A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE PROMISE:
STUDENTS ARE KNOWN BY NAME, STRENGTH, AND NEED

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Christie Lee Brown
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Abstract

High school students, like everyone, want to be understood. Current research suggests students with a positive, supportive relationship with at least one adult in school attend school more regularly and are more likely to graduate. Low high school graduation rates contributed to the Highline School District's promise that “students are known by name, strength, and need.” This study sought to understand high school teachers’ perceptions and experiences with the district promise and their beliefs of how to best teach and support students. Six teachers from two district high schools were interviewed, and their responses coded and interpreted using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. The results showed teachers are aware of the district promise. They believe they are not able to know each and every student they teach due to the large number of students assigned them. Teachers believe knowing students is important but find it too time consuming and unrealistic given the curricular expectations and classroom management responsibilities, leaving no time for interaction and communication. Teachers did indicate that if knowing students were evaluated, they would make more effort. Accordingly, teachers generally treat all students as having similar learning needs. Two special education teachers had different practices and beliefs; they know their students because of the federal requirements to assess student needs and to create instructional goals based on those needs thus they are able to provide differentiated instruction to cater to student needs. Both high schools use small group, advisory programs to create trusting relationships with adults, yet the program was met with skepticism and apathy by half of the teachers because they do not believe the program is effective for them nor do they believe they are prepared to teach the lessons and perform other tasks that support the students in their advisory group. In each interview, teachers said they wanted to collaborate with other teachers, to feel known, and to work in a school
supportive of themselves and students. The main recommendation of this study is for increased
teacher support and training in knowing students strengths and needs. Lastly, to fulfill the
district promise, it is imperative for the school district to initiate and develop a supportive school
community with the involvement of school administrators, teachers, and students.

*Keywords: teacher-student relationships, respect, social and emotional learning, advisory
programs, school community*
Dedication

For my mom Lucy Shaw and her partner Jim Rowley, wonderful parents who assured me that my dreams were attainable and that it was up to me to make them happen.
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Each person holds so much power within themselves that needs to be let out. Sometimes they just need a little nudge, a little direction, a little support, and the greatest things can happen.  

- Pete Carroll

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance of the Problem</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positionality Statement</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions:</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Frameworks</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philosophical Roots of Respect</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence-Lightfoot and Respect Conceptual Framework</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Importance of Respect in Teacher and Student Relationships</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lawrence-Lightfoot’s Aspects of Respect Applied to Education</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agency as the First Aspect of Respect</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication as the Second Aspect of Respect</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Respect as the Third Aspect of Respect</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPA as Research Methodology</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Traditions of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Participant Recruitment</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview Protocol</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Storage</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First coding - Data Analysis</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthiness</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Influential thinkers in education, including John Dewey (1938) and Carl Rogers (1994), believe that teacher-student relationships are key to student academic success. The personal factor, identified as rapport and feeling tone, is one of many factors in successful teacher-student relationships when success is measured by contribution to student learning (Bush, 1958). Rogers contends that teachers are facilitators of learning who care about, trust, and respect learners; since each child is a unique amalgamation of their family, culture, interests, disposition, motor abilities, experiences, and many other social, psychological, and physical features, an effective teacher must take individual uniqueness into consideration to provide personalized educational experiences (DiCarlo, Pierce, Baumgartner, Harris, & Ota, 2012; Kobak & Cole, 1993; C. R. Rogers, Frieberg, H.J., 1994; Smit & Humpert, 2012; Tomlinson, 2015). Knowing individual students, including their interests, culture, and learning styles, assists teachers in accommodating student needs and in providing appropriate educational experiences (Bondy & Ross, 2008).

A meta-analysis of the impact of teacher-student relationships completed by Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, and Oort (2011) described the positive impact of the relationship on student engagement leading to academic success and noted that the relationship seems to hold a more important role for older students than for elementary aged children. Elementary school classrooms in the United States have an average of 21.6 students, and Washington State averages 23.9 students in self-contained classes where the teachers spend the entire day with one group of children, allowing teachers time to get to know their students well (U.S.D.O.E., 2012). In contrast, high school teachers in the Highline School District, the 12th largest school of the 296 districts in Washington State, may teach as many as 145 students each day, typically in classes
averaging 29 students with an hour or less of instruction time. The lack of time and the number of student contacts each day make it challenging for teachers to create an open and caring classroom environment that supports students emotionally as well as academically (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2011).

Studies of teacher-student relationships in high schools have shown that teacher-student support has an impact on student learning (Cornelius-White, 2007). In his meta-analysis of 119 studies, Cornelius-White sought to understand the association of learner-centered relationships with teachers and student academic success. He found the characteristics demonstrated by teachers toward students with the highest correlations to student academic success to be trust, empathy, warmth, and intentional use of higher order thinking skills. Teachers wishing to create lessons promoting independent thinking and learning often find they conflict with the setup of the education system; comprehensive high schools typically operate using rigid time schedules, specific course descriptions, and pedagogical approaches without much time allotted for teacher autonomy in teaching practices (de la Sablonniere, Taylor, & Sadykova, 2009; Frelin, 2015; Olson, 2009). Highline School District, like most school districts, is a complex system constantly balancing curricular content and pedagogy with the educational needs of students.

Policy makers in the Highline School make a firm commitment to parents, students, and community promising that, “Every student in Highline Public Schools is known by name, strength, and need, and graduates ready for college, career, and citizenship (highlineschools.org, 2016).” The Highline School District makes this pledge to the community at large, beginning with the language “every student” and not adding qualifiers to any segment of the student population but purposefully making an inclusive statement. Highline leadership looks for solutions to problems. The superintendent, for example, has taken a position that out of school
suspections are not supportive of students. These suspensions, except for instances where student safety is a concern, have been replaced with in-school suspension. Each high school and middle school has a re-engagement specialist, a certificated teacher who has training in restorative practices and trauma, and is assigned to work with students who have been temporarily suspended from class (Highlineschools.org, 2016).

There is a body of research contending that this is a sound promise, one that is appropriate for a school system to make (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Matheson, 2010; Phillips, 2013; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Wiggins, 2011). To date, no clear definition of “knowing students” has been offered by Highline School District to the teachers, administrators, or the community. Since the inception of this promise school district employees have not received formal training in knowing students by name, strength, and need.

**Significance of the Problem**

An oft-noted measure of public school success in the United States is the graduation rate, notably the four year, on time graduation rates (on time graduation rate is defined as graduating within four years after a student’s first time beginning the 9th grade). The state-wide graduation rate in Washington for the 2014-2015 school year was 77.2%; the Highline School District graduation rate was 62.9% (OSPI, 2016). By way of comparison, the national graduation rate in 2013, the latest statistic available, was 82% of American students graduating on time with regular high school diplomas (nces.ed.gov, 2016). The pressure on high schools, departments, and teachers in the Highline School District has increased as the district superintendent has mandated that there be no more years when the graduation rate is under 70%. Furthermore, the district school board has committed to at least 19 out of 20 students entering Grade 9 in 2013 will graduate prepared to choose their future (HighlineSchools.org, 2017). The superintendent
noted that, “High school students in our district can go all day without any adult saying their name or speaking directly to them,” (Dr. Susan Enfield, March 2015, personal communication). She went on to say that she believes that students who have connections with adults at school are more successful; learning and using student names is critical to students' believing they belong in a school.

If teachers and other adults in schools are instrumental in students' successfully completing high school and graduating on time, their specific actions that influence these successes ought to be known and replicated. It is not uncommon for teachers and schools to blame community and families for lack of structure and student support. Additional blame for the lack of student progress is also leveled at middle schools, or even other high school teachers, for sending students who are unprepared for the rigors of high school (Benner, 2009). Yet high schools, and even middle schools, are challenging social, bureaucratic, and logistical places for adolescents to navigate. Studies show, and conversations with high school staff verify, that many students begin the downward spiral in 9th grade, beginning with a rough transition from middle school to the larger, more complex, and often seemingly less caring high school environment (Davis, Chang, Andrzejewski, & Poirier, 2014; Zimmer-Gembeck, Chipuer, Hanisch, Creed, & McGregor, 2006). If students fail a class or two early in high school, they may soon realize there is not enough time to retake the class during the school day; high school students may thus feel it is impossible to succeed with all the high school credit requirements.

