barriers that may inhibit their daily experiences in school. Like the Riverside Court project, the changes begin with one project and grow organically as the students move through the program year after year. ABCD, when utilized in

schools, could positively impact all the students in the school, especially those with marginalized identities, by combating alienation and improving the student experience.

Student voice is an essential component of ABCD (McKnight, 2017; Warren & Marciano, 2018). The ABCD listening project is an opportunity for students to share with school leaders what they need and want to improve their experience as a student in their schools (Mitra, 2008). The students are empowered to make changes and learn how to understand assets and relationships. As they look for partners to support their final project, students learn to create a link between the school community and the outside community that can be utilized to support the students. The direct benefit of listening to student voices is that when students feel empowered, their academics improve (Mitra, 2008). With an ABCD model in schools, student voice is at the forefront of change, while a deficit approach would have them silenced and viewed as problematic. With student voice as a predominant piece of the ABCD model, this method could be a tool to help students with educational buy-in and engagement.

ABCD Compared to YPAR and CRP

The asset-based community development model takes the concept of cultural wealth and student-centered instruction from CRP, combines it with the student-driven social aspects of YPAR, and creates a new tool for educators specific to school experiences. While YPAR and the ABCD model both discuss the topic to be chosen, the ABCD model would arrive at the final project based on conversations with the student body rather than just the small group. In addition, YPAR is focused on researching solutions, whereas ABCD is focused on completing small projects within the school that will make the school experience better for all students. The adults in ABCD are hands-off and only act as facilitators for meetings and needed support, limiting their interference with what the students want to do. It is possible to begin with a small,

in-school ABCD project that turns into a larger YPAR project if that type of transition is desired.

How ABCD Could Combat Alienation and Disengagement

The ABCD model in the community is meant to be community-driven and centered around the assets within the community; the same is true for the ABCD model in schools (McKnight, 2017). Engagement is a core component of the ABCD model and leads to students working as a team and actively participating in a project of their design. This model aims to engage the student in activities and relationship development that will motivate them to want to come to school. School experience is about so much more than academics; all the relationships and experiences in high school can significantly affect the student's academic success (Scales et al., 2000). In addition, the ABCD model emphasizes the social component of community development that could allow students who have historically been othered by their community to feel they have an important place within the school. Participating in the social aspect of school is essential in developing a friend group for support and security (Demetriou et al., 2000). Research suggests that a popular student has more academic success than a student who is not (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Teens who are not popular or do not have a successful peer-support group have a lower sense of self-worth than teens with a solid social group (Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). According to Wentzel and Caldwell (1997), when students invest in a social group, they often lean heavily into it for support. In contrast, students who do not find a social group to learn and grow in do not develop the needed social skills for success (Véronneau & Vitaro, 2007). Based on the research, it is apparent that there is an essential connection between having a successful social experience in high school and a successful academic experience in high school (Véronneau & Vitaro, 2007). The community development aspect, the peer-to-peer relationship building, and the student-mentor relationship building in ABCD could be effective in ensuring

these social relationships and positive student-staff relationships occur. With community building as a focus, the ABCD model could also be a powerful tool for educators who need alternative approaches to create a supportive community in the school. The ABCD model would aim to create an environment where students, especially those marginalized, can feel safe and have a place within the community.

In addition to student-to-student relationships, having a positive relationship with teachers and staff impacts student outcomes positively (Sethi & Scales, 2020). Teacher and staff relationships are a large part of students' social experiences while in school, and it is essential to look at these relationships when attempting to reach students who are struggling to succeed (Sethi & Scales, 2020). The teachers in the ABCD model become mentors and participants in the project created by the students. The students are able to develop alternative relationships with the staff outside of the classroom. An ABCD model in schools emphasizes the development of the school community and could be used to create a better understanding of marginalized students by the White able-normative students and staff. In addition, the ABCD model could also give marginalized students a sense of belonging within the school community.

An additional possible impact of introducing an ABCD model in schools is the opportunity for staff to support students in adding to their developmental assets. Developmental assets are those skills that allow students to "move closer to their human potential" and become successful members of society (Scales et al., 2000, p. 84). Developmental assets may be something as simple as learning compassion, their sense of value in a community, or their feelings of motivation (Bleck & DeBate, 2016; Edwards et al., 2007; Scales et al., 2000). Creating a positive school community, extending this community to families of students, maintaining expectations for success, and encouraging participation in out-of-class activities are

all ways educators can assist in the growth of students' developmental assets, contributing to their ability to achieve upward mobility after graduation (Bleck & DeBate, 2016; Edwards et al.; Scales et al., 2000).

It is also crucial for students to see themselves as assets and to understand what they have to offer; self-perception is vital in becoming a positive member of a larger community (Bleck & Debate, 2016; Scales et al., 2000). The ABCD model highlights the students' assets and teaches them how to connect with students and staff in the building and the community. In the process, the school staff, even those not involved, could see these assets in action, which is extremely important for the student's growth. When faculty and staff recognize students' assets and recognize them, it becomes easier for the student to recognize these assets in themselves (Scales et al., 2000).

Potential Impacts of an ABCD Model on Student Voice and Engagement

Student interest and involvement in school depend on the students' feeling as though the administrators and teachers genuinely hear their voices (Mitra, 2008). Understanding how students perceive their school experience and what factors motivate them to attend school is essential in understanding how to increase student engagement, attendance, participation, and sense of belonging (Mitra, 2008). Schools in the United States are designed based on an industrial-era model that does not allow students to truly be part of shaping the learning process (Beattie, 2012). Beattie (2012) points out that the current education design puts the student in a passive role where they are expected to be still and receive information that someone else has deemed necessary, regardless of their backgrounds or learning abilities.

The current student-as-a-vessel model does not allow students to participate in knowledge creation (Beattie, 2012). Paulo Freire refers to this as "the banking" model, which

turns the student into a receptacle, stifling the creativity essential for authentic learning (Freire, 1993). According to Freire (1993), having the White centric curriculum deposited into students' minds gives no room for any creative thought and keeps the oppressed groups in the oppressed position. This banking model fails because it removes students' independent voices, hinders creative thinking, and hinders their sense of value and worth; humans tend to thrive more when they feel they are a part of something greater (Cooke-Sather, 2002). Student voice is essential in understanding the diversity within any school (Bubb & Jones, 2020), and when student voice is included in school improvement, it allows for rich data that can give unique perspectives on student motivation. In an ABCD model, the students are not told what to do; they are the ones who decide what their project will be. The ABCD listening project is an opportunity for students to share what they need and want to improve their experience as a student in their schools (Mitra, 2008). The core group of students who are in the ABCD group go out into the school to interview students and talk with them about their school experiences. Through these conversations, the students are empowered to make changes that are meaningful to the students and learn how to understand assets within their student body. With an ABCD model in schools, student voice is at the forefront of change. Student and teacher voices are developed together and are interdependent (Thompson, 2009). Thompson (2009) explains that the student and teacher voices become a partnership that allows multiple perspectives of the educational experience. Freire (1993) referred to this as "dialogue" and explained that when the students have a voice and their perspectives are interjected into the lesson, the teacher-student relationship becomes one of collaboration that can lead to a richer experience for the student. Without the students' perspectives, understanding of the educational experience's impact on the students is incomplete (Thompson, 2009). The ABCD could allow these students to use their voices to make positive

changes in their schools.

Conclusion

The literature demonstrates a significant need to address alienation and disengagement in the school community to improve experiences for all students, especially those with marginalized identities. Deficit approaches have only exacerbated the problem of adolescent alienation and "othered" students who do not fit within society's dominant culture. Culturally relevant pedagogies and asset-based approaches such as YPAR have paved the way for an ABCD model in schools. An ABCD model focused specifically on the school could help build community within the school, increase engagement, and eliminate alienation that can lead to eventual pushout of school. Further research is needed to truly understand the full impact of the ABCD model on students' perceptions of their school experiences. The next step for research would be for more ABCD programs to be launched at several schools with various demographics to understand how this program works in different academic settings. The goal would be to have an asset-based community development model repeated in the same building year after year to see how it might impact the larger school community. Seeing the long term impact of an ABCD model program would be essential to understanding how it could have a larger more institutional impact.

Journal Selection

The selected journal for this literature review is Pedagogy, Culture, and Society. This journal seeks articles that focus on pedagogy within a cultural and social context. This journal is interested in philosophical papers, and this literature review is a conceptual review that poses an argument for the potential for ABCD as a pedagogical tool to combat alienation.

References

ABCD Institute. ABCD Institute | DePaul University, Chicago. (n.d.). https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx

Abedi, J., & Gándara, P. (2006). Performance of English language learners as a subgroup in large‐scale assessment: Interaction of research and policy. *Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, *25*(4), 36-46.

Allen, K., Kern, M. L., Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2018). 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

Alvarez. A. (2020). Seeing race in the research on youth trauma and education: A critical review. *Review of Educational Research,* 90(5), 583–626. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654320938131

Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(1), 163-206.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). Nurture Development. (2016, November 30). https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/

Axelson, R. D., & Flick, A. (2010). Defining student engagement. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, *43*(1), 38-43.

Barrett, K. (2018). When school dress codes discriminate. *NEA Today*.

Beattie, H. (2012). Amplifying student voice: The missing link in school transformation. *Management in Education*, *26*(3), 158-160.

Bleck, J., & DeBate, R. (2016). Long-term association between developmental assets and health behaviors: an exploratory study. *Health Education & Behavior*, *43*(5), 543-551.

Booker, K.C. (2004). Exploring school belonging and academic achievement in African American adolescents. *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 6(2), 131–.

Borrero, N. E., Yeh, C. J., Cruz, C. I., & Suda, J. F. (2012). School as a context for "othering" youth and promoting cultural assets. *Teachers College Record*, *114*(2), 1-37.

Bottiani, J. H., Bradshaw, C. P., & Mendelson, T. (2017). A multilevel examination of racial disparities in high school discipline: Black and white adolescents' perceived equity, school belonging, and adjustment problems. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *109*(4), 532.

Brown, M. R., Higgins, K., & Paulsen, K. (2003). Adolescent alienation: What is it and what can educators do about it? *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *39*(1), 3-9.

Bubb, S., & Jones, M. A. (2020). Learning from the COVID-19 home-schooling experience: Listening to pupils, parents/careers, and teachers. *Improving Schools*, *23*(3), 209-222.

Burleigh, D., & Burm, S. (2013). Unpacking our white privilege: Reflecting on our teaching practice. *Education*, *19*(2), 107-119.

Buzzai, C., Sorrenti, L., Tripiciano, F., Orecchio, S., & Filippello, P. (2021). School alienation and academic achievement: The role of learned helplessness and mastery orientation. *School Psychology*, *36*(1), 17.

Caraballo, L., & Lyiscott, J. (2020). Collaborative inquiry: Youth, social action, and critical qualitative research. *Action Research*, *18*(2), 194-211.

Cho, A., Herrera, R. G., Chaidez, L., & Uriostegui, A. (2019, May). The" Comadre" Project: An asset-based design approach to connecting low-income Latinx families to

out-of-school learning opportunities. In *Proceedings of the 2019 CHI conference on human factors in computing systems* (pp. 1-14).

Clay, K. L., & Turner III, D. C. (2021). "Maybe you should try it this way instead": Youth activism amid managerialist subterfuge. *American Educational Research Journal*, *58*(2), 386-419.

Clearimpact. (2017, August 25). *Asset-Based community Development - clear impact*. Clear Impact - Clear Impact Software and Services.

Comber, B., & Kamler, B. (2004). Getting out of deficit: Pedagogies of reconnection. *Teaching Education*, *15*(3), 293-310.

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing Students' Perspectives: Toward Trust, Dialogue, and Change in Education. Educational Researcher, 31(4), 3-14. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X031004003

Cunningham, G., & Mathie, A. (2002). Asset-based community development: An overview. *Coady International Institute. Retrieved February 4*, 2009.

Davis, L. P., & Museus, S. D. (2019). What is deficit thinking? An analysis of conceptualizations of deficit thinking and implications for scholarly research. *NCID Currents*, *1*(1).

Dee, T. S., & Penner, E. K. (2017). The causal effects of cultural relevance: Evidence from an ethnic studies curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, *54*(1), 127-166.of deficit thinking and implications for scholarly research. *NCID Currents*, *1*(1).

Demetriou, H., Goalen, P., & Rudduck, J. (2000). Academic performance, transfer, transition and friendship: Listening to the student voice. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *33*(4), 425-441.

Dudley-Marling, C. (2007). Return of the deficit. *Journal of Educational Controversy*, *2*(1), 5.

Edirmanasinghe, N. (2020). Using youth participatory action research to promote self-efficacy in math and science. *Professional School Counseling*, *24*(1), 2156759X20970500.

Edwards, O. W., Mumford, V. E., Shillingford, M. A., & Serra-Roldan, R. (2007). Developmental assets: A prevention framework for students considered at risk. *Children & Schools*, *29*(3), 145-153.

Ennis, G., & West, D. (2010). Exploring the potential of social network analysis in asset-based community development practice and research. *Australian Social Work*, *63*(4), 404-417.

Farrington. (2020). Equitable learning and development: Applying science to foster liberatory education. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 159–169. https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2019.1609730

Flint, A. S., & Jaggers, W. (2021). You matter here: The impact of asset-based pedagogies on learning. *Theory Into Practice*, *60*(3), 254-264.

Foster-Fishman, P. G., Law, K. M., Lichty, L. F., & Aoun, C. (2010). Youth ReACT for social change: A method for youth participatory action research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *46*, 67-83.

Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Tran.; New rev. 20th-Anniversary ed.). Continuum.

Gray, Hope, E. C., & Matthews, J. S. (2018). Black and Belonging at School: A Case for Interpersonal, Instructional, and Institutional Opportunity Structures. Educational Psychologist, 53(2), 97–113. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1421466haines

Haines, A. (2014). Asset-based community development. In *An Introduction to Community Development* (pp. 67-78). Routledge.

Hargreaves, A., Earl, L. M., Ryan, J., Clifton, R. A., & Mandzuk, D. (1997). Schooling for Change: Reinventing education for early adolescents. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *22*(1), 119.

Harris, L. (2011). Secondary teachers' conceptions of student engagement: Engagement in hendersolearning or in schooling? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *27*(2), 376–386. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.09.006

Hascher, T., & Hadjar, A. (2018). School alienation–Theoretical approaches and educational research. *Educational Research*, *60*(2), 171-188.

Hascher, T., & Hagenauer, G. (2010). Alienation from school. *International journal of educational research*, *49*(6), 220-232.

Healey, K., & Stroman, C. (2021). Structures for belonging: A synthesis of research on belonging-supportive learning environments. *website: https://selcenter. wested.*

Hehir, T. (2002). Eliminating ableism in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, *72*(1), 1-33.

Henderson, D. X., Baxter, S., Gordon-Littréan, B., Bingham Flemmings, J., & Edwards, C. (2023). "Push through everything": using phenomenological inquiry to investigate how Black males' socioecology and identities promote perseverance in the U. S. public education system. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *26*(5), 602–622.

Henry, K. L., Knight, K. E., & Thornberry, T. P. (2012). School disengagement as a predictor of dropout, delinquency, and problem substance use during adolescence and early adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *41*, 156-166.

Johnson, M. K., Crosnoe, R., & Elder Jr, G. H. (2001). Students' attachment and academic engagement: The role of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Education*, 318-340.

Johnson, R. M., Strayhorn, T. L., & Parler, B. (2020). “I just want to be a regular kid:” A qualitative study of sense of belonging among high school youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *111*, 104832-. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104832

Juvonen, J., Lessard, L. M., Rastogi, R., Schacter, H. L., & Smith, D. S. (2019). Promoting Social Inclusion in Educational Settings: Challenges and Opportunities. *Educational Psychologist*, *54*(4), 250–270. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1655645

Keefe, E. S. (2022). From Detractive to Democratic: The Duty of Teacher Education to Disrupt Structural Ableism and Reimagine Disability. *Teachers College Record (1970)*, *124*(3), 115–147. https://doi.org/10.1177/01614681221086994

Klem, A. M., & Connell, J. P. (2004). Relationships matter: Linking teacher support to student engagement and achievement. *Journal of School Health*, *74*, 262-273.

Lasater, K., Bengtson, E., & Albiladi, W. S. (2021). Data use for equity?: How data practices incite deficit thinking in schools. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*, *69*, 100845-. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2020.100845

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, *32*(3), 465-491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2008). Yes, but how do we do it?”: Practicing culturally relevant pedagogy. *City Kids, City Schools: More Reports from the Front Row*, 162-177.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2007). Pushing past the achievement gap: An essay on the language of deficit. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 316-323.

Liggett, T. (2005). *Visualizing the invisible: The role of race and white racial identity in the teaching and pedagogy of new ESOL teachers*. University of New Hampshire.

López, F. A. (2017). Altering the trajectory of the self-fulfilling prophecy: Asset-based pedagogy and classroom dynamics. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *68*(2), 193-212.

Mathie, A., & Cunningham, G. (2003). From clients to citizens: Asset-based Community Development as a strategy for community-driven development. *Development in Practice*, *13*(5), 474–486. https://doi.org/10.1080/0961452032000125857

McKnight, J. (1995). Asset-based community building: Developing communities from the inside out. *New City Magazine*, 16(2), 10–.

McKnight, J. (2017). Asset-based community development: the essentials. *Chicago: Asset-Based Community Development Institute*.

Milner, H. (2011). Culturally relevant pedagogy in a diverse urban classroom. *The Urban Review*, 43(1), 66–89. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-009-0143-0

Mitra, D. L. (2008). Amplifying student voice. *Educational Leadership*, *66*(3), 20-25.

Morinaj, J., de Moll, F., Hascher, T., Hadjar, A., Grecu, A., & Scharf, J. (2023). School alienation among adolescents in Switzerland and Luxembourg: The role of parent and peer supportive attitudes toward school and teacher autonomy support. *Youth & Society, 55*(2), 187–212. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X211043902

Nel, H. (2018). Community leadership: A comparison between asset-based community-led development (ABCD) and the traditional needs-based approach. *Development Southern Africa* (Sandton, South Africa), 35(6), 839–851.https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2018.1502075

Our Mission and History. Communities In Schools. (n.d.). Retrieved October 12, 2022, from https://www.communitiesinschools.org/about-us/mission-and-history/

Phillips, R., Trevan, E., & Kraeger, P. (Eds.). (2020). Research Handbook on Community Development. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved Mar 11, 2024, from https://doi-org.proxy.library.vcu.edu/10.4337/9781788118477

Pyne, J. (2019). Suspended Attitudes: Exclusion and Emotional Disengagement from School. *Sociology of Education*, *92*(1), 59–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040718816684

Scales, P. C., Benson, P. L., Leffert, N., & Blyth, D. A. (2000). Contribution of developmental assets to the prediction of thriving among adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, *4*(1), 27-46.

Scherr, T. G., & Mayer, M. J. (2019). Supporting at-risk and marginalized students. In *School safety and violence prevention: Science, practice, policy* (pp. 121–147). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/0000106-006

Sethi, J., & Scales, P. C. (2020). Developmental relationships and school success: How teachers, parents, and friends affect educational outcomes and what actions students say matter most. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *63*, 101904.

Shapiro, S. (2014). "Words that you said got bigger": English language learners' lived experiences of deficit discourse. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *48*(4), 386–406. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24398689

Sharma, M., & Portelli, J. P. (2014). Uprooting and settling in: The invisible strength of deficit thinking. *LEARNing Landscapes*, *8*(1), 251-267.

Shute, J. W., & Cooper, B. S. (2015). Understanding in-school truancy. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *96*(6), 65–68. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721715575303

Smith, A. (2001). A faceless bureaucrat ponders special education, disability, and white privilege. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, *26*(3), 180-188.

Sobba, K. N. (2019). Correlates and buffers of school avoidance: a review of school avoidance literature and applying social capital as a potential safeguard. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, *24*(3), 380–394. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2018.1524772

Telyani, A. E., Farmanesh, P., & Zargar, P. (2021). The Impact of COVID-19 Instigated Changes on Loneliness of Teachers and Motivation-Engagement of Students: A Psychological Analysis of Education Sector. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *12*, 765180–765180. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.765180

Tomaszek, K. (2023). Why it is important to engage students in school activities? Examining the mediation effect of student school engagement on the relationships between student alienation and school burnout. *Polish psychological bulletin*, *51*(2), 98-. https://doi.org/10.24425/ppb.2020.133767

Thompson, P. (2009). Consulting secondary school pupils about their learning. *Oxford Review of Education*, *35*(6), 671-687.

Timberlake, M. (2020). Recognizing ableism in educational initiatives: Reading between the lines. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, *2*(1), 84-100..5

Trowler, V. (2010). Student engagement literature review. *The Higher Education Academy*, *11*(1), 1-15.

Valenzuela, A. (2005). Subtractive schooling, caring relations, and social capital in the schooling of US-Mexican youth. *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender in United States Schools*, 83-94.

Véronneau, M. H., & Vitaro, F. (2007). Social experiences with peers and high school graduation: A review of theoretical and empirical research. *Educational Psychology*, *27*(3), 419-445.

Warren, C. A., & Marciano, J. E. (2018). Activating student voice through Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR): Policy-making that strengthens urban education reform. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *31*(8), 684-707.

Welton, A. D., Harris, T. O., La Londe, P. G., & Moyer, R. T. (2015). Social Justice Education in a Diverse Classroom: Examining High School Discussions about Race, Power, and Privilege. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *48*(4), 549–570. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2015.1083839

Wentzel, K. R., & Caldwell, K. (1997). Friendships, peer acceptance, and group membership: Relations to academic achievement in middle school. *Child Development*, 1198-1209.

Werner, S., & Scior, K. (2016). Interventions aimed at tackling intellectual disability stigma: What works and what still needs to be done. *Intellectual Disability and Stigma: Stepping out from the Margins*, 129-147.

Whitehouse, M., & Colvin, C. (2001). Reading families: Deficit discourse and family literacy. *Theory into Practice*, *40*(3), 212-219.

Williams, K. L., Coles, J. A., & Reynolds, P. (2020). (Re)Creating the Script: A Framework of Agency, Accountability, and Resisting Deficit Depictions of Black Students in P-20 Education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *89*(3), 249–266. https://doi.org/10.7709/jnegroeducation.89.3.0249

Willms, J. D. (2003). *Student engagement at school: A sense of belonging and participation: Results from PISA 2000*. Oecd.

Yared, H., Grové, C., & Chapman, D. (2020). How does race play out in schools? A scoping review and thematic analysis of racial issues in Australian schools. *Social Psychology of Education*, *23*, 1505-1538.

Yosso, T. J., & Solórzano, D. G. (2005). Conceptualizing a critical race theory in sociology. *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*, 117-146.

Zirkel, S. (2008). The influence of multicultural educational practices on student outcomes and intergroup relations. *Teachers College Record*, *110*(6), 1147-1181.

Paper 2

Asset-Based Community Development Model In Schools: Community Works

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research study is to examine the perceived impact that an asset-based community development (ABCD) model program implemented in two schools in a Local Suburban School District (LSSD) has on students' sense of belonging, engagement, and academic self-confidence in school. The growing body of literature on student alienation and engagement gives merit to the increasing need to research in this area. Building on the current research on asset-based pedagogies like YPAR, this study could add to the conversation by giving educators a valuable tool to combat alienation, specifically in the school setting.

Keywords: Asset-based community development, engagement, alienation

Using Asset-Based Community Development to Increase Engagement and Improve Student Experience in School

The history of public education in the United States has led to a system that fails to fully support all students (Farrington, 2020). Consequently, many students with marginalized identities—such as those based on culture, race, ability, and socioeconomic status—often feel disconnected and disengaged (Henry et al., 2012). This sense of alienation can manifest as feelings of powerlessness, a lack of meaning in their education, a sense of being different, and a disconnection from the school's values (Hascher & Hadjar, 2018). According to Hascher and Hadjar (2018), students become isolated when they lose motivation to participate and disconnect from the school community, which further exacerbates their social disengagement. To address rising levels of adolescent alienation and disengagement, significant reforms in secondary education are necessary to build supportive and nurturing school communities (Hargreaves et al., 1997).

Historically, educators have applied deficit-based approaches to address the disconnection between marginalized students and the curriculum or school staff (Comber & Kamler, 2004). Schools often reflect dominant cultural norms, and deficit thinking tends to view anything outside these norms as problematic, which can discourage teachers and administrators from recognizing the strengths of different abilities, dispositions, and actions (Sharma & Portelli, 2014). In contrast, asset-based approaches, such as youth participatory action research (YPAR) and culturally relevant pedagogies (CRP), have been implemented in schools nationwide to engage students, reaffirm their sense of belonging, and help them feel integrated within the school community (Caraballo et al., 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2007). These asset-based approaches shift the focus from viewing individual students as problems to recognizing them and their

communities as valuable assets. Asset-based community development (ABCD) is one such approach, where communities use their existing resources to drive improvements (ABCD Institute, n.d.). ABCD involves steps that guide communities in leveraging their assets to create meaningful change, empowering members to voice their needs and ensuring that the changes are relevant and impactful for them. Integrating an asset-based community development model in schools could complement CRP and YPAR and provide practical solutions to issues of disengagement and alienation.

Currently, there is a lack of research on the effects of implementing an ABCD program in schools. This study aims to investigate whether applying the ABCD model can enhance student engagement and belonging, particularly for students with marginalized identities. Given the growing literature on student alienation and engagement (Henry et al., 2012), this empirical study seeks to build on existing research on asset-based pedagogies like YPAR, offering educators valuable insights into a potentially effective tool for addressing student alienation in the school setting.

Literature Review

Alienation, or adolescent alienation, has historically been a sociological concept that focuses on non-involvement or lack of attachment during adolescence (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2010). Research on alienation has primarily examined three key areas: social isolation, feelings of powerlessness, and perceptions of being abnormal (Brown et al., 2003). Hascher and Hagenauer (2010) note that, despite varying definitions, a common theme in adolescent alienation is the perception that schooling lacks value for these students.

Alienation from the school community directly contributes to both social and academic disengagement (Comber & Kamler, 2004). Research indicates that higher levels of student

engagement are positively correlated with increased high school completion rates, reduced feelings of alienation, and improved academic performance (Harris, 2011). As students experience growing alienation, their disengagement tends to escalate (Klem & Connell, 2004). A strong sense of belonging within the school community is crucial for student success and is closely tied to a student's self-worth and mental health (Gray et al., 2018). Students with a stronger sense of belonging generally have lower dropout rates compared to those who feel disconnected from their schools (Johnson et al., 2001; Johnson et al., 2020). If students, particularly those from marginalized groups, do not feel a sense of belonging or feel distanced from the school community, they are less likely to engage (Johnson et al., 200; Johnson et al., 2020). When students become estranged from the school community, they struggle to accept school goals as their own (Brown et al., 2003).

In the context of the current Eurocentric and able-normative education system in the United States, deficit approaches are commonly used when addressing students with marginalized identities. These approaches often ignore and devalue the cultural backgrounds and experiences of these students (Flint & Jaggers, 2021; Henderson et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valenzuela, 2005). Deficit approaches aim to "fix" what is perceived as broken according to dominant cultural standards, rather than focusing on the strengths within the community or individual (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Davis & Museus, 2019). This perspective leads to educators viewing students as problematic and in need of correction (Flint & Jaggers, 2021; Henderson et al., 2023; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valenzuela, 2005). When educators adopt a deficit mindset, especially in relation to families from Black and Brown communities, this negative framing follows students throughout their educational journey, intensifying feelings of alienation and disengagement (Whitehouse & Colvin, 2001).

Moreover, school policies often disproportionately target marginalized students, which can signal to these students that they do not belong within the school community. Rules and regulations that favor certain groups can make others feel marginalized, leading to alienation, disengagement, academic failure, and behavioral issues (Valenzuela, 2005). For instance, strict dress code policies that privilege the norms of one cultural group over another can make students feel excluded from the dominant culture (Healey & Stroman, 2021). Such policies can place students on the periphery and expose them to more punitive consequences (Bottiani et al., 2017). Barrett (2018) points out that many school dress codes are disproportionately discriminatory towards females and are often designed from a White-centric perspective, failing to accommodate culturally significant factors affecting how students dress and style their hair (Barrett, 2018).