While many studies have examined teacher-student relationships (see for example, Brackett et al., 2011, den Brok & Levy, 2005; Hamre & Pianta, 2006), the impact of teacher-student relationships on students’ academic success (see for example, Appleton, Christenson, Kim, & Reschly, 2006; Finn & Rock, 1997; Hagenauer & Hascher, 2014), and social
development (see for example, Buyse, Verschueren, Verachtert, & Van Damme, 2009; Davidson, 1999; Holfve-Sabel, 2014), few studies have looked into how teachers perceive a school district’s promise to improve teacher-student relationship and what insights they may have to help achieve an improved teacher-student relationship in the context of large, public high schools with over 49 percent of students qualifying for free or reduced meals. The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating high school teachers’ perceptions, experiences, and their suggestions for best teaching and supporting high school students. Moreover, the study explored the teacher-student relationships topic from the lens of respect, a conceptual framework that has largely been used in research on nursing (Chapman & Clucas, 2014; Papastavrou et al., 2012) business (Arnold & Bowie, 2003; van Quaquebeke, Zenker, & Eckloff, 2009), and as an aspect of organizational change processes (Angwin & Vaara, 2005; Putnam, Myers, & Gailliard, 2013; Self, 2009), the results of the study will contribute to the current literature on this topic by digging deeper into the role of respect in improving teacher-student relationships.

**Positionality Statement**

In this positionality statement, I explore my own bias as an elementary and middle school teacher and as a school administrator. My practice as an educator reflects my interest in caring for students. In my research about high school teachers’ getting to know the students they work with, I sought to understand how students are known with the hope that this understanding may lead to better instruction as well as students’ gaining a greater sense of themselves and of their learning needs.

My school career was in a district neighboring the Highline District, and as an introverted child, I was not in my teachers’ focus. My grades were above average because my mother told me that, “C’s are for other students.” I learned to hate school in about fifth grade when teachers
seemed to be concerned only with students who quietly sat in their desks and wrote with tidy penmanship. That year, like every school year, my teacher must have gotten a look at the scores from an I.Q. test I took when I was seven. It caused me no end of grief because, next, the teacher sought me out to berate me for not being the highly successful student that I was capable of becoming. She offered no help, no altered curriculum to assist in the process; she must have expected I would figure out how to be motivated and interested in her instruction by myself. I really wanted to like school, and I did when we were assigned creative projects a time or two, but only the library really held my interest. My best response to my teachers was to become an educator who works to create a relationship with each of my students and to help them advocate for their own needs.

I have spent 25 years working in public schools, eight years in private schools, and I am currently an elementary school teacher in the Highline Public Schools. While most of my experience has been either as a classroom teacher or principal in elementary and middle schools, several positions I have held specifically inform my thinking as to the urgency and importance of building relationships.

Early in my career I accepted a position with Department of Defense Dependents Schools teaching the children of American Armed Forces personnel on a base in Germany. I taught gifted and talented middle school students as their Language Arts teacher. They were the children of Army personnel or of civilians who worked on the base. The students had a wealth of life experiences from the places they had lived and visited, but the challenge as a teacher was to create a community of learners out of the disparate group of adolescents. I gained skill as a community builder because, besides teaching, I was responsible for scheduling and implementing the school wide advisory program. This turned out to be more of a challenge than
I had anticipated, because half of the middle school staff were former elementary school teachers and embraced the program but the other half of the staff were high school teachers and wanted nothing to do with the “touchy-feely hand-holding” program designed to serve as a supportive environment with a compassionate adult in a large school. It was a constant discussion with many teachers; some never bought into advisory and others eventually recognized the support it provided American children living overseas.

The children normally lived on the base, and very few of them ventured far into the surrounding town. The families tended to move every few years, and their service member was away from them for long periods of time. In fact, I was teaching middle school during the first Gulf War when soldiers from “our” base were among the first to be deployed to Kuwait. It was scary for the children left behind. School was canceled one day so teachers could take “mass casualty” training in case the soldiers from our base met a bad outcome in the desert. There were American soldiers with weapons positioned on the roof of the school for weeks in case of an attack. The children were frightened, and school served as a distraction from their worries where teachers and friends provided stability and support.

More recently, I spent five years in a combination position as the principal and one of the teachers at a small school serving family members of cancer patients who were in the city for treatment at a major cancer treatment center. Most of the students had parents or siblings who were patients, but some were the pediatric cancer patients. In the afternoon, after teaching the “family program” for the day, teachers tutored patients who were well enough to be out of the hospital. I understood the upheaval in all these children’s lives as well; some had little or no time to prepare for leaving their homes, maybe a rural or small town, maybe thousands of miles away, to be temporarily set down in a big city. Furthermore, they were living with a critically ill
parent or sibling and experiencing less than typical attention being paid them as the patient was the focus for the family. The children who were the patients themselves had often spent months in the hospital and just wanted to have experiences in the “real” world. School felt normal, ordinary, and understood. While there were certainly times of distress for the children, their natural propensity was to create a life that was normal as possible. Just as the children of military members, these children with cancer patients in their families (or who were cancer patients themselves) sought out what they needed to belong, such as the school library, the basketball court, other children to befriend, or an adult who had time to listen. The roles of teachers both in the school in Germany and the school at the cancer treatment center were important to the children they served; the children looked to school as a safe, normal, predictable place.

It was purposeful in both schools to have procedures in place to welcome and acclimatize children when they arrived as well as when children left because, in both situations, this happened frequently. In Germany, if a platoon was transferred to another base, a third of the children might leave a classroom. At the cancer center school, a child might arrive, be there a few weeks, go home, and come back several times or end up staying a week or an entire year. Student arrivals and departures were not predictable. Teachers consistently welcomed them, sought to understand their situation as much as was important to know, got to know the student’s social and academic strengths and needs, and helped children settle into school.

My beliefs and work as an educator have continued to evolve throughout my career, yet both teaching situations had particularly profound effects on my work because relationships with students and families necessarily came first. I had to spend time getting to know the children before I could facilitate learning for them. A personal bias grew from the luxury of teaching
children all their academic subjects for a year, and on several occasions for multiple years, allowing plenty of time to create and nurture teacher-student relationships. It is my bias that I was interested in exploring during this study; by learning about high school teacher-student relationships, I sought to better understand if knowing students by name, strength, and need is a realistic expectation for our district’s schools and teachers and how this is best undertaken.

I chose a conceptual framework of respect for this research with my teaching experiences in mind, and I believe the respectful relationships created both in Germany and at the cancer treatment center helped sustain children socially, emotionally, and academically when they were in unsettling situations. I seek to understand how urban public high school teachers perceive the Highline School District promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need as well how teachers choose to learn about their students.

**Research Questions:**

1. What are high school teachers’ perceptions of the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need?

2. What are high school teachers’ experiences with the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need, and what are the outcomes of those experiences?

3. What do teachers believe can be done to best teach and support high school students?

**Theoretical Frameworks**

Several possible theoretical frameworks were considered for this research, including care theory, self-actualization theory, and attachment theory, culminating in the realization that the approach most critical to understanding relationships was mutual respect. Care theory proposes that the teacher-student relationship begins with the care given to children (Engster, 2005). Self-
actualization theory considers the benefit of people realizing their sense of self. Care theory could frame discussions about student growth toward self-understanding as teachers model learning and behavioral norms as an indicator of positive relationships in school (Patterson, 1977). Attachment theory considers the need for children to feel safe in attachments to care-taking adults, allowing for security in new learning situations (Jacobsen & Hofmann, 1997).