Asset-Based Pedagogies as Alternatives to Traditional Schooling

Several asset-based approaches in education are already demonstrating their impact. Asset-based pedagogies, such as culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP), actively challenge deficit-based perspectives in education (Flint & Jaggers, 2021). Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) describes CRP as "oppositional pedagogies" aimed at helping students achieve academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness, enabling them to question and challenge the status quo (p. 160). Culturally relevant educators recognize how social institutions often marginalize individuals from nondominant cultural backgrounds and strive to help these students deconstruct and reconstruct the existing curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2007). CRP empowers students to critically engage with educational content and use their cultural backgrounds to understand their place in the world (Milner, 2011). Milner (2011) explains that culturally relevant learning happens when educators create classrooms that value students' cultures as assets rather

than barriers to success, integrating these cultural elements into curriculum planning and instruction. Research shows that marginalized students perform better in classrooms where their knowledge, strengths, languages, values, and beliefs are recognized and incorporated into the curriculum (Flint & Jaggers, 2021; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Dee & Penner, 2017). Students who are viewed as assets rather than problems tend to excel more (López, 2017), a concept López (2017) terms the self-fulfilling prophecy, where lowered teacher expectations lead students to believe they cannot meet higher standards. Additionally, research has explored the concept of cultural wealth within communities, which encompasses the knowledge, skills, abilities, and networks present in Communities of Color that are used to counteract institutional racism and oppression (Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). Highlighting the cultural capital of these communities is crucial for challenging deficit-based narratives about marginalized students (López, 2017). Asset-based, culturally relevant pedagogies serve as practical tools in the classroom to shift educators' mindsets and support historically marginalized students in thriving (Dee & Penner, 2017). These approaches are essential for creating positive school experiences for students, particularly those with marginalized identities (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Emphasizing asset-based pedagogies underscores the importance of students feeling positively about their school community and recognizing their own cultural contributions to it. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is an asset-based approach that has gained popularity. Grounded in critical pedagogy, YPAR involves students researching issues directly affecting their communities and schools, then collaborating with adults to present potential solutions to school leaders, district officials, or city officials (Edirmanasinghe, 2022). YPAR leverages local knowledge and collective action to address pressing problems (Caraballo et al., 2017). However, one criticism of YPAR is that adults may exert too much control over aspects like data collection

and analysis, potentially diminishing the critical components of the YPAR process (Foster-Fishman et al., 2010). While YPAR is effective for engaging students in social change, there is potential for educators to develop similar initiatives targeting school communities specifically through an asset-based community development (ABCD) model in schools.

Asset-based Community Development as a Community-Based Concept

Jim McKnight developed the asset-based community development (ABCD) model to empower low-income communities by utilizing their existing assets and resources to address local problems and drive essential improvements (Phillips et al., 2020). Unlike deficit-based approaches, which view communities as problems and outsiders as saviors, the ABCD model recognizes that many community issues stem from external institutions, policies, and a history of structural racism. The objective of an ABCD approach is to focus on the issues that matter most to community members themselves, rather than imposing solutions based on external perspectives. This model contrasts with deficit-based methods, which often involve outside groups dictating what the community needs and attempting to "fix" perceived problems, frequently resulting in superficial or ineffective solutions. According to McKnight, deficit-based programs brought in by external organizations tend to overlook the cultural wealth present within these communities. While ABCD has faced criticism for being overly idealistic and naïve regarding the structural barriers confronting low-income Black and Latino communities (Ennis & West, 2010), McKnight's model includes support from external organizations in the form of training and guidance. This support helps communities develop the necessary resources and connections to achieve long-term success independently (Cunningham & Mathie, 2002). The core purpose of ABCD is to enable residents to leverage their assets and build relationships both within and outside their community to effect positive change (Phillips et al., 2020). The deficit

model often maintains communities in a state of need and separation, whereas ABCD empowers communities by teaching them how to support themselves with appropriate external assistance. Although ABCD was not initially designed for educational settings, its principles can be effectively applied to schools. By focusing on the assets within educational communities and fostering collaboration, ABCD can serve as a powerful pedagogical tool, similar to its impact in broader community contexts.

The Steps in ABCD

Research on applying Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) in schools is limited, as this is a relatively new concept. To fully understand how ABCD might impact school communities, it is essential to examine the steps involved in an ABCD project as implemented in community settings. These steps include the listening project, asset mapping, and the final project. The core principles of the ABCD model in a community are: recognizing that everyone has unique gifts, building communities through relationships among residents, focusing on citizen-centered engagement, and discovering passions and talents through listening (Clearimpact, 2017).

The first step in the ABCD model is the listening project, where leaders gather stories from community members. These stories represent the community's cultural capital (Asset Based Community Development, 2016). According to Nurture Develop (2016), a strategic partner of the Asset Based Community Development Institute, this process helps uncover individual talents, assets, and key community concerns. The listening project involves informal conversations between community members and external partners (Cunningham & Mathie, 2002). It typically starts with long-standing community members who have extensive knowledge and experiences. The goal is to reveal the community's gifts and aspirations and identify

emerging leaders who will drive the final project (Haines, 2014).

After completing the listening project, the core group of community members proceeds with asset mapping, which involves identifying local talents, organizations, economic resources, and natural assets (Haines, 2014). This mapping includes recognizing the gifts of the head (knowledge and experience), the heart (passions), and the hands (skills) (Alan, 2020; Phillips et al., 2020). In the asset-based model, the community defines its own needs and selects a project aligned with their vision (Asset-Based Community Development, 2016).

With asset mapping complete, the community can embark on its final project, exploring internal relationships and accepting support from external organizations in a supportive role. This collaboration can lead to positive outcomes and strengthen the partnership between the community and outside entities (Asset Based Community Development, 2016). ABCD fosters dialogue, empowers individuals, and shifts focus from problems to the community's own capacities (Transnational Forum on Integrated Community Care, 2021). It helps mobilize members from conceptualizing to actualizing projects (Transnational Forum on Integrated Community Care, 2021).

Applying ABCD principles to schools could follow a similar process as in community settings. The steps outlined could be adapted for educational environments to replace deficit-based approaches with asset-based pedagogy. Schools could transition from an adult-centered model to a student-centered development model, where student voices are actively heard, and their talents and contributions are recognized.

ABCD Compared to YPAR and CRP

While there is no established precedent for applying Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) in schools, the concept bears some resemblance to Youth Participatory

Action Research (YPAR). Understanding their similarities and differences can illuminate how these approaches might be integrated for educational benefit. ABCD builds on the principles of cultural wealth and student-centered instruction found in Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) and merges these with the student-driven social focus of YPAR, creating a tailored approach for educational settings. Although both YPAR and ABCD emphasize project focus, their methodologies diverge in keyways. The biggest difference is the methodology that is taught within the ABCD curriculum. The focus is on relationship building, recognizing one's own gifts, building a community from within, and teaching skills that will last a lifetime. One way they differ is that ABCD derives its final project from broader conversations with the entire student body, rather than just a small group researching an issue. Getting input from the student body allows for a wider student input regarding what issues are important to the students and requires students to interact with peers with whom they would not normally interact. Another key difference is the use of asset mapping as a strategy to empower the students by teaching them about their own talents and assets. Additionally, YPAR concentrates on researching solutions to specific issues, whereas ABCD aims to implement smaller-scale projects within the school to enhance the overall student experience. In ABCD, adults typically serve as facilitators, offering minimal interference in student-led initiatives, unlike in YPAR, where adult involvement can sometimes be more intrusive (Clay & Turner III, 2021). This hands-off approach in ABCD allows students greater autonomy in shaping their projects. An effective strategy might involve starting with a smaller-scale ABCD project within the school to address localized issues. Over time, as students develop critical consciousness and gain experience, this initial project could expand into a larger YPAR initiative. This progression would enable students to tackle more significant structural issues and policy changes, leveraging their growing insights and

involvement.

Methods

Research Design and Rationale

This primarily qualitative case study aimed to examine the perceived impact of an ABCD model program on student engagement, sense of belonging, and academic confidence in two secondary schools during the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years. The ABCD program, Community Works[1], was implemented in two Local Suburban School District (LSSD)[2] schools by School Community Project (SCP)[3]. SCP is an organization that supports students who are in danger of not completing school for various reasons. Some students are in the foster system, have parents who are incarcerated, have parents who are struggling financially, are recent immigrants, are having attendance and academic issues, or have any combination of these factors. SCP assists these students through high school and helps them make connections within the community that could help support students after graduation. SCP offers mentors to students and teachers to ensure student success. This empirical study focused on the mentors' perspective of the program and the experience of the students in the SCP caseload. The study attempted to understand the perceived impact of the ABCD program on SCP students' school experience. In order to do this, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

RQ1: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model program on students' feelings of belonging in school?

RQ2: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model program on students' level of engagement in school activities and class activities?

RQ3: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model on students' academic self-confidence?

[1] Pseudonym for ABCD program
[2] Pseudonym
[3] Pseudonym

RQ4: How does the context of each case influence the perceived impacts of the ABCD model on student experience in school?

A case study design was particularly suitable for this research due to its focus on examining specific occurrences within real-life contexts (Yin, 2012). This study aimed to investigate the implementation of an ABCD model in two distinct school settings to assess its impact on the school communities and the experiences of SCP students. Adopting a case study approach provided a detailed and realistic perspective on how the ABCD program influenced students' experiences in these schools. Each school was treated as a separate case, allowing for unique data collection from each site. This data was then analyzed across schools to compare and contrast experiences, offering insights into how different contexts affect program outcomes. The strength of case studies lies in their ability to capture the context and distinctiveness of each case, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon (Yin, 2012). Therefore, a case study design was an ideal choice for this study.

Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling was selected for this study due to its natural fit with qualitative research (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposeful sampling is beneficial when a group has specific knowledge about a topic being studied (Palinkas et al., 2015). Random sampling would not have been feasible or make sense when attempting to analyze a particular situation, like the Community Works experience, due to the specificity of the subjects being interviewed (Maxwell, 2013). These are the only two schools piloting this program; therefore, besides the students, the mentors and coordinators involved in the project were the only participants who could speak to the ABCD program delivery, making them critical for answering the research questions (Maxwell, 2013).

The sampling included four SCP mentors and the district SCP coordinator, who initiated the launch of the Community Works programs in their schools. These four participants were selected based on their participation in the Community Works program.

Participants and Context

In order to understand the purpose of this study, it is essential to understand the Community Works program and how it came to fruition. In spring 2022, the coordinator for the LSSD Schools SCP asked me to write an 11-15-week curriculum that would apply ABCD to the school setting. We titled this curriculum Community Works. The SCP coordinator wanted to find a way to create a sense of belonging, reduce alienation, and improve students' school experiences. The SCP organization believes that all students deserve an opportunity for a quality education, regardless of their situation in life outside of school. SCP works with schools with a certain percentage of students who are in danger of not completing high school. Typically, these schools have more students on free and reduced lunches. The SCP seeks to provide mentoring through academic and social-emotional support.

The students on the SCP caseload are typically recommended by someone in the building, community, or school district based on the student's needs. These students have experienced homelessness, foster care, abuse, an arduous immigration journey, loss of parents, or any combination of these situations. Some of the students on the SCP caseload have a history of negative behaviors or truancy that have led to interventions, including the referral to SCP.

Based on their individual circumstance, these students on the caseloads are identified as needing additional mentoring and adult support. The mentors meet with the students daily one-on-one to give emotional support, assist with any teacher issues, discuss grades, and handle general educational issues that may arise. There is a referral process for these students to ensure

they are a good fit for the program. The referral process is meant to get a complete picture of each situation to ensure the program would be helpful for the student. Typically, students stay in the program until they graduate and, through the program, are connected to community mentors for life after school.

The SCP organization trains its mentors, who often have education or social work backgrounds. The mentors have a limited number of students on their caseloads because they are meant to be focused on individualized student support, and there is typically one or two mentors at each school. The mentors have a robust understanding of the student experience before joining the SCP caseload. The mentors also keep regular contact with teachers, counselors, administrators, and outside adults in the students' lives. Because of this relationship with the students, the mentors are helpful resources for recognizing possible changes in the behaviors of their mentees.

During the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 school years, the SCP students in two schools piloted the new Community Works curriculum. The curriculum taught them about the concepts behind ABCD as they could be applied to the school setting. During the Community Works meetings, held every two weeks for 30 minutes after school hours, the mentors delivered the curriculum to the students participating in the program. The curriculum takes the ABCD model, breaks it down into easier-to-understand pieces, and applies its concepts to the school community. Once the Community Works participants understood ABCD, the Community Works participants interviewed the student body as a part of the listening project to understand what the students felt was needed to improve their school experience, and they asset-mapped within the school community to understand what kinds of skills and talents exist within the group and school. The Community Works project is meant to improve the students' experience on the SCP

caseload, but it is also meant to improve the school community for all students. After conducting the interviews, the Community Works participants analyzed the data gathered from the listening project and decided on a final project that they felt would improve the school community.

School 1

School 1 is a comprehensive high school with approximately 2,000 students located in a politically diverse suburban community (US News and World Report, 2024). The student body at School 1 is ethnically and socioeconomically varied. According to US News and World Report, 75% of the students are classified as minority students, which includes individuals of color who are not the numerical minority within the school. Additionally, 79% of the students are identified as economically disadvantaged (2024). Figure 1 provides a visual representation of the student enrollment breakdown.

School 1 initiated the Community Works pilot program in the spring of 2023, which was unusually late, as the program is typically designed to start in the fall and run throughout the academic year. This cohort had a smaller participation rate, with only four students involved. The mentor for the year, whom we'll refer to as Sandra, felt apprehensive about starting the program and was uncomfortable with delivering the content. She was particularly nervous about direct instruction and preferred one-on-one interactions with students. Despite these challenges, Sandra managed to deliver the lessons and eventually found the experience rewarding.

The students in this group felt disillusioned by the school's reputation, which had been negatively impacted by recent news coverage of school violence. They were also concerned about the prevalence of vaping on campus. They perceived that the administration focused excessively on presenting a polished image of the school, while ignoring serious internal issues like vaping, violence, drugs, and weapons. The students believed that the administration tended

to downplay these problems, which they felt undermined trust within the school community. To address these issues, the students decided to create a t-shirt design that symbolized the dual nature of their school: the façade presented by the administration versus the reality they experienced. The t-shirt featured a split design representing these two perspectives and was intended to foster unity among students and send a message to administrators about their concerns. A limited number of these shirts were produced for the group.

School 1 SY 2023-2024

The second year of the Community Works program at School 1 started on a very different note. A new mentor, referred to as Jennifer, took over. Jennifer, a recent teacher, was highly enthusiastic and driven to get the program underway. The group began their meetings early in the fall of 2023 and completed their project by the spring of 2024. This cohort conducted a survey of the student body and found that many students felt their needs were not fully understood by teachers. In response, the Community Works students decided to develop a professional development (PD) program aimed at helping teachers better grasp the students' needs. With Jennifer's support, the students took on the task of delivering the PD sessions themselves.

School 2

School 2 is a similarly sized comprehensive high school located only five miles from School 1. According to US News and World Report, 94% of the student body are categorized as minority enrollment, and 79% of students are economically disadvantaged (2024). Figure 2 shows the student population breakdown (US News and World Report, 2024).

School 2 SY 2022-2023

School 2 also experienced a delayed start to its pilot year. The mentor, whom we'll refer to as Mary, was initially hesitant about delivering the required instruction. Although Mary had an educational background, her experience was primarily in administrative roles as a dean of students, making the new

curriculum somewhat intimidating for her. Despite her enthusiasm and commitment to the program's success, the group, consisting of four students, did not proceed with a project. They completed all the phases of the ABCD curriculum but ran out of time to implement a project. On a positive note, several students from this group planned to return the following year, ready to begin the program promptly and continue their work.