**Care theory.** Originally care theory was considered as a theoretical framework for health care and social work research. Engster (2005) explains the three aims of caring to be 1) satisfying basic needs, 2) helping others to develop or sustain their capabilities for communication, movement, reason, imagination and, in most present day societies, literacy and numeracy, and 3) helping individuals avoid or relieve suffering so they can lead lives as well as possible. Engster explains that the virtues needed to attain the aims of caring are: attentiveness, being aware and sensitive to others’ needs; responsiveness, being aware that a need for care leads to engaging with others; and respect, implying that others are worthy of care. Used as the theoretical framework in this research, care theory could define specific actions of teachers who are tasked with providing for learners’ emotional and affective needs in a learning environment. Care theory considers a one-sided relationship with the caregiver defining the interactions based on their observations of the person in need. Applying care theory to this study would minimize consideration of students as partners in their school experiences.

**Self-actualization theory.** Self-actualization refers to a mindset open to change and continual learning (Patterson, 1977). Elements significant to this theory are, first, empathy, understanding other people based on their internal understandings of themselves; second, respect, acceptance of others as worthy, without judgment, with warmth and liking for them as other people with all their faults and behaviors; and, third, genuineness, not playing a role,
authentic and transparent. Of these elements, empathy or authenticity, could be understood through anecdotal descriptions teachers share during interviews. Developing self-actualized people occurs through examples; teachers need to model self-actualization. However, it would not be possible to identify whether teachers are self-actualized within the scope of this study.

**Attachment theory.** Applying attachment theory to education and research in schools began in studies of early childhood education programs and day care situations. Teachers and schools create consistent environments that may mitigate negative attachment factors for children by providing consistent, caring, and supportive relationships for children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Relationships are key in attachment theory; children who are secure with their caregiver, their teacher in this instance, are more prepared to explore and learn than children who are aloof or anxious through the lack of a relationship with the teacher.

Attachment theory began as a tool to consider infant behaviors and to understand how early attachment played a role in the child’s ongoing development. New understandings continue to be incorporated in light of differing applications (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1991). Riley (2011) discusses, “Attachment theory is a homeostatic one designed to regulate emotional distance and felt security in which the caregiver and care seeker endeavor to stay close enough to each other to remain comfortable (p.11).” Important to attachment theory is the role the caregiver plays for the care seeker by serving as a safe, secure base to explore from and return to with questions and concerns (Ainsworth, 1989). Attachment theory is frequently used in studies of young children and their caregivers. It was considered for this study because it informs safe, secure relationships between children and adults. Attachment theory is limited, though, in effectiveness in studies of older children who have more life experiences, complex thinking,
reasoning abilities, and interactions with many adults at school. High school teachers may not embrace caring for student needs as part of their work thus limiting teaching approaches that might be explored in a study.

**Respect conceptual framework.** The 18th century philosopher Immanuel Kant wrote about the humanity of people in relation to each other and included respect as a necessary element of interaction; people ought to treat others with respect because they are people (Kant, Schneewind, Baron, & Kagan, 2002). The United Nations continued Kant’s belief of respect of all humanity when it called particularly for the respect of children and their right to education (Lee, 2013) accepting them for their uniqueness without bias (Downie & Telfer, 1970).

To hold other persons with esteem is to respect them. Letting others know of your respect for them occurs verbally and non-verbally, through simple gestures such as using another person’s name when speaking with them, by listening carefully to them, and by validating their thoughts and perceptions (Fjortoft, 2006). Respect as a conceptual framework for this research includes the opportunity to look at the underpinnings of teachers’ relational beliefs and, presumably, their actions. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) names and defines six intertwined dimensions of respect: (a) empowerment, offering others the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to allow them to make their own decisions and control their own lives; (b) healing, offering others a feeling of worthiness, wholeness, and well-being; (c) dialogue, listening carefully and responding supportively; (d) curiosity, being genuinely interested in others; (e) self-respect, respecting one’s self while also acknowledging strengths, weaknesses, and vulnerabilities; and (f) attention, offering others full, undiluted attention. Lawrence-Lightfoot discusses these facets of respect through sharing stories from the work of people in a variety of professions, such as a doctor who works in a free neighborhood clinic and a portrait artist who
seeks to capture people in authentic situations. The stories were gathered using portraiture, a qualitative research methodology she developed.

Lawrence-Lightfoot’s categories of respect were condensed to three aspects for use in this study as follows: (a) empowerment and healing have been combined and are referred to as agency to align terminology with common usual school usage, (b) curiosity, dialogue, and attention have been combined as communication to describe both spoken and unspoken interactions between people, and (c) self-respect has been left as a unique aspect of respect referring to both teachers and students. These aspects of respect, by adding the perspective to teacher-student relationships and specifically reorganized to address education, inform the framework for this research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012).

**Agency.** Agency consists of offering the skills, knowledge, and resources that students need to make their own decisions and control their own lives while encouraging in them a feeling of worthiness, appreciation for their wholeness, and sense of well-being. In school settings, demonstrating these aspects of respect includes school systems and teachers’ purposefully creating environments of rapport and liberating creative thought, thereby demonstrating a belief in students as known, competent individuals (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). Structures would be in place to encourage students to be as independent as possible in making decisions for themselves and allowing for their agency. Henderson (2013) calls this respect resilience and suggests that showing students their own power helps them to believe their own abilities and worth.

**Communication.** Respectful communication between students and school staff includes listening carefully and responding supportively. Conversations that are authentic communication consist of asking clarifying questions and responding with ideas and suggestions rather than directives. Further, communication is ongoing; recalling conversations and the information
students share is an important part of learning with and from them. Communication also includes creating appropriate learning situations for individual student needs (Keeley, 2014).

Growing respectful relationships entails being genuinely interested, curious, and acknowledging others through purposefully created connections. Teachers must offer the students their focused, undiluted, full attention and attend to student needs. Attention, as an element of communication, includes a suspension of judgment while treating students with dignity and a gentle, curious presence in service of knowing, valuing, and enjoying them as unique individuals (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000).

**Self-respect.** Teachers must acknowledge their own strengths and weaknesses in addition to being vulnerable and direct about their own needs. Teachers need to be aware of who they are as altruistic individuals, because respect for students includes not upstaging them; it is critical to keep the focus on students rather than the teachers themselves. Finally, teachers ought to recognize the necessary tension between teaching and evaluating the same students (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000).

**Respect conceptual framework applied to high school teacher-student relationships.** Respect conceptual framework facilitates the understanding of teachers’ beliefs about teaching styles and relational strategies they may use with students by defining respectful actions. Teachers engage in interactions with students that include formal presentations as well as private conversations. Teachers make personal choices about how they will engage with students, allowing relationships to form between them or not. Respect for another person evolves from approaching one another as whole, complex individuals and taking the time to understand one another. In this process, teachers may not actually respect a student, but the assumption is that the student would never be aware of this; professional teachers practice treating every student
with respect and support every day (Marzano, 2011). Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2000) defined aspects of respect provide a framework for understanding purposeful, respectful behaviors teachers display toward students. With this framework in mind, actions teachers report taking, and decisions they discuss making, toward students could be considered as respectful actions or not respectful actions.

**Summary**

Although the Highline School District promises that students are known by name, strength, and need, the teachers may not understand the promise as they have not engaged in specific training, nor has the district provided any additional explanation of the promise. Past studies indicate that teachers believe that the setup of the education systems in comprehensive high schools, including rigid schedules and specific course descriptions, leave little room for teacher autonomy including time to get to know students. Teachers knowledge of their students’ needs and specifically addressing those needs plays an important role in keeping students from leaving high school prior to graduating. High school graduation rates are a standard measuring tool in determining a high school’s effectiveness as an educational institution.