School 2 SY 2023-2024

Like the second year in School 1, School 2's group began the program with a new mentor, who we will call Marcus, who brought much more enthusiasm and vigor. The group began meeting early in the fall and began their projects in the spring. This group decided they wanted to bring back senior privileges (senior bells and cafeteria privileges) and focus on the senior class. The reasoning behind this decision was that the group wanted to bring a focus back on becoming a senior to motivate students to get through their academics. They felt that if underclass students had some things to look forward to once they became seniors, then finishing school would be more appealing. The group decided their main project would be to create a senior courtyard. They were well on their way when they hit a massive barrier. The courtyard was closed off for student activity because of construction on the roof. The administration feared that the students would get injured if something fell, so they had to put a stop to their plans and pivot. The group decided to undertake a series of micro-projects, all focused on enhancing the senior experience. They planned to reinstate the senior section of the cafeteria, organize a senior-only special prom, and introduce an early dismissal for seniors, allowing them to leave five minutes before the underclassmen. These initiatives were designed to celebrate and honor the senior students. Although there was some staff resistance due to concerns about exclusivity, the administration supported the projects, emphasizing that all students would have the opportunity to enjoy these privileges when their turn as seniors came.

For this study, all four mentors who participated in the Community Works Program were interviewed in order to understand their perceptions of how the Community Works program impacted their mentees. These mentors work with these students daily and understand the typical behaviors exhibited by these students. They gave insight into those changes and indicated how the students' behaviors may have changed throughout the program. In addition, I did panel interviews with all mentors and the SCP coordinators of the two sites. The SCP coordinator gave a perspective outside the buildings that helped triangulate the interview data. For clarity, below is a table reflecting the schools, mentors, and associated projects.

Table 1

Mentors, Schools, and Projects by Year

School	Year	Mentor	Project
School 1	*2022-2023*	Sandra - Criminal Justice Background	T-shirts designating two sides of the school
School 1	2023-2024	Jennifer - Teaching Background	Created and presented professional development for teachers to train them, improving engagement and building relationships with students
		School 2	
School 2	2022-2023	Mary - Former Dean of Students	Did not complete a project but went through the curriculum
School 2	2023-2024	Marcus - Teaching Background and Social Work	Senior Microprojects

Data Collection

The data collection methods were mentor and coordinator interviews, panel interviews, and secondary data from student feedback forms. The feedback forms were administered at the

end of the Community Works program. The forms were meant to be part of a program evaluation but also provided insight into the student experience. I also used field notes I have taken over the past year to triangulate survey and interview data.

Interviews

Data was collected through 40-minute, semi-structured interviews with the four SCP staff described in the participants section above. The purpose of the questions was to understand how the staff felt the ABCD program impacted the students' experiences in school. The interview also looked to discover the SCP mentors' perceptions of the Community Works program's impact on their students and school community. Because the questions were open-ended and allowed for a variety of responses, additional probes came naturally in the conversation, but the protocols were followed otherwise. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. A panel interview was also conducted with all four mentors and the SCP coordinator. Interviews and participation was completely voluntary and all participants signed a participant agreement form which included the recruitment script. All forms and processes were approved through VCU's IRB.

Secondary Data

The SCP coordinator wished to have an evaluation of the program. As a part of the program evaluation, the SCP mentors administered a program feedback form the students completed during the SCP meetings after school. There were 17 feedback forms, one per student. The questions were developed by the SCP team in order to evaluate their curriculum. The feedback forms were paper and pencil, anonymous, and not required by SCP. The students were advised verbally that they did not have to complete the survey, should not write their names on them, and that all data collected may be used for other research purposes. Students had the option to select a box indicated that they did not want their data used for any other purposes. If a student

did write their name on the form, SCP removed the name and ensured all surveys were de-identified. The deidentified data on the feedback forms were based on a Likert scale with some open-ended questions. VCU IRB indicated that this study did not require a data-sharing agreement, and an email would suffice to state that SCP will share their data.

Field Notes

In addition to the interviews and feedback data, I included field notes I have taken over the past two years to help further understand the interpretation of the data. The notes came from my discussions with the SCP coordinator throughout the year about the SCP student caseloads, how their students are selected, the mentors' attitudes towards the program, the reason for wanting this curriculum, and the history of how this ABCD program evolved.

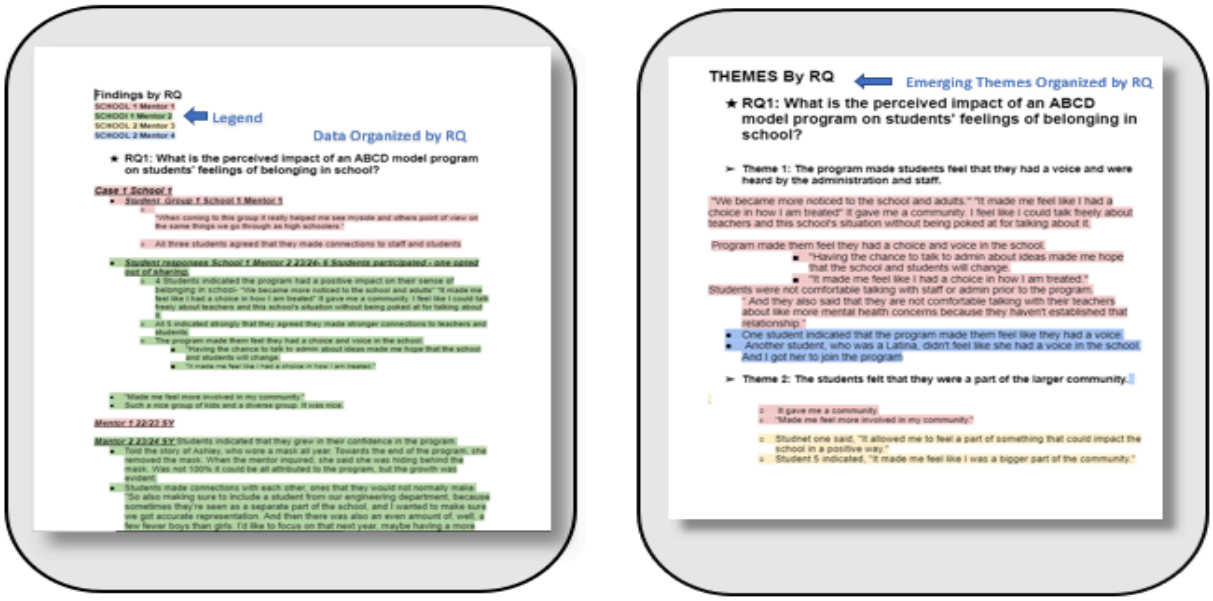
Data Analysis

Before beginning the data analysis, the codebook (see Appendix A for an excerpt of the codebook) was created using themes that emerged from the literature review. As the data analysis continued, codes were added to the codebook. The data analysis for this study began with the first round of student surveys from SY 22/23. I focused on individual cases, and then once I had a solid understanding of the themes emerging from each case, data from all four cases was compared to understand how the context may have impacted the outcomes of the ABCD program. After the first round of coding the student surveys, a peer assisted me with calibrating the codebook. The calibration consisted of taking the same selection from the surveys, coding it separately, and then comparing responses to see if my calibration partner and I coded the data the same way. We found that our coding and data interpretation were similar and felt the surveys indicated similar themes. Two themes were added to the codebook as a result of this process: Empathy and Coping Strategies. These themes were collapsed into the collective themes of

community and sense of belonging as they were all connected to the same root concepts. Specifically, these themes emerged from open-ended questions directly responding to the questions about the student's sense of belonging and feeling that the students had a support group to help them through difficult times. In addition, through the coding process, a few codes were removed from the original codebook. Initially the code book included a category for "home" and one for "student." These were removed because no student or mentor indicated anything related to home life during the interviews or in the surveys. Both mentors and students primarily focused on the school setting and all responses were student centered, so having a student category was not needed. In addition, initially there was code for *isolation*. The concept of isolation itself seemed to be connected with the sense of belonging, so having both codes was superfluous. All negative and positive responses were considered together in each code, and the items were separated and organized in the last phase of the coding analysis process. This color-coding process is explained below in figure 3.

After I had completed one round of coding for the mentor interviews, I did another cycle of focused coding and memoing as I began to look for emerging themes. As a part of my data analysis, I created a running document, pulled out information by case, and color-coded it under each RQ. (see Appendix B for excerpt of this coding process) Once I had the data organized by RQ to which it applied, I was able to extract themes that occurred across all cases and note the exceptions in the data. This method also gave me the opportunity to revisit the data multiple times and interpret the data thoroughly. The color coding allowed me to see if the phenomenon was balanced across cases and gave further clarity to the difference between the cases and years of participation. Figure 3 shows an example of this process.

Figure 3: ***Data Analysis Color Coding***



While coding the qualitative data, I also analyzed the data from the Likert scale questions. This data was reported in a table showing the response averages of each item, disaggregated by school cases. (See table 2 below.) If the qualitative questions were extensions of another response, that information was considered together. This data was linked to the codebook for easy reference. I had a peer calibrate my code book for a second time using data from the mentor interview from School 2 SY23-24. I also shared my data and codebook with a colleague with years of experience with qualitative data analysis to ensure that my themes aligned with what she saw in the data. Finally, the panel interview data was analyzed for differences and similarities between cases. The data formed several codes based on mentor, school demographic, group dynamic, and project itself. The findings section of the paper breaks down these themes.

Privacy and Ethics

This study's primary concern was the participants' comfort and safety. All participants

were given a consent form before the study began. To ensure the participants were comfortable and felt that their responses would be private, the interviews were conducted over Zoom in the private SCP office. I ensured confidentiality by using pseudonyms and not revealing names in transcription.

Measures to Ensure and Enhance Trustworthiness of Findings

This study needed to address several threats to validity. A validity matrix was created to comprehensively analyze the potential threats to ensure that all threats were addressed appropriately (see Appendix ?). The matrix specified the purpose for each research question and why that question was essential to the study. In addition, the matrix outlined my strategy for data analysis, validity threats and plans to address validity threats, and rationale for all of these approaches. The results of the matrix are summarized in the following paragraphs.

Social desirability bias occurs when a subject is concerned about being seen positively (Fisher & Katz, 2000). Some students may have answered in a particular way to please their mentor or answer in socially desirable ways. In order to mitigate this reaction, the surveys were done individually and not shared with the group. In addition, some students may have needed help understanding how to connect their feelings with the aspects of the program. In order to address this threat, I triangulated the interviews with the mentor with the survey responses from students to get a complete understanding of what happened throughout the program. The mentors work closely with their students and have a solid understanding of their students' typical behaviors, academic performance, and overall attitudes about school. Comparing their observations with student responses helped get a complete understanding of the data. In addition, respondent validation was used to revisit responses with mentors and ensure the data was correctly interpreted. If I was unclear about a response, I reached out to the mentor to

clarify. I met with one mentor on a second occasion to clarify a few points from our first meeting. I also looked for disconfirming evidence and utilized the memo process and audit trails to ensure that all processes were documented, and findings were worthy of further research (Antin et al., 2015). As I moved through each phase of the research, careful memos were created to document the research process and development of the codebook.

Reactivity is a concern in any qualitative research study involving mentors and student response. Student response may have been influenced by feeling that their responses were being read by the mentors. The mentors could also have been concerned about how their responses to the interview questions could impact their program. In order to mitigate the occurrence of reactivity, the students who responded to the survey did not have to put their names on the survey and could opt out if they did not want to respond. In addition, the mentors were interviewed about the actual activities and their observations and did not have to have any particular approval or disapproval of the program itself. The interviews were focused on this particular project and its outcome. The interviews were all voluntary and not required for any participant. Any questions that made them uncomfortable could also be skipped.

Through the use of thick descriptions and detailed process descriptions, I aimed to establish the transferability of this study to other settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Based on the descriptive presentation of data, the readers of this study should be able to decide if they can apply this approach to their own settings. The readers should also have a sense of the considerations they should bear in mind based on insights gained from this study.

Researcher Bias

The most significant potential threat to validity is my connection to the Community Works Program. My interest in ABCD (Asset-Based Community Development) in schools began when

I was introduced to the coordinator of SCP, an organization dedicated to integrating community resources into schools through in-school mentors. Their mission is to help every student reach their full potential, regardless of factors like race, socioeconomic status, location, or gender. During an unpaid internship, SCP's coordinator requested that I develop a curriculum to adapt the ABCD community-based model for a school environment. Initially unfamiliar with ABCD, I completed training with a local nonprofit to learn how the model operates in community settings. Using this training, I adapted the ABCD framework to create a version suited for schools, with school-based mentors leading the initiative. My involvement in developing the SCP curriculum may have introduced some bias. In qualitative research, it's often challenging to eliminate a researcher's influence and beliefs regarding the theories under investigation (Maxwell, 2013). Given my strong enthusiasm for Community Works, this passion could have affected my interpretation of the responses or influenced participant feedback. Despite this, the outcome of Community Works does not impact my professional success, compensation, or other significant stakes. To address potential researcher bias, I implemented several safeguards. I coded all interview transcripts and had two independent peers review and calibrate the coding system. I also sought peer feedback on my conclusions and conducted respondent validation for mentor interviews when needed. Additionally, I employed Maxwell's (2013) validity test checklist, which included engaging with the SCP team, obtaining rich data from conversations with participants, and triangulating information from SCP mentor interviews and student feedback forms (see appendix D).

Findings

Before examining the themes that emerged from the interview and survey data combined, the findings will be discussed, and the Likert scale data from the program evaluation surveys will

be analyzed. The findings will be discussed by case and year and then together. Not all questions on the survey were relevant; however, they gave deeper insight into the student experience with the program that I considered with the rest of the data.

Likert Scale Results

The responses to the Likert Scale questions were consistent across cases. Some students responded N/A when asked about their intent to return and some students left blank responses to questions. Table 1 clearly shows that the results are relatively consistent across cases and years and shows the average responses for each question. These results do not include students who did not respond or responded "N/A."

Table 1

Likert Scale Data Average Responses

Question Number	School 1 SY 22-23	School 1 SY 23-24	School 2 SY 22-23	School 2 SY 23-24	Total Ave
1. The program was very organized.	4	3.67	4	3.25	3.73
2. I intend to participate in the program next year.	4	4	4	3.5	3.88
3. The lessons were easy to understand.	4	4	4	3.75	3.94
4. The lessons change your perspective on your own assets.	4	3.5	3.25	3.25	3.5
5. I felt connected to the SCP Team including mentors and students	3.67	4	3.75	3	3.53
6. I was more interested in attending school because I looked forward to our meetings and project.	4	3.83	3.75	3.25	3.71

7. Our Community Works final project was successful.	4	4	3.5	3	3.63
8. The Community Works project your team created will continue next year.	4	3.83	3.75	3.33	3.73
9. The Embrace Program made me feel more confident in school.	3.33	3.5	3.75	3.25	3.46

Table 1 shows that the overall responses average 3.46 - 3.94, which indicates that the students, on average, agreed or strongly agreed with the survey questions.

Open-ended Survey Data Results

The open-ended survey data was also consistent across the years and cases, with two outliers that I will explain below. According to the open-ended survey results, the majority of students felt the program helped them become more engaged and boosted their self-confidence. The surveys revealed that the students agreed that they came to school more often as a result of participating in the program. All but one student survey indicated that the program made them feel more connected to peers and mentors. The survey data also indicated that most students felt more confident in school. Only one student indicated that the program did not have an impact on their self-confidence in school. When the data from the interviews was triangulated with the data from the surveys, several consistent themes emerged between cases. I will outline the themes from all data sources in alignment with the research questions.

Students' Feelings of Belonging in School

Sense of belonging is a broad term that covers many aspects of being a part of a larger community and understanding their place within that community (Akar-Vural et al., 2013). Two significant themes emerged from the mentor interviews and secondary data that related directly

to the feeling of belonging in school: student voice and a feeling of connectedness to the school community.

Theme 1: Students Reported The Program Made Them Feel That They Had a Voice. The concept of student voice emerged as a prominent theme across both cases and years. In School 1 during the 2023-2024 school year and School 2 across both years, students and mentors consistently reported that the program empowered them by providing a sense of agency and influence over their treatment. Jennifer indicated that before the program, students indicated that they were not comfortable speaking with teachers, “they…said that they are not comfortable talking with their teachers about like more mental health concerns, because they haven't established that relationship.” Jennifer also indicated that there seemed to be a connection between having a voice and engagement. Several students indicated that they felt that their voices were elevated and that they were making a meaningful impact on their school community. As one student noted, "We became more noticed by the school and adults," while another shared, "It made me feel like I had a choice in how I am treated." Another student reflected, "It made me feel like I had a voice in this school." The program seemed to give students the platform to express their opinions, with one stating, "[The program] made me feel as if my opinion was wanted and heard." These statements highlight that being recognized and making a difference were crucial to these students, who valued the opportunity to be heard and acknowledged by faculty.

Marcus explained that he observed that one Latina student initially felt voiceless and underrepresented at school. By encouraging her to join the program, Marcus felt that he helped her find a platform to advocate for positive changes, and he reported that she eventually became one of the program's most outspoken participants. Another participant highlighted the

importance of feeling appreciated by administrators, noting, "Having the chance to talk to the admin about ideas made me hope that the school and students will change." Mentors generally noted that, prior to the program, students typically appeared that they were uncomfortable discussing issues with staff or administrators. Jennifer stated that students indicated that there were hesitant to discuss mental health concerns with teachers due to a lack of established relationships. Marcus noted that he observed that involving students in creating and editing the interview protocols for the survey empowered them, stating, "When we created the survey together… Having them edit was so empowering… I kind of took the backseat a little bit." Post-participation, students reported feeling more comfortable speaking with teachers, especially those in School 1 during the 2023-2024 school year. For example, one student mentioned, “It gave me a community. I feel like I could talk freely about teachers and this school's situation without being poked at for talking about it.” Overall, the ability to influence and impact the school community was highly significant to the students. Survey responses suggest that students linked their sense of belonging to their perceived voice in the community: the more they felt integrated and their voices valued, the more they desired to engage. These findings will be further explored in the following section.

Theme 2: The Students Reported Feeling that They Were a Part of the Larger Community. As mentioned, another theme that emerged through the conversations and secondary data analysis was feeling a part of a community. Students expressed that the program helped them feel more involved in the school community and that they could positively impact it. One student said, “[The program] made me feel more involved in my community." while another student stated, “It allowed me to feel a part of something that could impact the school in a positive way." These student responses make it clear that the students want to be a part of

something bigger than themselves and that they want to feel like they belong to the larger community.

The students seemed to want to have a place in the school and to feel as though they belonged. Not only that, but they also seemed as though they wanted to make a positive impact on the community. Others indicated that the group gave them a community of support they did not have before. The group was a support system for some students who used it to help work out issues outside the meetings. One student explained, “I [had] A lot of things I had to deal with, this group helped me get through it.” It seemed that the students needed to have a space in which they felt welcome and wanted. Students from Marcus’s group in School 2 stated that the program made them think more about others and the community and allowed them to change their perspectives. For example, one student said, “[The program] helped me think [about] what I can do to make my community a better place.” So, not only were they thinking about how they fit in the community, but they were considering how they could help the community around them and make it a better place for all students. Jennifer explained how one student started off having major difficulties making connections. As they moved through the semester, she perceived a change in this student’s willingness to engage in the school community. Jennifer explained, “it's nice to have her feel more comfortable being in the building and being around people. So like that was definitely a big win.’ Students in Marcus’s, Jennifer’s, and Sandra’s groups were interested in making changes and were excited about the prospect. They wanted to have more field trips, pep rallies, and school spirit. Sandra explained how the students were excited to create more fun and school spirit. “So, it's cute. They were talking about more food and educational field trips to more pep rallies, food, instruction, and spirit.” Marcus indicated a similar feeling among the students at his school. There was a lack of school spirit that was perpetuated by the

focus on negative behaviors, as made evident in this quote:

> One of the biggest things that the students were bringing to me was the lack of extracurricular activities for them, how the focus was all on the kids that were getting in trouble, they didn't have much opportunity to be noticed, like the students are doing well. [As a result], that started being our focus.

This comment showed an apparent level of excitement among the students at the prospect of initiating these events and building a school community. The students suggested that they were looking forward to being a part of something, and students seemed to be interested in creating a community in their school where there was no real feeling of community. A lack of community connection created a particular dynamic in the building between social, cultural, and racial groups, which Marcus indicated had been a topic of discussion throughout the district. Students were segregating themselves into racial groups in the cafeteria. He explained what happened when they created a senior-only section in the cafeteria in order to address this issue while providing some privileges for seniors:

> For years, [this school] had a senior section, and then after COVID, there was no more senior section. And unfortunately, what it became was, and this is actually a conversation that's going on throughout the whole county, it became like the Latino sitting area. So, what is happening across the county is students are segregating themselves within the cafeteria. There's actually articles and stuff talking about this. So, I noticed that opportunity [to create some more diverse seating], and then I started allowing seniors to invite, you know, just one underclassman or two underclassmen at their will.

The segregation that was occurring among racial and cultural groups was something the students and Marcus felt was negatively impacting the school community. Marcus's Community Works

group set out to address this issue as one of their small projects in SY 23-24. The creation of the senior seating section in the cafeteria and the invitation of seniors to guests created a mixture of students from various backgrounds and grade levels who had not previously been together. They appeared to connect and bond with each other as seniors and as friends of seniors. This space became a space for all senior communications and centralized activities as described by Marcus thusly:

> "They're selling prom tickets down in the Senior Section… So they sold tickets down there, and they did wristbands. Also, this group, Community Works, did a senior prom-only event... Yeah, so they were able to give out senior wristbands down in the Senior Section."

Marcus reported that the senior section seemed to become more than just a place to eat. It became a hub of sorts where students intermingled with other social, racial, and cultural groups in full view of the underclassmen. The group's and Marcus's hope was that the upperclassmen could possibly find inspiration in the activities to hang on to their desire to finish their education and become seniors.

Engagement in School and Class Activities

The study revealed several different aspects of engagement that the program may have impacted. Attendance and engagement in class and school activities were common themes among the cases and years of the program.

Theme 3: Students Reported Participating in The Program Impacted Their Desire to Come to School. Attendance had been an issue that the mentors had been battling. For various reasons, the mentors indicated that students on their caseloads had very poor attendance, which impacted them academically. In all variations of the program, the majority of students indicated

through the survey that they were motivated to attend school because of the Community Works meetings. Mentors pointed out that academics are directly connected to attendance. Jennifer elaborated and explained how idea of feeling targeted, not being respected, and being yelled at all day directly impacted the students' attendance. Students seemed to feel that teachers made assumptions about them based on their discipline issues, tardiness, and poor performance. The students indicated that that administrators and teachers would yell at them because of these assumptions. According to Jennifer, if the students were in the hallway, the assumption was that they were causing trouble when they could have just been in the hall because they needed space. Jennifer elaborated saying that the students felt "targeted" by teachers and stated, "[Students were feeling targeted…not being respected, being yelled at, you know, during the day." The perception was that teachers were quick to discipline these students and not as quick to discipline the students who do not have attendance or performance issues. The students appeared to feel that the teachers assumed that the lack of performance was related to their intelligence level rather than an emotional issue. Jennifer mentioned that some students seem to avoid school due to this feeling of being targeted, "And, like, all of this is connected to attendance and student engagement. This idea of feeling targeted, this idea of not being respected, being yelled at, you know, during the day." Students simply did not want to come where they felt they were not approved of. Once the program began, students felt motivated to come to school because they did not want to miss the meetings. Marcus described a student who exemplified this theme.

> "Students were motivated to come to meetings and school and did not want to miss. I've had a few say, like, I wanted to make sure I was here for Community Works. Like, I wanted to make sure I was present for the meetings.

> And one of them in particular, I know, felt so bad. There was one time we were in the thick of creating our slideshow to give to the staff. I'll just call him Raymond. It's not his name. But he just felt so guilty that he couldn't be there because he had to do something for engineering [class]. And I was like, It's okay, it's okay."

This student genuinely seemed remorseful about missing the meeting, even though it was for something academic. Marcus indicated that he used the program to emphasize the importance of attendance and reaching the end goal of becoming a senior:

> So, this [program] became a really big just wake-up call. A lot of conversations have been had with students about where they are academically and how I can be a part of this, and it just started up a ripple effect amongst the senior class advisory group [and] all that stuff. So, it's been a really big thing. Yeah.

The ripple effect Marcus describes happened when the students began seeing the fun in the senior section. Watching the seniors leave early motivated many students to inquire about participating in the program. Some students who may not have seemed to care about becoming a senior due to a lack of buy-in appeared motivated by these privileges. Marcus reported that that becoming a senior seemed to become something that was appealing and special to more students. The program also seemed to motivate some students to participate in school activities and the hope is that the program motivated some students to want to stay in school to eventually reap those rewards.

Theme 4: Students Reported That Participation in the Program Increased Their Engagement in Class and in School Activities. When asked if participation in the program increased their level of engagement, the majority said it did. One student in Jennifer's group said, "Yes because I had more time with Ms. [Jennifer], and she stays on my grades and helps."

Another stated, “Yes, because most students don't engage in class, but if I engage and pay attention, the teacher will respect me more and realize I want to learn and pay attention.” This student made a connection between engagement and academic success. Students also indicated that they were inspired to perform better in class, “[I] was more focused in class because I wanted to do better.” The surveys showed that students seemed motivated to improve grades and engage more because they felt a sense of duty to their mentor in some instances.

Specifically, when asked about the impact the program had on engagement, the student group from School 1 22/23 SY responded that it did. Three out of five indicated that the program made them want to be more involved and one stated, “[The program] made me more aware of things happening.” Another student indicated that the program “Gave me something to look forward to.” Students also said, “[I] wanted to be more involved” as a result of their participation. These statements seem to indicate that participation in the program increased the students' awareness of what was happening in school and encouraged them to be involved in and participate in the activities happening around school. The SCP students are typically students who come to school and hide from socialization and school activities. Responses suggest that the program aided students in making connections with mentors and peers, and these connections motivated them to come to school.

Jennifer explained that many of her students were already involved in other school activities, but she explained that students were very motivated to be present for the meetings, “I've had a few say, like, I wanted to make sure I was here for [Community Works]. Like I wanted to make sure I was present for the meetings.” These responses seem to indicate that there was a desire to increase engagement for those students who were already involved in other school activities as well as those who were not. The students from Marcus’s group were in

agreement and indicated an overall increase in their desire to be present and involved at school. One student from this group said, “I felt more involved and wanted to be more active within the school.” The student responses suggest that the program increased their engagement in and out of class.

Students' Academic Self-Confidence

The open-ended surveys also indicated that the program boosted confidence. Students noted an increase in confidence in school and in social situations.

Theme 5: Students Reported that Participation in the Program Boosted Their Confidence in School. Across all cases, except Sandra’s group, which did not comment, students indicated that the program significantly impacted their social self-confidence while in school. The following quote shows how one student from school 1 felt more confident because of the way they were able to change their perspective on their teacher, "It made me feel more confident because I was able to think about my teachers in a better light, which gave me confidence in my relationship with my teacher.” Feeling confident in approaching the teachers and having a better rapport with them was apparently encouraging to these students.

Another key aspect of the program that contributed to increased self-confidence was the emphasis on understanding and valuing one’s own assets. According to the surveys, students overwhelmingly felt that the program positively impacted their awareness of their personal strengths, with only one student indicating otherwise. Mentors observed that while students initially struggled to recognize their own assets, they gradually developed a clearer understanding of their strengths and how these could benefit their school and peers. The program introduced students to the concepts of gifts from the head, heart, and hands, helping them appreciate what they had to offer to the school community. This enhanced self-awareness,

coupled with the opportunity to practice communicating with peers, led to noticeable growth in students' self-confidence. As one student shared, "It made me more aware of things and more comfortable expressing how I felt." Another stated, "It made me feel more confident about coming to school, knowing I was being heard." These comments reflect that students felt more assured in articulating their thoughts and feelings about school issues. One student remarked, “[The program] has made me step out of my comfort zone and speak more about what the school needs and wants from the students." Such statements indicate that the program not only boosted students' confidence but also motivated them to actively seek feedback and advocate for improvements. Another student noted, "It made me believe I could make a better change in the school." Student responses suggest that this sense of empowerment was closely linked to their ability to express themselves and engage in meaningful dialogue about school improvements.

The SCP coordinator was invited to the presentations that took place at School 1 with Jennifer’s group. She was impressed with the confidence with which the students presented their PD that they created as their final project. She stated, “Jennifer invited me when the Community Works students presented to School 1 staff, and I was taken aback at how competent they presented.” She had visited them throughout the year and was impressed with their confidence going in to present to the staff. She was even more impressed due to the nature of the presentation. The coordinator did indicate one concern about the content. Because these students were presenting a professional development essentially telling teachers what students felt they were doing wrong in their classes, it could have been received poorly. However, she expressed that the way they presented the message ensured that the staff received it professionally and authentically.

Theme 6: Students Reported Becoming Increasingly Confident Speaking to Other Students in the Group and SCP Mentors. When the groups began, across cases, the mentors described what they perceived as an initial period of hesitance as the students began to understand what the group was, who the mentor was, who the other kids were, and that it was a safe space for them to express themselves. The students appeared to learned how to have conversations, hear others' perspectives, and clearly express themselves. One student stated, "Coming to this group really helped me see my side and others' points of view on the same things we go through as high schoolers." The conversations helped them see that they were more alike than they had initially thought. In addition, another student said, "It made me reach out to more people, asking their opinions about some matters." Conversations that may not have happened without this program were happening, and more opinions were shared. One student expressed how the program may have encourage them to reach out to speak to more students, "[The program] has made me get out of my comfort zone and speak more about what the school needs and the wants from the students."