A respect theoretical construct was chosen to frame this study to guide consideration of teacher beliefs and actions regarding knowing students. Based on Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2000) work, six aspects of respect were condensed to three aspects of respect for use in this study and include agency, communication, and self-respect. Agency is defined as creating an environment where high school students are as independent as possible. Communication involves teachers and students carefully and authentically listening to one another in ongoing dialogue. Self-respect involves teachers acknowledging their own strengths and needs while keeping the primary focus on students.
Key Terms and Definitions

Agency: Refers to a person’s autonomy or independence. In this study agency includes teacher created environments and teacher actions that promote student independence.

Communication: Teachers speaking and listening carefully to insure authentic conversations with students. In this study communication also involves recalling interactions with others and building on them as relationships develop.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis: A qualitative research methodology where people are asked how they make sense of their experiences. In this study, teachers have the common experience of the school district promising that their students are known by name, strength, and need.

Respect Conceptual Framework: Refers to the six aspects of respect introduced by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) and condensed to three aspects to explore how respect informs teacher-student relationships.

Self-Respect: A person’s respect for themselves and their character. In this study self-respect specifically considers the importance of acknowledging personal strengths and weaknesses in demonstration of understanding and accepting others.

Teacher-Student Relationship: Manifest through ways teachers and students communicate and support one another. In this study, teacher-student relationships are further explained as being created through mutual respect and based on emotional factors like acceptance, fairness, and low conflict levels.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature regarding respect in teacher-student relationships and, by reviewing literature, explore respect as a philosophy applied to education. Next, the chapter will explore the three aspects of respect in the framework based on the portraiture research of Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000). Finally, this chapter considers this study in the context of the Highline School District promise that students are known by name, strength, and need.

Philosophical Roots of Respect

The philosophical concept of respect has roots in Immanuel Kant’s (1788/1996) belief that individuals should be respected and dignified simply because they are human; he called this “respect for persons.” Kant (1788/1996) was the first Western philosopher to suggest that individual people are whole in and of themselves. Kant’s theory serves as a foundation for other philosophers such as Maslow (1962), who adds that individuals also need to respect both themselves as well as their own capabilities, i.e., abilities that are grounded in authentic practice, mastery, and the respect of their peers.

Rawls (1999) extends Maslow’s explanation by adding that each person must be guaranteed individual liberty, including the right to speak and think as she or he wishes. Cranor (1975), in contrast to Maslow and Rawls, suggests that people must prove their worthiness to receive respect, an approach that is counter to unconditional acceptance and support. Although Kant’s respect for persons assigns no value to the person, Cranor (1975) proposes that a person’s value is determined by considering their needs, honesty, and courage. Cranor’s explanation of respect for persons is thus one in which respect is given only after determining a person’s value to society.
Lawrence-Lightfoot and Respect Conceptual Framework

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) seem to agree with Kant’s “respect for persons” in their work seeking to show the power of individuals. Lawrence-Lightfoot, in studies of individual people’s lives and work using qualitative portraiture methodology, embodies Kant’s belief by carefully sharing individuals and their stories to illustrate aspects of respect, thus operationalizing Kant’s philosophy. The crux of respect as defined by Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) is the connection between people in relationships. Many respectful connections involve a difference in power, such as teachers and students experience, and Lawrence-Lightfoot's concept seeks to show how differences might be minimized (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000).

In the book *Respect: An Exploration*, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) outlines her concept of respect by illustrating each of the six aspects of respect with a person’s story. For example, she shares a portrait of a doctor who spends time working at a walk-in clinic in a low income area and documents the doctor’s work and respectful interactions with patients as well as the doctor’s thoughts about her work, which Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) refers to as “compassionate healing.” The portrait ends with the doctor musing about the science of her work being secondary to the emotional support patients need. The doctor seems to echo Kant’s “respect for persons” when working with people (Immanuel Kant, 1788/1996). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) considers mutual respect as a goal in all relationships. Although Kant (1788/1996) is clear about the need to respect people, there is no explicit mention in his writings about expressing mutual respect *per se*, while Cranor (1975) suggests that respect ought to include the value of the attributes a person presents, but again with little mention of actually expressing mutual respect.

Kant and Cranor were not specifically discussing respect in schools, yet their work does inform relationships in school settings by explaining ways people perceive each other. An
example of perception in this setting is the work of Loutzenheiser (2002). In an interview-based research study to understand the school experiences of marginalized students, based on nine Californian female high school students in an alternative or specialized high school, Loutzenheiser (2002) found that students wanted to work with teachers who demonstrated the belief that all students are valued. Disrespect of students by teachers in traditional high schools, or “othering” them, had adversely impacted these students, leaving them with the assumption that relationships with teachers are disrespectful of them and unsafe. Although Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) does not address this specific kind of relationship, her efforts to understand the role of respect in all relationships clearly speaks to the consequences of the differing amounts of power between high school students and their teachers Loutzenheiser (2002) identified.

**The Importance of Respect in Teacher and Student Relationships**

Significant relationships between teachers and their students are, per Comer (1995), mutually respectful. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) supports Comer’s thinking, adding that respectful, trusting relationships are built on connections, empathy, and notably, symmetry between people. Symmetry can be a challenge in teacher and student relationships because there is a natural power imbalance; historically the person with power was expected to be respected by the other (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000). The idea that mutual respect is built jointly in schools, that both students and teachers deserve respect, challenges the belief that teachers deserve unquestioning respect from their students because they are teachers, a practice that leaves students compliant and voiceless (Delpit, 1995). Education, Delpit (1995) continues, has traditionally been about power and dividing people rather than about creating relationships. The concept that teachers might be respectfully appreciative, or caring, toward students challenges these traditional beliefs (Dillon, 1992). As Lawrence-Lightfoot explains:
I focus on the way respect creates symmetry, empathy, and connection in all kinds of relationships, even those, such as parent and child, teacher and student, doctor and patient, employer and employee, commonly seen as unequal. Rather than looking for respect as a given in certain relationships, I am interested in watching it develop over time (2000, p. 9).

Lawrence-Lightfoot considers respect between people with unequal power and, in each case, she notes the presence of mutual respect in the relationship when the person with power believes mutuality is imperative (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000). Perhaps most critical to communication within relationships with a power differential is that the philosophical underpinnings of respect are most apparent when people communicate by purposefully talking and authentically listen to one another without regard to status (Joh, 1975).

According to Klem and Connell (2004), who analyzed student records and student and teacher survey results in elementary and secondary schools for five years, students may not receive supportive attention from teachers. When students reach high school, as many as 40–60% are likely to be regularly disconnected from school; 31% of students agree that their boredom in class stems from having no interaction with the teacher, and fewer than 25% of students report that their teachers motivate them to attend school by creating a welcoming classroom climate (Klem & Connell, 2004; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007).

Based on teacher and student questionnaires and longitudinal data of student behavior, attendance, nationally normed test scores, and academic success, Klem and Connell (2004) maintain that the greatest predictors of dropping out of high school after age 16 are a reading level below the 25th percentile and/or school attendance rate of 79% or less. In comparison and as evidence that teacher support matters, students who believe that they are supported by their
teachers are 89% more likely to report being engaged in school than their peers who report minimal levels of support (Klem & Connell, 2004). According to Flannery and McGrath Kato (2017), the support that is most important for teachers to communicate is frequent student attention and acknowledgement.

Students are more interested in learning when they recognize that teachers respect and care about them because they are safe to express curiosity, ask questions, and try out new ideas (Curby, Rimm-Kaufman, & Abry, 2013). In their study of the value of training in emotional support of students for elementary teachers, Curby et al. (2013) maintained that student support promotes healthy classroom social and emotional environments. Noddings (2005) has long advocated for this support, saying children need to be understood academically and emotionally. Children also need appropriate attention and modeling to establish positive relationships with teachers and peers (Noddings, 2005). Downey (2014) offered the child perspective via interviews of 50 adversely affected eight to twelve-year-old children and defined respect for persons as showing care for others in ways that are ethical and accepting of others' uniqueness.