The more the group met, the more confident the students seemed speaking out in meetings. They appeared to gain trust in the mentors and each other. Jennifer indicated observing that students became more confident as they went through the program. She stated that, "[Students [talked] about feeling more confident." Marcus discussed how the students started off seemingly more timid but then behaved as if they gained confidence: "I would say, once we got to towards the end, the students were a lot more transparent with their concerns, and they were more willing to participate…in the beginning, [they were] like feeling me out." In the following quote, Marcus explained that interviewing classmates and peers seemed to be causing some anxiety in some of the students, even impacting their attendance in meetings: "To [interview

fellow] students, it was a very anxiety-inducing experience for the students. I didn't realize that that was going to be a thing." He did not expect this to be a problem and had to encourage students as they moved into the student body interviews. Marcus did, however, indicate that he saw was growth in this area as the students moved on to the micro-projects in the following quote:

> "Yeah, I would say there was some, there was some development. However, once we got to the interviewing portion of things like actually having to go and speak to people and survey them, there was a lot less engagement… and willingness to participate than it was earlier in the year when we weren't interviewing."

As the interviews approached, he saw a decline in participation and had to actively work to keep the program moving forward. As Marcus continued to build rapport and instill confidence in the students, they appeared to gain the confidence they needed to complete the interviews. The students were observed to gain perspective and think in terms of themselves as a part of the larger school community as a result of their participation. The quote below describes one example of a student who may not have gained a tremendous amount of confidence in the program but seemed to be moving toward the goal:

> I can think of one student who was super anxious about interviewing, and she's a junior. …she joined the group from a referral from one of her friends. Um, so she wasn't part of the program last year … However, [the program] was able to instill some empowerment and safety with her to be able to speak up more, so got her to speak in a classroom warm…letting her know, like, 'Hey, I've already, I've already talked to the classroom…all you have to do just kind of go in there.'

Marcus would give support by warming up the room, introducing the project, and then standing with the student while she delivered the interviews. This scaffolding seemed to help the student move forward in her confidence throughout the project. Like this student, it appeared that even if the students did not feel completely confident, their participation gave them the opportunity to grow and gain some level of confidence. Once this initial fear subsided, the mentor stepped back and let the students continue to grow on their own.

Exploring the Influence of Context of Each Case

The current study was interested in understanding the differences the case may have on the outcomes of the program. There were two years, four mentors, two different schools, and a different grouping of students each year. There were similarities in the students' experiences with staff and administration but also some differences in where they wanted to focus their work. There were also major differences between the mentors in each year and the outcome of the projects. For the panel interviews, I was only able to meet with Jennifer, Marcus, and The SCP mentor. Mary and Sandra had moved on to other projects and were no longer working with the Community Works Program. For these years, I based the analysis on our initial interviews and field notes. The outcomes of the panel interviews were analyzed in terms of the mentors' impact on the program, the dynamics of the individual groups, the differences in the projects, and the demographics of the schools.

Mentors' Impacts on the Program. During the pilot program's first year, both School 1 and School 2 started very late. The program was designed to run all year, but uncertainties about how to begin created some barriers. There were also the mentors themselves who expressed they were not as confident as the year two mentors. Sandra and Mary had different backgrounds in social work and administration. In addition, this year started with the mentors learning the

program and new administration. These factors created somewhat of a barrier, and the program in year one did not even begin until January of the school year. Mary explained, “So, we know we got started a little late... we [did] get through [the] slides.” Her focus was on the mental health aspect of the training, so that is where her emphasis was with her group. Mary’s group moved through the curriculum and prepared several students to return the next year to begin the year two group. The second year, Jennifer took over and the new group began in September. There was much more time to deliver the content and launch a substantial project. The first-year mentors were not as comfortable delivering the content with as much confidence as the mentors in the second year due to the newness of the concept. Jennifer and Marcus were much more comfortable with the material and had recent classroom experience leading a group of students through a project. Their outcomes were much more successful: they had a stronger, consistent group of students, completed the full curriculum and projects, and are poised to begin again next school year.

The Dynamics of the Group. Marcus was very vocal about the friend group he had in his group that he felt may intimidate some of the other students. The group of students, who were carryovers from the previous year, knew the program and had established a friendship, “We had some new people that added that didn't feel welcome… And there were moments when they spoke up and… [weren’t] being adhered to or taken very seriously.” While this lasting connection speaks to the program’s ability to allow students to make new friends, it made it a bit isolating when these students were put in a new group with new students. Marcus felt that they tended to take over conversations, and he had to continuously mitigate the conversations, so everyone’s voice was heard. While he felt he was successful, it created some unwanted work that he hoped to avoid. Most of the students were seniors and will not return next year. He hopes to

apply some of what he learned from Jennifer during our conversation and begin the next year working from scratch and intentionally diversifying the group. Marcus discusses his plan in this quote:

> I feel like the group didn't bloom as much as it could have because of the friend group looking for permission to participate from their peers, right? So, I think, next year, having almost more strangers, which in the beginning will be a little tougher, right? But being more intentional about icebreakers and stuff, I think creating a platform will inspire not only creativity, like thoughts and change, but also maybe just more [empowerment] and action too, as well.

This idea does not necessarily suggest the group can't naturally change throughout the year; this method is just a starting point to ensure more student groups are represented. The SCP coordinator agreed with Marcus and stated that she saw a very different group of students between the two schools. Jennifer's group had more diversity, and Marcus's was saturated with leaders who very often expressed their opinions. She had the following to say:

> So, at School 1, [there] was more diversity. I will say it was a mix of all [classes], like all the classes nine through twelve. [There was] great diversity in race as well. … if I had to describe some of them were kind of shy, some of that it was a mix of like the outspoken kids… School 2 was all a group of leaders…one of the participants [created] her all-African-American organization, so she had her own programming.

The group of friends mentioned by Marcus had a larger part of the group's control. They were also older and more experienced. In the end, all the mentors agreed that their students were enthusiastic and happy to participate in the program. Participation in the program was voluntary, after all, so this was not much of a surprise.

The Projects. One significant factor that was different between the cases was the final projects. In both years, Sandra's and Jennifer's groups in School 1 wanted to communicate with administration and teachers to voice their experiences. Jennifer's group wanted to create a tool for training teachers each year to ensure student voice was heard and there was an increase in student engagement in class. Marcus's group was more focused on raising interest in staying in school and becoming senior through a series of microprojects that directly impacted students. When asked about next year, Jennifer stated:

> I want to make sure that it's student-driven. And … meets whatever needs that they think… at the end of the day, like I really do want to see where they're at and like what they're coming into the school with and the concerns that they have. So next year is probably kind of up in the air right now. Just because I don't know.

This openness makes each year unique. The program and projects are driven by the students, with the mentors there to copilot. Based on the surveys, the differences in projects did not seem to impact the students' outcomes. The differences in projects seemed to be based on the specific school needs that the students found important.

School Demographics. The general makeup of the student bodies of the different schools did not seem to impact the program overall. In fact, the mentors and students expressed similar sentiments in the interviews and surveys. Students in both schools had similar expressions of disconnect with the schools and expressed similar changes after participating in the program. The biggest impact the demographics had in School 2 is that the mentor sought more diversity in the program, and he had a difficult time getting students who were not African-American to join the program. Marcus commented, "[The student] representation we missed is [Caucasian students]. So, we don't have many, but we still have that representation here. And they have different, you

know, struggles than everybody else in our school with our school being predominantly Hispanic and black." He wanted a wider perspective and representation from all student groups. Even though the school is predominantly African-American, he wanted to have representations from as many different groups as possible. That diversification is the focus for his start next year.

Discussion

Overall, this study showed promise for the use of the ABCD model in schools, especially for those with marginalized identities who have been pushed to the fringes and viewed through a deficit perspective (Henderson et al., 2023). This study aimed to understand the perceived impact of an ABCD program on the student experience in school, focusing on feelings of belonging and how those feelings impacted the students' level of engagement and academic self-confidence. This study was based on the premise in prior literature that alienation from school can negatively impact student success (Comber & Kamler, 2004). There has not yet been a study on the impact of this model in the school setting, and the results of this study give substantial reason to continue the research on this model. As students feel increasingly alienated, they tend to disengage more and more (Klem & Connell, 2004), and the ABCD shows promise for combating the alienation that can lead to students being pushed out of school. It is essential for student success that they feel they are a part of the larger community and are comfortable engaging; this is particularly true for minoritized students (Johnson et al., 2001). Students need to feel a part of the school in order to feel they can speak freely (Brown et al., 2003). The ABCD model seems to give students this connection they need in order to be able to use their voices to make change and feel they are a part of something bigger. In the current study these two factors seemed to be key in the development of staff and student relationships. Mentors reported that the ABCD program facilitated these connections and taught community building. In the current study, the ABCD

model made evident a clear connection between feeling heard, feeling a part of the school community, and an increased desire to come to school. Through the unique way of teaching students the concepts of community building, the ABCD model showed promise in helping students use their voices successfully, make connections to staff and mentors, and build community among peers in the school.

Unlike YPAR, ABCD does not have students research an issue and present a solution (Edirmanasinghe, 2022). There are similarities to YPAR, but the ABCD program is designed to teach the students how to communicate, advocate, build community, and empower others to do the same (Clear Impact, 2017). This is the aspect that makes ABCD stand out from other student-driven pedagogies. Through the listening project, the ABCD model in this study positively impacted students' sense of belonging and made them feel that they were a part of the community, which appears to be key to their desire to come to school. It is noteworthy that this feeling of wanting to belong to a larger community emerged as a primary theme across all cases. The disengagement and alienation from the larger school community has occurred in part due to the deficit approaches that do not value students' cultures and continue to make students feel as though they are the problem (Flint & Jaggers, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Valenzuela, 2005). In the majority of the student surveys, the students repeatedly indicated that voice was very important to them and their school experience. When they were able to express themselves, students felt that they were able to connect and felt valued. Prior literature shows that student success is directly linked to a student's sense of self-worth, and when students feel they have a sense of belonging, they have a better chance of completing high school (Johnson et al., 2001). Students who participated in the ABCD model program reported that participating increased their sense of belonging overall, and many expressed their desire to be a part of and help their

school community. Mentor interviews agreed with this student feedback and witnessed students becoming more engaged and opening up during meetings.

In addition, the literature has shown that students tend to align themselves with the school once they find shared goals (Brown et al., 2003). Conversations like the ones held in the listening project helped facilitate a connection between the students, their peers, and their mentors and ensure goal alignment. Without these conversations, it can be difficult to understand the various perspectives in community building. The ABCD model offered a way for students to understand their school community and ensured that the values of the school were truly in alignment with their own values. The students who were surveyed for the program expressed their enthusiasm for sharing their views and expressing themselves as a part of the ABCD project. The conversations with other students and staff gave the students perspectives that they had not previously had.

In addition, the students indicated that overall, they were more engaged and willing to participate in class and outside activities. Current research suggests that there is a positive relationship between student engagement and increased high school completion rates and overall academic achievement (Harris, 2011). The potential that this study shows for the ABCD to increase engagement is worthy of further research. In addition, having a sense of belonging within the school community is directly associated with a student's sense of self-worth and positive mental health (Gray et al., 2018). The ABCD model offers promise in facilitating growth in this area and reveals another possibility for ABCD to support students is giving the students a safe space in which to grow and learn how to speak to groups of people and to people who the students did not know.

To fully assess the impact of this program on student experiences, further research across different grade levels is needed. It is crucial to determine whether the program's outcomes vary with different demographics. While the current study indicates potential benefits for students from marginalized communities, examining its effects on students from diverse backgrounds would provide a more comprehensive understanding. Schools lacking similar programs could also benefit from implementing this model. Additionally, teachers might apply this approach at the classroom level to foster a stronger classroom community, which could enhance student engagement and attendance.

Future research should explore how the ABCD program might influence the overall school culture if implemented repeatedly and integrated more deeply into school practices. Understanding how this tool could address issues of alienation and build a sense of connection in various school settings would significantly contribute to the field. Moreover, revisiting existing programs to observe their evolution over time could offer valuable insights. As mentors become more experienced with the curriculum, investigating how their growing familiarity affects program outcomes would also be beneficial. In addition, the ABCD model in schools may need to be facilitated by people trained in pedagogy rather than social workers or others without pedagogy training. In this study, four mentors is too small a sample to know for sure; however, the different outcomes across the ones with teaching experience and the ones without raised the question of whether some training in pedagogy could benefit the students involved. In addition, streamlining the ABCD model training for mentors could be beneficial to ensure consistency in student training. Making the training more structured and monitored could ensure consistency in each school.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this study is that there were no direct student interviews. Interviews with students would have been ideal to understand their experience fully. The district restricted research with students, and interviews became impossible. The mentors were able to give some indication of the student response based on their observation and close proximity to the students but were limited in their ability to interpret students' responses with 100% accuracy; therefore, future research that can include student interviews will be helpful. Observations of the Community Works meetings and SCP projects would also have been an excellent addition to the data collection. For further research, adding student interviews and long-term observations would be suggested. An additional limitation was that the students surveyed for the program evaluation were all voluntarily in the program and already very excited about participating, which may have impacted the survey data. The study showed how the students who participated indicated that the program impacted their school experience and provided valuable feedback on how the program did not appear to impact their school experience. There was not a large amount of data; however, the fact that the data was collected over two years between four different cases with consistent results gives an indication that this study offers valid conclusions worthy of further research.

Conclusion

This small pilot case study could serve as a foundation for follow-up studies that could significantly contribute to educational research. This study has significant exploratory work on an intervention that could have the potential to change school systems. The ABCD model could be a practical tool for teachers, administrators, and other school faculty to use in order to combat student alienation.

Journal Selection

The journal selected for this study is the *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching*. This journal looks for articles on program innovation, curriculum and instruction, and teaching. This study would be ideal for teachers to understand alienation and implement similar programs in their schools.

References

ABCD Institute. ABCD Institute | DePaul University, Chicago. (n.d.). https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx

Akar-Vural, R., Yilmaz-Özelçi, S., Çengel, M., & Gömleksiz, M. (2013). The Development of the" Sense of Belonging to School" Scale. *Eurasian Journal of Educational Research*, *53*, 215-230.

Alan, V. a. P. B. (2020, January 17). Gifts of the Head, Heart, and Hands – a versatile tool. Herding Together. https://herdingtogether.com

Antin, T. M. J., Constantine, N. A., & Hunt, G. (2015). Conflicting Discourses in Qualitative Research: The Search for Divergent Data within Cases. Field Methods, 27(3), 211–222. https://doi.org/10.1177/1525822X14549926

Aronson, B., & Laughter, J. (2016). The theory and practice of culturally relevant education: A synthesis of research across content areas. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(1), 163-206.

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). Nurture Development. (2016, November 30). https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/

Barrett, K. (2018). When school dress codes discriminate. *NEA Today*.

Best High Schools. US News and World Report . (2024). https://www.usnews.com/education/best-high-schools/virginia/districts/chesterfield-county-public-schools/lloyd-c-bird-high-school-20406

Bottiani, J. H., Bradshaw, C. P., & Mendelson, T. (2017). A multilevel examination of racial disparities in high school discipline: Black and white adolescents' perceived equity, school belonging, and adjustment problems. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, *109*(4), 532.

Brown, M. R., Higgins, K., & Paulsen, K. (2003). Adolescent alienation: What is it and what can educators do about it? *Intervention in School and Clinic*, *39*(1), 3-9.

Caraballo, L., & Lyiscott, J. (2020). Collaborative inquiry: Youth, social action, and critical qualitative research. *Action Research*, *18*(2), 194-211.

Clearimpact. (2017, August 25). *Asset-Based community Development - clear impact*. Clear Impact - Clear Impact Software and Services. https://clearimpact.com/solutions/asset-based-community-development/

Comber, B., & Kamler, B. (2004). Getting out of deficit: Pedagogies of reconnection. *Teaching* , *15*(3), 293-310.

Cunningham, G., & Mathie, A. (2002). Asset-based community development: An overview. *Coady International Institute. Retrieved February 4*, 2009.

Dee, T. S., & Penner, E. K. (2017). The causal effects of cultural relevance: Evidence from an ethnic studies curriculum. *American Educational Research Journal*, *54*(1), 127-166.of deficit thinking and implications for scholarly research. *NCID Currents*, *1*(1).

Edirmanasinghe, N. (2020). Using youth participatory action research to promote self-efficacy in math and science. *Professional School Counseling*, *24*(1), 2156759X20970500.

Ennis, G., & West, D. (2010). Exploring the potential of social network analysis in asset-based community development practice and research. *Australian Social Work*, *63*(4), 404-417.

Farrington. (2020). Equitable learning and development: Applying science to foster liberatory

education. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(2), 159–169. fohttps://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2019.1609730

Fisher, R. J., & Katz, J. E. (2000). Social‐desirability bias and the validity of self‐reported values. *Psychology & Marketing*, *17*(2), 105-120.

Flint, A. S., & Jaggers, W. (2021). You matter here: The impact of asset-based pedagogies on learning. *Theory Into Practice*, *60*(3), 254-264.

Foster-Fishman, P. G., Law, K. M., Lichty, L. F., & Aoun, C. (2010). Youth ReACT for social change: A method for youth participatory action research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, *46*, 67-83.

Gray, Hope, E. C., & Matthews, J. S. (2018). Black and Belonging at School: A Case for Interpersonal, Instructional, and Institutional Opportunity Structures. Educational Psychologist, 53(2), 97–113. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2017.1421466haines

Haines, A. (2014). Asset-based community development. In *An Introduction to Community Development* (pp. 67-78). Routledge.

Hargreaves, A., Earl, L. M., Ryan, J., Clifton, R. A., & Mandzuk, D. (1997). Schooling for Change: Reinventing education for early adolescents. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *22*(1),
119.

Hascher, T., & Hagenauer, G. (2010). Alienation from school. *International journal of educational research*, *49*(6), 220–232.

Hascher, T., & Hadjar, A. (2018). School alienation–Theoretical approaches and educational

research. *Educational Research*, *60*(2), 171-188.

Harris, L. (2011). Secondary teachers' conceptions of student engagement: Engagement in learning or in schooling? *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *27*(2), 376–386. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2010.09.006

Healey, K., & Stroman, C. (2021). Structures for belonging: A synthesis of research on belonging-supportive learning environments. *website: https://selcenter. wested.*

Henderson, D. X., Baxter, S., Gordon-Littréan, B., Bingham Flemmings, J., & Edwards, C. (2023). "Push through everything": using phenomenological inquiry to investigate how Black males' socioecology and identities promote perseverance in the U. S. public education system. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, *26*(5), 602–622.

Henry, K. L., Knight, K. E., & Thornberry, T. P. (2012). School disengagement as a predictor of\ dropout, delinquency, and problem substance use during adolescence and early adulthood. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *41*, 156-166.

Johnson, M. K., Crosnoe, R., & Elder Jr, G. H. (2001). Students' attachment and academic engagement: The role of race and ethnicity. *Sociology of Education*, 318-340.

Johnson, R. M., Strayhorn, T. L., & Parler, B. (2020). "I just want to be a regular kid:" A qualitative study of sense of belonging among high school youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *111*, 104832-. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.104832

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1), 120-124.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, *32*(3), 465-491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2007). Pushing past the achievement gap: An essay on the language of deficit. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 316-323.

López, F. A. (2017). Altering the trajectory of the self-fulfilling prophecy: Asset-based pedagogy
and classroom dynamics. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *68*(2), 193-212.

Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach (applied social research methods)* (p. 232). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milner, H. (2011). Culturally relevant pedagogy in a diverse urban classroom. *The Urban Review*, 43(1), 66–89. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-009-0143-0

Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and policy in mental health and mental health services research*, *42*, 533-544.

Phillips, R., Trevan, E., & Kraeger, P. (Eds.). (2020). Research Handbook on Community Development. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing. Retrieved Mar 11, 2024, from https://doi-org.proxy.library.vcu.edu/10.4337/9781788118477

Sharma, M., & Portelli, J. P. (2014). Uprooting and settling in: The invisible strength of deficit thinking. *LEARNing Landscapes*, *8*(1), 251-267.

Tomaszek, K. (2023). Why it is important to engage students in school activities? Examining the mediation effect of student school engagement on the relationships between student alienation and school burnout. *Polish psychological bulletin*, *51*(2), 98-. https://doi.org/10.24425/ppb.2020.133767

Transnational Forum on Integrated Community Care - Where primary care matters. (2021, February 5). Where Primary Care Matters. https://www.fondsdanieldeconinck.be/en/initiative/transform#publications

Valenzuela, A. (2005). Subtractive schooling, caring relations, and social capital in the schooling of US-Mexican youth. *Beyond Silenced Voices: Class, Race, and Gender in United States Schools*, 83-94.

Yin, R. K., Clarke, C., Cotner, B., & Lee, R. (2012). Case study methods. In *Handbook of complementary methods in education research* (pp. 111-122). Routledge.

Yosso, T. J., & Solórzano, D. G. (2005). Conceptualizing a critical race theory in sociology. *The Blackwell Companion to Social Inequalities*, 117-146.

Appendix A

Survey Codebook Sample

				School 1 Year 1			School 1 Year 2		
Category	**Code**	**Abbreviation**	**Definition**	**Student 1**	**Student 2**	**Student 3**	**Student 1**	**Student 2**	**Student 3**
School	Belonging	Sch_Bel	Students' perceived sense of belonging in School	Student said the program did not impact their sense of belonging in school	When coming to this group it really help me see myside and others point of view on the same things we go through as high schoolers.		"We became more noticed to the school and adults"		"It made me feel like I had a choice in how I am treated"
School	Academic Self-confidence	Sch_Acad	Students' academic confidence before Community Works	Student disagreed that the program impacted their academic self-confidence.		Motivated me to be better			
School	Confidence in School	Sch_Conf	Student feels more confident in school as a result of connections made in the program	A lot of things I had to deal with, this group helped me get through it.	Student disagreed that participating in the program made them feel more confident in school	Student strongly agreed that participating in the program made them feel more confident in school	Student strongly agreed that the embrace project made them feel more confident in school.	Student agreed that the embrace project made them feel more confident in school.	Student agreed that the embrace project made them feel more confident in school.
School	Engagement in School	Sch-Engage	Students are willing to participate more in class or in extracurricular activities.	Student indicated that the program did not improve their willingness to engage.	Some what I was really already in a lot of things but I did take part even more with that being said.	Yes because I looked forward to coming to the meetings			" Yes because I had more time with Ms. M and she stays on my grades and helps."
School	Faculty Connections	Sch_Fac	Student has connections to at least one faculty member.	Student strongly agreed that they made connections with mentors and students	Student agreed that they made connections with mentors and students	Student agreed that they made connection with mentors and students	Student strongly agreed that they felt a connection to Embrace team including mentors and students.	Student strongly agreed that they felt a connection to Embrace team including mentors and students.	Student strongly agreed that they felt a connection to Embrace team including mentors and students.

Mentor Codebook Sample

Category	Code	Abbreviation	Definition	Mentor responses	Mentor responses	Mentor responses
School	Belonging	Sch_Bel	Students' perceived sense of belonging in School	So what was happening across the county is students are they're segregating themselves within the cafeteria. There's actually articles and stuff talking about this. So I noticed that opportunity and that what was happening, you have different cultural backgrounds choose specific areas to sit	They're selling prom tickets down in the Senior Section. Obviously there's nowhere to go. They're doing they did... So they sold tickets down there and they did. They did wristbands because we did. Also this group Community Works did a senior prom only event. So it was only for a prom only for seniors. Yeah, so they were able to give out senior wristbands down in the Senior Section. So this one little like minimum thing that I seen turned into like into some something more	
School	Academic Self-confidence	Sch_Acad	Students' academic confidence	Data collection, I didn't realize it was going to, it was gonna take a lot to inspire the kids to collect to survey students, it was a very anxiety-inducing experience for the students, I didn't realize that that was going to be a thing.		
School	Confidence in School	Sch_Conf	Student feels more confident in school as a result of connections made in the program	Yeah, I will say data collection. I didn't realize it was going to be a thing. It was going to take a lot to inspire the kids to collect data and survey students. It was a very anxiety-inducing experience for the students. ★ Pink Text indicates a repeated quote	And I have a list of teachers that were willing to give up their classroom time for us to come in and interview their students during class. It did. It did help. Exactly. So we had, there's a couple of senior only classroom like classes that were able to go in and interview some, but there were still like, I had a couple of students who were like, you know, I don't want to go in there. I'm nervous. Even it was, like, 15 kids in there, you know what I mean?	Yeah, I would say there was there was some development. However, I, once we got to the interviewing portion of things like actually having to go and speak to people and survey them, there was a lot less engagement, I would say, even after doing some, you know, you could see it went from being excited about joining in meeting to, then there's always a meeting going on with I have to study for an assignment, which a lot of it was probably, you know, 100% accurate, and probably always had to do that. But it seemed like there was less like engagement and willingness to participate than it was earlier in the year when we weren't interviewing

School	Engagement in School	Sch_Engage	Students willingness to participate more in class or in extra curricular activities. Or mentor indicated a desire to increase student engagement	I want to do is inspire and empower kids to take academics more seriously. Here's the thing, a lot of the kids are failing, or they're not going to class because they don't know what it takes to actually succeed. And what I mean by that, specifically, is like they don't realize this credit base, you hit the next grade based on the amount of credits you get, right. So five credits for freshman 11, for junior, and so forth, you know, excuse me, five credits to be a sophomore. 11 credit to be a junior, and then so forth. And then up from there. And then so what this does is when you talk about senior privileges, it brings up the conversation, how do I become a senior? You know what I mean? What does that look like, because when you put that senior stamp, the only way to be a senior is by passing these classes by passing classes and going to class passing it and so forth. So this became a really big just wake up call a lot of conversations have been had with students about where they are academically, how can I be a part of these and it just started up a ripple effect amongst the senior class advisory group, all that stuff. So it's been a really big thing. Yeah. So	one of the biggest things that the students were bringing, to me was the lack of extracurricular activities for them, how the focus was all on the kids that were getting in trouble, they didn't have much opportunity to be noticed, like the students are doing well. So and that, that started being our focus,	One big thing, make sure I was consistent about is doing like a fun activity to kind of do like an icebreaker to open the group up, but also get them to speak more than I was speaking

Appendix B
Themes and Findings Analysis Process Sample

Findings by RQ

SCHOOL 1 Mentor 1
SCHOOl 1 Mentor 2
SCHOOL 2 Mentor 3
SCHOOL 2 Mentor 4

★ RQ1: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model program on students' feelings of belonging in school?

Case 1 School 1

- ***Student Group 1* School 1 Mentor 1**
  - "When coming to this group it really helped me see myside and others point of view on the same things we go through as high schoolers."
  - All three students agreed that they made connections to staff and students

- ***Student responses School 1 Mentor 2 23/24- 6 Students participated - one opted out of sharing.***
  - 4 Students indicated the program had a positive impact on their sense of belonging in school- "We became more noticed to the school and adults" "It made me feel like I had a choice in how I am treated" It gave me a community. I feel like I could talk freely about teachers and this school's situation without being poked at for talking about it.
  - All 5 indicated strongly that they agreed they made stronger connections to teachers and students.
  - The program made them feel they had a choice and voice in the school.
    - "Having the chance to talk to admin about ideas made me hope that the school and students will change.
    - "It made me feel like I had a choice in how I am treated."

- "Made me feel more involved in my community."
- Such a nice group of kids and a diverse group. It was nice.

Mentor 1 22/23 SY

Mantor 2 23/24 SY Students indicated that they grew in their confidence in the program.

- Told the story of Ashley, who wore a mask all year. Towards the end of the program, she removed the mask. When the mentor inquired, she said she was hiding behind the mask. Was not 100% it could be all attributed to the program, but the growth was evident.
- Students made connections with each other, ones that they would not normally make. "So also making sure to include a student from our engineering department, because sometimes they're seen as a separate part of the school, and I wanted to make sure we got accurate representation. And then there was also an even amount of, well, a

THEMES By RQ

★RQ1: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model program on students' feelings of belonging in school?

➢ Theme 1: The program made students feel that they had a voice and were heard by the administration and staff.

"We became more noticed to the school and adults." "It made me feel like I had a choice in how I am treated" It gave me a community. I feel like I could talk freely about teachers and this school's situation without being poked at for talking about it.

Program made them feel they had a choice and voice in the school.

- "Having the chance to talk to admin about ideas made me hope that the school and students will change.
- "It made me feel like I had a choice in how I am treated."

Students were not comfortable talking with staff or admin prior to the program.

" And they also said that they are not comfortable talking with their teachers about like more mental health concerns because they haven't established that relationship."

- One student indicated that the program made them feel like they had a voice.
- Another student, who was a Latina, didn't feel like she had a voice in the school. And I got her to join the program

Indicated that the program allowed them to speak their mind and make changes in school
indicated that the program made them more involved in school and able to share their opinions.
This student felt they belonged to this school
[The program] helped me think [about] what I can do to make my community a better place.

➢ Theme 2: The students felt that they were a part of the larger community.

.

- It gave me a community.
- "Made me feel more involved in my community."

- Student one said, "It allowed me to feel a part of something that could impact the school in a positive way."
- Student 5 indicated, "It made me feel like I was a bigger part of the community."