Mainhard, Brekelmans, den Brok, and Wubbels (2011) build on the importance of care, and observed that teachers' embracing of student individuality has lasting effects; first impressions between teachers and students matter because connections are formed early and are long-lived. A study of 48 Dutch secondary teachers each surveyed one class of students asking about teacher warmth, care, and control ten times in a four-month period (Mainhard et al., 2011). The study concluded that perceptions of teachers by students who have just met them are much the same as the perceptions of students who have spent significant time in the teacher’s class (Mainhard et al., 2011). Hamre and Pianta (2006) concur, adding that teachers' respect for student perspectives and sensitivity to their needs both result in positive learning environments.
This conclusion was validated by Brackett et al. (2011) in a study utilizing surveys and classroom observations of 63 fifth and sixth grade teachers and 2,000 students from 44 northeastern U.S. schools. Yet, specific learning about the social and emotional needs of children are not typically part of teacher preparation, even though children spend years of their development in school (Brackett et al., 2011). In sum, Comer (1995), in a lecture presented to educators stated, “No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship.”

**Lawrence-Lightfoot’s Aspects of Respect Applied to Education**

Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2000) seminal research on respect used portraiture methodology, to explain six aspects of respectful interactions with others, each one considering respect a different aspect of respectful behavior. In this study, the six aspects have been abbreviated to three, also discussed earlier, by combining several aspects to focus on teacher and student relationships. Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (a) healing and empowerment, have been combined into agency, (b) curiosity, dialogue, and attention have been combined into communication, and (c) self-respect remains as originally defined. This framework is applied to this study to clearly acknowledge and classify the variety of interactions between teachers and adolescents in high schools.

**Agency as the First Aspect of Respect**

The first aspect of respect, agency, refers to the ability to make decisions and act on opportunities (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Gilligan (1993) further describes agency as the need to be aware of one’s own needs and those of others, to be good or responsible to others, and to be honest by being responsible to oneself. The result of greater student agency is increased academic effort and engagement in school (Bush, 1958; Goodwin, 2010).
Individual students developing agency. C. R. Rogers (1961), in an article discussing advancements in social psychology, explained that people strive to be independent, to employ their own agency, and are aided by individuals and groups who establish supportive, interpersonal relationships. Examples of this process are supportive teacher-student relationships, which begin with teachers clearly communicating the beliefs that all students are important and that they all belong in the secure classroom community (O'Connor, Dearing, & Collins, 2011). In concert with Kant’s (1788/1996) philosophy of respect for people, Baumeister and Leary (1995) in a review of literature, seek to explore their hypothesis that attachment to other people is an essential human need. They argue that being accepted by individuals and the community is key to people’s sense of belonging although this has not typically been appreciated as critical to emotions, behaviors, and health. In demonstration of this important understanding, Siegle, Rubenstein, and Mitchell (2014) held four focus groups with 28 college freshmen in the honors program at a public university to understand the impacts previous teachers made on their ambitions. Their findings indicated that students attributed their curiosity and drive to learn in middle and high school to connections with accepting teachers. The students specifically noted that their teachers engaged with them and encouraged independent thinking and learning (Siegle et al., 2014), certainly an extension of the breadth and impact of teacher care.

Luckner and Pianta (2011), observed 894 fifth graders drawn from a study of early childhood and youth development which followed children over time. Children were originally selected from 10 different locations across the United States. Children chosen for this study all attended public schools and were observed in their classrooms where observers noted the interactions between the students and their teachers. The researchers, via classroom observations and teacher reports of student peer behaviors, found that classrooms that were noted as being
respectful and caring with receptive relationships between teachers and students promoted self-regulation skills, especially in students who were noted previous to this study as being aggressive in school (Luckner & Pianta, 2011). While this study was of fifth grade students, the researchers noted that a strong sense of self and a base of positive peer engagement is critical to future student social and emotional growth thus impacting students throughout the rest of their formal education (Luckner & Pianta, 2011). Furrer and Skinner (2003), in their research on student engagement in 948 students in third through sixth grades in a suburban-rural school district, utilized teacher reporting on student engagement as well as student reports about friends, agency in school, and their feeling about the classroom. Furrer and Skinner also noted that students who felt secure in relationships with teachers were more apt to demonstrate academic and social agency by engaging enthusiastically in their own learning.

**Student agency and classroom environment.** To understand how teachers establish an environment supportive of student agency and academic success, Bondy, Ross, Gallingane, and Hambacher (2007) videotaped and studied three successful, early career teachers in a small city school. The researchers noted strategies that each of the three teachers in their study found useful, including (a) getting to know students, (b) encouraging children to think about who they are as students and to learn about other students, (c) establishing rules, expectations, and consequences directly but without harshness, and (d) communicating belief in their students as capable (Bondy et al., 2007). Teachers modeled listening to students, responding with familiar words and popular expressions, and using examples from current popular culture to engage and relate to their students (Bondy et al., 2007). The study found that all three teachers, who were previously noted for their effectiveness, communicated using strategies like adding humor and non-examples of good behavior to help promote student engagement (Bondy et al., 2007).
According to Hargreaves (1998), in settings where students feel they are safe to be authentically themselves, they are more likely to represent their strengths and needs. This is supported by a research survey of students 5,000 students, aged ten through 19, and their teachers in England (Arthur, 2011). Arthur (2011) found that students felt teachers ought to demonstrate care by showing positivity in their attitudes and by allowing students agency regarding their own learning. Students noted that teachers who understood them encouraged them to take on new opportunities. Further, students were enthusiastic about these teachers encouraging academic thinking and rigor (Arthur, 2011). Student perceptions of being understood was a motivator for creating smaller learning communities, and in a study of high schools divided into small schools, Ready and Lee (2008) found that small high schools allowed for more caring student interactions with adults. The schools enjoyed social environments where students were encouraged to grow as individuals with agency and academic abilities (Ready & Lee, 2008). Smaller groups of adults and students interacting in a small school, acknowledge Ready and Lee (2008), necessarily ends up with people more easily knowing and respecting one another, which is a significant response to the expressed student need to be understood (Arthur, 2011). Some students may be autonomous with one teacher and seek more interaction with another, depending on such factors as student strengths, deficits in different subject areas, and the personalities involved (Hair, 2003; Zee, Koomen, & Van der Veen, 2013).

Teachers appreciate that their support of students’ social and emotional learning is of value, but they may not believe that their teacher training prepared them to provide support for students in their classes (Luckner & Pianta, 2011). In their study of fifth grade students, Luckner and Pianta (2011) observed the quality of teacher-student interactions, including emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support. Their findings suggest that classroom
settings exhibiting warmth, respect, and receptive teacher-student interactions had higher incidences of positive social behaviors (Luckner & Pianta, 2011). The same study concluded that practice with peer-to-peer social skills may also help to increase student agency (Luckner & Pianta, 2011).

**Student agency is supported by peers.** Children need to gain school skills, including learning about being a student and interacting with other children, to be prepared for situations that arise in social environments such as bullying (Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink, & Birchmeier, 2009). Using middle grades archival data from 4,331 students in nine schools, Flaspohler et al. (2009) surveyed students about bullying to understand its impact on students' feelings of well-being. The researchers found that both students who bully and those who are bullied feel less safe than their peers. The findings indicate that peer support is key to students feeling a sense of agency and security in school because peers shared and discussed social situations and concerns (Flaspohler et al., 2009). Children who are bullied feel less victimized if they are supported by both their teachers and peers, yet if only their teachers are supportive, the victims remain wary. Students who are accepted as well as supported by peers are more likely to be autonomous in school. People are first autonomous and in control of their lives, then use agency to act (I. Kant, 1969).

Cappella, Kim, Neal, and Jackson (2013) further the conversation in a study of social processes in urban, low income, middle grade classrooms and found that students were engaged and express agency when children and adults bonded as community. If students trust that the classroom environment supports them by helping them to express their agency, students will make the effort to actively participate, but if students are not feeling supported in school or not allowed agency, their class participation is limited (Siegle & McCoach, 2005).
High school students’ positive relationships with teachers are critical to student agency, leading to academic effort and success (Appleton et al., 2006; Siegle et al., 2014). In their study of cognitive engagement with 1,931 ninth graders from an urban, Midwest school district, Appleton et al. (2006) found engaged students had higher grades and higher reading and math assessment scores, while less engaged students were more likely to be suspended from school. The engagement may be tempered by social norms. Horner, Wallace, and Bundick (2015) observed that students in high school were inclined to be emotionally neutral around adults. In a study utilizing focus groups with a total of 72 urban high school students in three states, Horner et al. (2015) concluded that students suppress their emotions around adults unless they feel the adults know and support them as an individual. If support is not assured, high school students will not choose to appear vulnerable, with results being the opposite of empowering agency in students and instead discouraging them (Horner et al., 2015). Creating opportunities in classes for student thoughts to be heard and considered, for students to enact their agency, is critical to students empowerment and academic security in school (Buss, 1999).

One way that high schools address student agency is by implementing advisory programs. These programs, also referred to as teams, advisories, family groups, and home room, consist of a small group of students and a teacher who spend between 30 and 90 minutes a week together (Sinner, 2004). The goal of the advisory program, per Sinner (2004), is to increase student achievement, decrease student isolation, and make school a comfortable place for students. The advisory programs typically have a curriculum that is used school-wide, often incorporating Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills and attitudes such as self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making (Taylor, Oberle, Durlak, & Weissberg,
Indicators of advisory program success are positive social behaviors, academic success, and fewer student behavior issues (Taylor et al., 2017).

**Agency summarized.** Agency, the first aspect of respect conceptual framework, refers to the ability to make decisions and act on opportunities (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Gilligan (1993) adds to the definition of agency as also having awareness of one’s own needs and being good to oneself and to others. As the empirical studies discussed in this section have shown, benefits of students' agency include student confidence in their independence, more focused learning, students feeling safe to share their strengths and needs, and a healthy sense of classroom community. The specific strategies teachers adopt to help students empower their own agency fall into two major categories: taking the time to get to know students as individuals and creating an environment where it is safe for students to be challenged academically and socially. While agency plays a significant role in school success, the empirical studies discussed in this section have also revealed several challenges. When teachers fail to create a sense of community in their classrooms, or in advisory programs, students who feel unsafe or who are distrustful cease to participate, educational rigor wanes, peer interactions take priority over school, and student’s future success may be compromised. Other aspects of respect such as communication, which is discussed in the next section, may alleviate or temper these possible concerns.

**Communication as the Second Aspect of Respect**

Communication is the second key aspect of respect. When people communicate, they develop a sense of community, of mutual respect (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000). As used in this study, the communication category encompasses Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2000) elements of dialogue, curiosity, and attention, allowing them to be more readily applied to an educational
setting. Communication benefits students when they recognize that they are listened to, understood, and advocated for and when they know and appreciate the expectations teachers set for them. Robert Marzano (1993), a renowned teacher educator and researcher, advocates teachers' listening to and recalling previous communications with students to develop authentic relationships. Similarly, according to McHugh, Horner, Colditz, and Wallace (2013), community-building and academic interactions between teachers and adolescents in high schools require clear interpersonal boundaries to facilitate respectful relationships. These researchers collected focus group data from a total of 78 high school students from California, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania to understand how urban students described their communication with teachers. McHugh, Horner, Colditz, and Wallace (2013) report that students preferred clearly communicated, well-defined boundaries so that their interactions with teachers were predictable and note that, in contrast to what students prefer, students believed that their teachers do not know or understand them nor do the teachers want to know them as people.

**The importance of students' being listened to by teachers.** Honest, supportive communication is important because teachers and students learn about each other through conversation, which allows familiarity and mutual respect to develop (Arthur, 2011). Teachers have options for the ways they communicate with their students and attend to their needs. Teachers can act on their own behalf, they can make students the priority, or they can combine these approaches (Goodlad, 2004; Noddings, 2003). Allen et al. (2013) observed secondary student and teacher interactions in 37 classrooms from six school districts to learn how, when new students began a teacher’s class, their social skills effected classroom interactions. The researchers suggested that students with better-developed interactive skills may be more academically successful. Significantly, they also found that teachers who continually showed
respect for students by communicating their understanding of adolescent needs by asking about events outside of school, laughing with students, and giving students options in class, in turn promoted student fondness and respect, leading to positive student behaviors (Allen et al., 2013; Brackett et al., 2011).

Teachers who authentically enjoy their work, writes Tomlinson (2003), connect with each student each day in conversation because ongoing, focused student engagement by teachers is critical to students' academic growth and accomplishment (Furrer & Skinner, 2003). Getting and keeping students engaged in class is complex work for teachers (Overman, Vermunt, Meijer, Bulte, & Brekelmans, 2014). When high school students were asked about teacher affiliation, students explained that when their teachers did not communicate and were not interested in them, they lost interest in learning (Overman et al., 2014). Overman et al. (2014) analyzed questionnaire responses seeking students’ perceptions of teacher behaviors using a Likert scale from 24 Dutch chemistry teachers and 480 secondary students. The researchers found that a lack of communication between students and teachers leads to a feeling of student insecurity, resulting in teachers and students experiencing distrust and resistance (Noddings, 2003; Overman et al., 2014). Students are more likely to be engaged at school when they work with teachers who they believe pay attention to them (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Teachers also communicate with students by demonstrating curiosity and concern for them, indicating a commitment by teachers to their student’s well-being (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000). Teacher attention to students, by offering genuine interest and nurturing student thinking, creates an environment of mutual trust in the classroom (Raider-Roth, 2005). Students, in turn, experience security as respect progresses, thereby authentically encouraging their investment in the relationship (Morris & Morris, 2002). In a qualitative case study of schools in an African-
American community in a small Alabama town, Morris and Morris (2002) interviewed 34 people and received 119 completed surveys from alumni, school employees, and community members. Their findings note that a variety of school programs and parental and community involvement are important in schools. Morris and Morris also explain that competent, caring teachers were critical, even imperative, in creating a supportive environment for learning, i.e., a positive school climate. This outcome is supported by a meta-analysis by McGrath and Van Bergen (2015) of research on teacher support for students at risk of negative teacher-student relationships that found treating others with respect is a recognition of student rational thought and emotions.

Communication that represents both trust and respect for others is also important because human interaction is the basis of people’s learning and personal development (Comer, 2015). A concern noted by Comer (2001) is the recent trend in schools to focus on academics, with minimal attention to student development when, traditionally, schools have taught both academics and social norms. According to Coleman (1988), the relationships children have in public situations, as in school with their peers and teachers, are pivotal in their development, because children are presumed by the community to perform according to social norms, and schools are places they acquire and practice those skills. Christenbury (2010) adds that effective teachers make responding to the needs of students and the class a priority, while Raider-Roth (2005b) suggests that people learn to define themselves while interacting with others. She introduces “the learning self,” described as the self who understands and actively participates in school. In the best of situations, students realize that the learning self is a relational being who respects and engages with others while also expressing independent ideas in classroom discussions (Raider-Roth, 2005b).
Students need to be understood and advocated for by their teachers. Arthur (2011) studied the role teachers make on students’ character development by interviewing both practicing and pre-service teachers and students as well as collecting data from a student questionnaire. The research noted that high school students labeled teachers as “good” when they were expressive and encouraged laughter in their classrooms, leading students to believe the teachers enjoyed them. Further, students considered teachers who did not make the effort to know them, or who seemed to be uncomfortable around them, to be unapproachable and unfeeling (Arthur, 2011; Moje, 1996). These beliefs around the meanings of communication suggest that teachers are caring advocates for students, who they know and understand (Marzano, 1993). Ultimately, though, teachers are responsible for students’ learning as well as the students’ expressed needs, not simply the curricular content. This combination can be challenging when communication between teachers and students is lacking (Noddings, 2012).