- Indicated students were interested in making changes and excited about the prospect. "So it's cute. They were talking about more food and, well, educational field trips to more pain rallies, food, instruction, and spirit."

Students created a community where there was none

Appendix C

Mentor Research Questions Aligned with Interview Questions

Research Questions	**Interview and Survey Questions**
RQ1: What is the perceived impact on an ABCD model program on students' feelings of belonging in school?	**From Mentor Interviews:** 1. How would you describe the school you are working in with SCP? 2. What school-based factors do you think contribute to the sense of alienation at the school? Probe- What strategies have you used in the past to help students become more acclimated to the school setting? 0. Describe some supports and barriers the students had to complete the project. 0. Describe your perceived impact the Community Works curriculum had on the school community. Probe: What about the Community Works final project? 0. Describe your perception of the changes in the academic and social attitudes of your mentees as they moved through the program. 0. Explain the impact the Community Works participation had on students' level of engagement. Probe: Describe the connections student participants made with to their peers inside or outside the program throughout the semester? **From Student Survey:** 0. Explain in the space below how the Embrace experience impacted your sense of belonging in school. If it did not impact your sense of belonging, you can discuss that as well. 0. I felt connected to the Community Works team including mentors and students. (LIKERT SCALE) **From Group Panel Interviews** 0. Please describe your experience with the ABCD model in your school each year. 0. Please comment on which parts of others' stories resonated with your own experiences and which parts diverged from your experiences. To follow up, Can you consider how the specific contexts of the different schools might have contributed to any of those diverging experiences? 0. . What about the particular students in your groups? How did their personalities/ individual

	differences affect your project (it could be positively, negatively, neutral, or a mix of these)?
RQ2: What is the perceived impact of an ABCD model program on students' level of engagement in school activities and class activities?	0. Tell me about the Community Works experience. 0. Describe the students' enthusiasm for the Community Works curriculum and final project from the beginning, middle, and end. Probe: Explain why you think the enthusiasm changed. 0. Describe your perception of the chang**es in** the academic and social attitudes of your mentees as they moved through the program. 0. Explain the impact the Community Works participation had on students' level of engagement. **From Student Surveys** 0. I was more interested in attending school because I looked forward to our meetings and project.(LIKERT SCALE) 0. Did the Embrace program increase your engagement in school? Explain how and in what ways in the space below. 0. Please use this space to tell us anything you would add to the program and any feedback you have regarding your experience in the program or how it impacted your school experience. **From Panel Interview Protocol:** 0. How do you think your particular school context(s) affected your mentees' relationships with their peers? Their teachers?
RQ3 What is the perceive impact of an ABCD model program on students' academic self-confidence?	**From Mentor Interviews:** 0. Describe your perception of the changes in the academic and social attitudes of your mentees as they moved through the program. 0. Do you converse with your mentee's teachers often? Probe: If so, were there any conversations that indicated a change in academic self-confidence in any of your mentees? **From Student Surveys:** 0. Please use this space to tell us anything you would add to the program and any feedback you have regarding your experience in the program or how it impacted your school experience.

	0. Did the Community Works program increase your engagement in school? Explain how and in what ways in the space below.
RQ4 How does the context of each case influence the perceived impacts of the ABCD model on students' experience in school?	**SCP Coordinator Interview** 0. Tell me about these students on your caseload. Probe: What is the application process for getting into SCP? Probe: What made you feel that these students were ideal for your program launch **From Mentor Interviews** 0. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your background. 0. How long have you worked with SCP? Tell me about your experience working with SCP at your school. How would you describe the students you work with in SCP? Probe- What strategies have you used in the past to help students become more acclimated to the school setting? **From Panel Interview Protocol** 24. What about the particular students in your groups? How did their personalities/ individual differences affect your project (it could be positively, negatively, neutral, or a mix of these)?

Paper 3

Asset-Based Community Development Model for Increasing Student Engagement and Changing School Culture

Abstract

This practitioner's article gives background information on my story as a researcher in discovering ABC and its potential as a pedagogical tool. The article gives a brief background on asset-based community development and then how the SCP program translated the ABCD model to the school setting. Then, the article gives an account of what happened when SCP launched this program in their schools and offers suggestions for implementing in the classroom and schools.

Keywords: Asset-based pedagogy, school culture, student engagement, inclusive education,

Asset-Based Community Development Model for Increasing Student Engagement and Changing School Culture

"If you feed a man a fish, then you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, he will eat for a lifetime." I have heard this old adage my whole life. It wasn't until I was working through my grad school internship, twenty years into my career, that I truly became connected with what this statement really means and what focusing on a person's assets can do for the person and the community.

About a year and a half ago, I began my internship with an organization I will call School Community Program (SCP). SCP supports students who are in danger of failing high school to help them reach their goal of graduating. When I reached out to the organization to see their needs and where I could lend my expertise, I had no idea what they might say. When I had the opportunity to meet with the SCP coordinator, I was overwhelmed with the gratitude she showed when I expressed my interest. The more we talked, the more we connected, and the more I learned about her dreams for an asset-based community development model in her schools. She began to tell me about the students on her caseload and how they came into her schools completely shut down and disengaged. There was an overwhelming sense of alienation and disengagement from the students that the SCP mentors struggled to overcome. How could they help the students if the students refused to come to school? Through our conversations, the coordinator revealed that many students come to the program as a result of acute trauma that created an emotional barrier to school, friends, and especially adults. The mentors told stories of students who were afraid to eat lunch in the cafeteria or speak to anyone outside the SCP office.

Students felt so isolated from the school community that they stopped attending school. The SCP team worked tirelessly to help their students, but it felt like they were fighting a losing battle.

Adding to their frustration were the deficit-based approaches that are the go-to solutions for most schools in the United States. Students from marginalized communities are often viewed as problematic, and in the schools served by SPC, this mentality was no different. These deficit approaches left the students on the SCP caseload feeling like they were the problem, exacerbating their feelings of alienation and disengagement (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

The SCP team looked into some asset-based approaches to addressing some of their students' issues. Approaches like youth participatory action research (YPAR) offered real potential and had great foundations in student-driven development (Caraballo & Lyiscott, 2020). They also looked into some culturally relevant approaches to connect the students and the school community. During this research time, they met someone who changed their perspective on asset-based educational approaches and introduced them to the asset-based community development model. He was a local pastor who started a non-profit organization that trains local churches on using the asset-based community development model for community outreach. The SCP coordinator saw the potential for this model of community-driven change and was inspired to look into how they could use this tool to combat the issue of chronic absenteeism, alienation, and disengagement plaguing their students. This is where I came in. They needed a curriculum, something they could use to adapt this model to the school setting.

I had no idea what was involved in asset-based community development (ABCD), so in order to help SCP create a tool based on ABCD for schools, I had to attend a training detailing how this concept is practically applied within the community. ABCD as a concept was developed by John McKnight. McKnight felt strongly about ensuring that community development was

focused on the community's assets and would include the community members in whatever improvement or project was planned (McKnight, 2017). The most important thing to understand about ABCD is how a true ABCD model is achieved. The steps make it unique and help develop the people and community involved.

First, there is the listening project, which is a chance for the voices of the community to be heard. It is a conversation between an outside partner and the community members over a meal or snacks in an informal setting (Asset-based Community Development, 2016). It can include conversations with community members who are well-established in the community and can give a historical perspective of how the community has developed. Through the conversations, a community project is developed, and natural community leaders emerge and are recruited as volunteers to help the outside partner spearhead the project (McKnight, 2017).

Once the leaders are established, the asset-mapping can begin. Asset mapping is an essential part of the process because it allows the community to do several important things: recognize their own assets, recognize the assets of others in the community, and make connections within the community (Clear Impact, 2017). The asset-mapping focuses on understanding the gifts of the hands, heart, and head. Gifts of the hands would be things one could do, heart would be sharing passions and talents, and head would be knowledge.

The ABCD model is based on the idea expressed by the old adage, “If you feed a man a fish, then you feed him for a day. If you teach a man to fish, we will eat for a lifetime.” Showing a community how to improve connections in and out of the community will give them skills and confidence that will last. Rather than giving them a one-time gift, this provides them with experience and an understanding of how their talents can be used to impact their neighborhood positively (Clear Impact, 2017).

Once I had a solid understanding of ABCD in the community setting, the potential for using this model to build community in schools was evident. The core group would come from the students on the SCP caseload. The listening project interviews would begin with this group, and an organic recruitment process would allow the group to grow through these conversations. Students could use lunch periods or homeroom periods to walk around and interview students to better understand how they feel about the current culture in the school. The interview questions would vary from school to school. Still, they should be centered around concerns students have for the school community as a whole, their experiences in school, and their perspectives on what needs to happen to improve the school experience for students.

After the students have gathered the data, they get together with their mentors and learn to analyze the data to see what students have said about their school experiences and what they feel would change it for the better. The core group would then narrow down what they feel is the most resounding sentiment from the interviews and focus on resolutions to this issue. Once they have a plan in place, they need to begin to connect with the faculty, student body, and community to figure out how they can enact their plan.

In the initial trial run of this program, SCP implemented the ABCD curriculum in two different high schools in the same district. We did a pilot program in year one and then fully launched the program the next year. In truth, both years were really pilot programs for these mentors; however, the second year showed significantly more progress than in year one. In School 1, six students participated in the pilot year, abbreviated because the program did not get off the ground until late semester two. Through the listening project, the students decided that there were two very different sides to their school. One side was the positive view that was presented to the media, and one was the reality of excessive vaping, drug use, and weapons in the

school. The students wanted to acknowledge this dualistic existence within the school, so they created a T-shirt encouraging people to see both sides of their school. A student designed the shirts and printed them to sell to help raise money for the school and make improvements to encourage more school community.

In year two, School One launched its program with great gusto. The students were excited to begin the program and hit the ground running once they understood their task. The older students did not hesitate to take the younger students under their wing. The most amazing thing about this project is that it can go so many different ways with so many creative young minds involved. This particular group was interested in increasing engagement in classes. They wanted to create a presentation to deliver at a faculty meeting, letting teachers know what the students needed from them in order to increase engagement. The students had to create and present the slide deck independently, and they delivered the final professional development at a faculty meeting with all of the teachers and administrators present. One of the most extraordinary things that occurred during these meetings was that students in this group made lasting connections with students they would not normally have been connected with. They also connected with faculty members as they moved through the project. This group encouraged them to come to school so they would not miss the meetings and gave them a positive space in school. Most of these students felt that participating in the program increased their level of engagement in school and increased their overall sense of belonging in school.

School 2 had a bumpy start in year one. The mentor was a little uncomfortable about teaching the modules. She was very willing, but it was clear that this was new territory for her. The group got to a late start, and, as a result, the students could only get through the program's training portion. The positive effect of this is that the students who were not graduating were all

geared up and ready to go as soon as the new year started. These students were led by a new mentor who came in with a comfort level that made the launch of the program much easier. He started the year with some serious vigor and led the students through several micro-projects that were focused on seniors and bringing back senior privileges. The group's idea behind these projects was that bringing back many senior privileges may encourage more students to stay in school and experience how fun it was to be a senior. One privilege that the SCP students brought back was the early release for seniors at the end of the day. The seniors have a bell that rings five minutes before the underclassmen at the end of the day, allowing them to get out of the parking lot first. There is nothing "cooler" than being able to wave bye to the underclassmen while strolling out to the parking lot first. While the senior bell was a big hit with the senior class, the group wanted to make the biggest change by creating a senior section in the cafeteria.

The group identified a lunchtime phenomenon that didn't sit well with them. This issue was something that was occurring at schools throughout the district. The students were self-segregating during lunch by racial and ethnic groups. The SCP team hoped to create some comradery among seniors of all backgrounds and create more diverse lunch groups. In order to combat this segregation, the seniors would be allowed to invite one guest with them each day. This allowed room for more seniors to join who had not previously been sitting in the section. As a result, students who would not normally sit together began coming together at lunch and introducing new friends to each other, creating a more diverse group within that section. Students who would not normally sit together were brought together in this common space that was especially for them. The group also mounted a television in the senior section to broadcast new episodes of the student news program created by students through the school media program. This space is also a place where seniors can get announcements, purchase prom tickets, and have

any senior events posted. Overall, the senior section was successful and will continue through the next year.

In my conversations with this mentor, he revealed some issues I had not considered as I wrote the curriculum. He mentioned that students had to work through some significant anxiety in order to initiate interviews with peers whom they didn't already know. In fact, the students began to participate less in the program as they moved into the interview phase of the program. The mentor encouraged them by allowing them to interview people they knew first and gradually expanding the group. By the end of the year, their comfort level grew, and they engaged more easily with the other students. The students were motivated to come to school to make it to meetings, and they felt connected to the students in the group and the mentor.

Overall, the students in all four groups had a positive experience with the program and indicated that they felt it positively impacted their school experience. Most of the students were able to make connections with other students and staff. The program helped them feel heard and that their voices mattered. The students felt like they were a part of the larger school community and expressed how important this feeling was to them in their school experience.

The ABCD concepts that were the foundations of this study could also be used at the classroom level. Natural leaders will emerge if a teacher has the listening project as a class activity. Various concerns will emerge from the conversation, leading to a smaller-scale project that could help create a classroom community, allow teachers to hear the students' voices, and encourage students to realize their own assets in the classroom. Alternatively, the program could begin as an extracurricular club. Students could complete the training and the project after school. Club recruitment could begin with a small group and extend to the student population. The same concept could also be started in an existing mentoring program or as its own.

The asset-based community development model in schools is unique because it teaches the students the concepts behind student-driven change and allows them to explore their own gifts that they can offer to their school community. It teaches students how to understand their own assets and use them to make positive changes in their situation. It is more than a student-driven research project. It is an opportunity for schools to teach their students how to use their voices for change and create community in a space where they feel they have no connections, creating a community that they feel they are a part of.

Journal Selection

The journal selected for this practitioner's article is *Kappan* first *person*. These are first person accounts of a variety of activities and experiences happening in schools. These stories range from serious to funny and are written in a way that is entertaining and practical. This journal is ideal because its target audience includes teachers, administrators, and policy makers. The journal looks for articles related to leadership, teaching, and policy alike.

References

Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD). Nurture Development. (2016, November 30). https://www.nurturedevelopment.org/asset-based-community-development/

Caraballo, L., & Lyiscott, J. (2020). Collaborative inquiry: Youth, social action, and critical qualitative research. *Action Research*, *18*(2), 194-211

Clearimpact. (2017, August 25). *Asset-Based Community Development - clear impact*. Clear Impact - Clear Impact Software and Services. https://clearimpact.com/solutions/asset-based-community-development/

Ladson-Billings, G. (2007). Pushing past the achievement gap: An essay on the language of deficit. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 316-323.

McKnight, J. (2017). Asset-based community development: the essentials. *Chicago: Asset-Based Community Development Institute*.1-4.