Feuerborn and Chinn (2012) researched implementation of school-wide behavior supports in contrast with reactive discipline systems in schools. They asked teachers to read and respond to profiles of four students from a fictitious school in Washington State and to note what they believed were important features of each student. The researchers concluded that very few teachers consider the social, emotional, or behavioral challenges students might be experiencing. Yet, teachers commonly believe that students know how to act appropriately, regardless of their demonstrated behaviors, and that displays of respect or disrespect are intentional; the constant attention to their students' unwelcome actions thus leaves teachers frustrated (Feuerborn & Chinn, 2012).

Teachers’ positive communication with students and attentiveness to their needs can also be an important part of advocating for and supporting students. Using case study methods to
interview and observe students and their teachers in a western U.S. city, Arriaza and Rocha (2016) studied teacher advocacy for students and their families to learn if a network of communication between school and home could help immigrant children make significant academic gains. Their results were clear that a critical first step was for children to be known by their teachers. Teachers, for example, purposefully communicated with parents frequently to create lines of communication. Being known signifies belonging in the classroom community, and the child’s feelings of security follow from that understanding (Arriaza & Rocha, 2016).

In another study that also considered attentive communication in schools, and the potential risks of teachers' not knowing or identifying with their students, Hamre, Pianta, Downer, and Mashburn (2008), studied behaviors of young children whose teachers reported as causing conflicts at school. These researchers assessed over 2,000 children academically and socially in 300 classes asking teachers to complete a questionnaire about themselves and their beliefs about teaching. Parents reported their children’s demographics and children were academically assessed. Hamre et al. (2008) found that more than half of the conflicts were explained by teacher bias toward students. This is concerning because it likely creates a pattern of continuing conflicts with teachers throughout the child’s education, leading the child to expect these interactions as the norm for them in any school (Hamre & Pianta, 2007). Alternatively, Brackett et al. (2011) conducted their research of emotional climates in 90 fifth and sixth grade classrooms in a diverse, northeastern school district by assessing videos of classroom interactions as well as student surveys asking about student affiliation with teachers. The researchers concluded that students are more positive and better behaved when they have attentive emotional support from teachers in school. (Baskin, Wampold, Quintana, & Enright, 2010) demonstrated in their research on loneliness and peer acceptance in middle school that
students who perceive they belong in the social life at school are more likely to be engaged in their classes. Engagement leads to increased student attendance, scoring higher on assessments, and staying in school to graduate (Baskin et al., 2010). Advocacy, like engagement, involves teachers clearly letting students know they are primary the focus of attention (Marzano, 2011).

**The importance of students' knowing and understanding teacher expectations.**

Teachers are expected to establish expectations for their students, both for conduct and for communication norms (Gilbert et al., 2014; Pianta, 1999; Walker, 2009). In a survey asking students about their perceptions of teacher expectations, practices, and support, 979 middle school math students from 11 schools in Alabama, Gilbert et al. (2014) found significant correlations between teacher expectations and student academic success. Teacher communication of their expectations for students are both spoken and unspoken. As an example of the latter, Moje (1996) found that teachers communicate respect for their students and set an expectation that promotes learning by being organized and prepared to teach engaging lessons.

Influential research on teacher expectations was performed by Kleinfeld (1975) in an observational study of 40 teachers in rural and urban Alaskan high schools to understand characteristics of successful teachers of native students. Kleinfeld arranged the data on teacher behaviors toward students on a four-quadrant diagram where the horizontal axis was a continuum from professional distance to personal warmth and the vertical axis showed a range from demandingness to personal understanding (Kleinfeld, 1975). Teachers who had the most success teaching high school students fell into the “warm demander” quadrant, defined as teachers who demonstrated attention and care for students yet also demanded students meet high expectations (Kleinfeld, 1975).
The salient features of warm demander teachers are attending to student learning, treating students with positive esteem, believing in the positive intent of their students, and expecting that students will interact respectfully (Bondy & Ross, 2008). These are characteristics that result in mutual respect and trust (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Costa & Garmston, 1994; Rogers, 1957). Teachers who are warm demanders clearly make students their priority (Kleinfeld, 1975). These teachers build relationships, beginning with attention to learning about their students’ individuality, which results in interactions with students that are more impactful educationally because students experience security; they are known to and trusted by their teachers (Graham, Holt-Hale, & Parker, 2001).

Teachers’ respectful, attentive relationships with their students require understanding student needs for active learning experiences, such as problem solving and inventing (Darling-Hammond, 1994). To create appropriate learning experiences based on their information about students and to best pay attention and serve students’ the needs, teachers may consider (a) differentiating learning, (b) personalizing learning, or (c) individualizing learning (Tomlinson, 2010). While there are similarities among these three approaches, they are considered as unique teaching methods (Kallick & Zmuda, 2017). Because heterogeneous classroom groupings of students are typical, teachers must be prepared to provide instruction that meets the strengths and needs of each student (Tomlinson, 2015). Attending to individual students in this way is to teach proactively (Pettig, 2000). When teachers strive to build a bond with students, they are contributing to student academic and social success because the students recognize them as supportive adults who can be called upon to help when needed (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). McGrath and Van Bergen (2015), in a meta-analysis of studies from 1985 through 2015 to understand the risks and outcomes of non-supportive teacher-student relationships, found that the
security that teachers provide by caring for students is important to both student achievement and advancement.

Knowing students as individuals allows teachers to communicate with them more effectively and to educate them using personalized goals suited to their needs. Zee et al. (2013) surveyed 8,545 sixth grade students in 395 schools to understand how student personality traits predicted teacher-student relationship quality. They found that student personality traits like extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism require frequent teacher attention and have greater impact on teacher-student relationships than the cognitive traits that are strongly correlated with student academic success (Zee et al., 2013).

**Teacher training in communication and respect.** Teacher training does not typically examine how caring, human attention, and respect apply to teacher’s daily work with students nor, according to Wynne (2008) in the “Ontario Safe Schools Report,” do teachers report having enough knowledge of specific student concerns. Palmer (2003) suggests purposeful education in attentive listening and communicating may be missing from teaching programs; professionals seem to be expected to “just have” the needed skills without any formalized training. To the extent this is not the case, teachers need coursework that includes tools for attentive, compassionate understanding of others (Palmer, 2003). In addition to the lack of teacher training, high school faculty and staff frequently assume that there is always another place for a student to go if the particular school or class is not seen as a good match for their needs, thus exporting rather than supporting challenging students (Flannery & McGrath Kato, 2017).

**Communication summarized.** Communication, the second aspect of respect, refers to the typical ways people share information. As the empirical studies discussed in this section show, communication benefits students when they recognize they are listened to, understood,
and advocated for and when they know and appreciate the expectations teachers set for them. The specific strategies employed by teachers to communicate with students include setting behavior expectations for individuals and the classroom community, demonstrating genuine interest in their students, creating a supportive classroom climate, and having high expectations for student achievement. While communication plays a significant role in teacher student relationships, the empirical studies discussed in this section have also revealed challenges, including the specific expertise required by teachers to communicate with students to address their needs as well as an understanding of specific student needs and how to address them. Teachers report that they did not receive enough training in communication methods in their teacher training programs. High school students have a significant likelihood of being disconnected, but attentive and communicative relationships with supportive teachers make a difference in their attitude toward school (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) suggests, teachers’ non-judgmental attention to students is critical; treating students with dignity begins with teacher self-understanding and self-respect, allowing them to communicate empowerment.

**Self-Respect as the Third Aspect of Respect**

Self-respect, the third aspect in the respect framework, is defined in the American Heritage Dictionary ("American Heritage Dictionary," 1981) as a person’s personal respect for themselves and their character, conduct, and self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief a person has in their own ability to be successful in given tasks. Self-esteem is occasionally used as a synonym for self-respect but, in clarification for this research, self-esteem refers to an appreciation of one’s own skills and talents. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) specifically includes
self-respect in her respect framework, explaining that acknowledging strengths and weaknesses demonstrates the personal understanding and honesty needed to accept and value other people.

Schools have begun to discuss implementation of emotional intelligence and training in emotional intelligence for teachers to promote healthy self-respect in children and clearer understanding of others. Programs and curricula about emotional intelligences are available, although as mentioned by Gillies (2011), there may be concern whether the mission of schools is to attend to children’s emotions at all. Schools are responsible for educating children, and emotions are not traditionally part of cognitive processes (Gillies, 2011).

**Teacher self-respect.** To understand the impact teachers make on student academic achievement, Rowan, Chiang, and Miller (1997) implemented a longitudinal study involving 5381 students in 410 schools. The researchers noted student growth on a standardized assessment as well as measures of teacher subject area knowledge and teaching strategies. Rowan, Chiang, and Miller found that variables in teacher skills such as specific abilities to engage students and inspire learning were statistically and substantively significant in explaining the importance of teacher competence and awareness of their own skills and abilities (Rowan et al., 1997). Ecclestone, Hayes, and Furedi (2005) propose that the vulnerability and skills needed to authentically and respectfully relate to students may not come naturally for all teachers; teacher ability to support students hinges on their respect for their own capabilities. Teaching is a personal, relational profession, and in order to be present in their work, teachers need to understand their own motivations for being a teacher (Palmer, 1998, 2003).

Palmer (2003) proposes that to be authentically engaged in teaching, teachers must be self-respecting and teach with the same level of thought and heart that is expected of motivated students. Palmer (1998) also points out that the impact that teachers make on student lives,
either positively or negatively, may hinge on their own self-respect. Self-respect, or lack of it, impacts teacher practice. Laham, Tam, Lalljee, Hewstone, and Voci (2010), surveyed and observed 75 British university students and 175 university students in Northern Ireland, finding that people who respect themselves, who demonstrate positive emotions toward themselves, are more likely to respect and behave positively toward others.

**Possible impacts of teacher self-respect.** Reinforcing the need for self-respect in school settings, Ecclestone et al. (2005) emphasize that teaching can be undermined by teachers’ feelings of vulnerability and unwillingness to take risks that could result in stronger relationships with students. Trust is part of strong relationships. An observational study of 82 third grade teachers and their classrooms in 18 schools in a large, east coast city utilized a classroom climate tool to understand how the teacher’s social and emotional functioning impact the classroom climate (Brown, Jones, LaRusso, & Aber, 2010). The researchers observed that when teachers don’t feel they have all the emotional skills needed to be supportive of students, they rely on managing students rather than addressing the causes of misbehaviors (Brown et al., 2010). The researchers suggest that providing teachers with emotional intelligence training, learning about differing ways that emotions are manifest and presented, would help teachers understand both their own and others' emotions and positively impact classroom environments (Brown et al., 2010). Students may be engaged through relational means and mutual respect with teachers.

Teachers and students who are respectful of themselves and others, Stronge and Hindman (2003) propose, look at life from a positive perspective. Self-respecting people are curious about others and get acquainted by letting conversations center on the other person rather than themselves (Stronge, 2007). Seligman (1995) advocates an optimistic outlook on the part of teachers, and by association students, as an aspect of self-respect. In teaching, optimism refers to
being competent and in control, and through actions and words conveying the message that tough situations aren’t permanent (Seligman, 1995). Self-respecting people expect they will perform to their own high expectations, and they hold themselves accountable to being fair and kind to others (Stronge & Hindman, 2003). Accountability to personal expectations is an additional demonstration of self-efficacy.

**Teacher self-efficacy as part of self-respect.** In a study of teacher experience, gender, and job stress, Klassen and Chiu (2010) considered three teacher efficacies as elements in teacher job satisfaction: teaching strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. The study participants were 1,430 Kindergarten through high school teachers from western Canada. Teachers completed a brief questionnaire asking what motivates them. The researchers found that all three of these elements increased from the beginning of a teacher’s career until the twenty-third year, then began to decline as careers continued. In order to maintain teacher efficacies throughout a career, professional development must be tailored to support them because, without this, impatience and lack of respect for students tend to become prevalent. This is more likely for teachers working with high school students than those teaching younger children (Klassen & Chiu, 2010).

**Student self-respect.** High school students are people in the midst of tremendous physical and psychological change (Kohlberg & Gilligan, 1971). For example, adolescents may appear to be disengaged at a time when they are typically seeking belonging (Stuhlman, Hamre, & Pianta, 2002). By actively promoting positive relationships with their teachers, Stuhlman et al. (2002) suggest, students experience people who believe in their abilities and convey high expectations. In ideal school situations, students have substantial understanding of their own
learning strengths and needs and are encouraged to set academic achievement goals (Stuhlman et al., 2002).

**Self-respect summarized.** Self-respect, the third aspect of the respect conceptual framework, refers to a person’s personal respect for themselves, their character, and conduct. As the empirical studies discussed in this section have shown, benefits to student sense of self-respect include having teachers who are respectful of themselves, demonstrate curiosity about their students, display positive emotions toward themselves and others, and look at life from a positive perspective. Teachers who respect themselves and are enthusiastic about their work share that enthusiasm with their students and thus are well situated to inspire students to learn and to encourage them to respect themselves (Rowan et al., 1997). At the heart of self-respect is self-honesty, being true to oneself so the person presented to others, in this instance in school, is authentic and honest.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the literature on teacher-student relationships and considered respect as a conceptual framework. Kant’s theory of respect for persons informs the framework that is based on Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2000) work illustrating six aspects of respect. The aspects of respect were reduced and combined to three aspects, agency, communication, and self-respect, for use in this study of teachers and schools. The respect conceptual framework embraces Lawrence-Lightfoot’s idea that mutual respect is built jointly in relationships and challenges the belief that people in power deserve unquestioning respect.

Respect between teachers and students in high schools enhance student success because students are more interested in learning when they recognize that teachers respect and care about them. The first aspect of respect, agency, refers to the ability to make decisions and act on
opportunities. Students who are secure in school were more apt to demonstrate academic and social agency. Peer support, and the ongoing conversation and social interactions it affords, is key to students feeling a sense of agency and security in school. High school students are not likely to appear vulnerable and take academic chances if school is not a friendly and emotionally safe place for them.

Communication encompasses Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2000) elements of dialogue, curiosity, and attention and is key to student learning. Students explained that when their teachers did not communicate and were not interested in them, they lost interest in learning. Students labeled teachers as “good” when they believe the teachers enjoyed them. The most successful high school teachers fall into the “warm demander” category which is defined as demonstrating attention and care for students yet also demand students meet high expectations. While this is the ideal mindset for teachers, teacher training does not typically examine how caring, human attention, and respect apply to teacher’s daily work.

A teacher’s ability to treat students with dignity begins with teacher self-understanding and self-respect because self-respecting people are curious about others. They also get acquainted by letting conversations center on the other person rather than themselves. These conversations help teachers learn about student strengths and needs as well as creating teacher-student relationships. Ideally, self-respect will also include teachers helping students know themselves as learners who understand their own strengths and learning needs.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The research methods and specific procedures below discuss the methodology that were used to consider teacher perspectives about the promise they know their students by name, strength, and need. This chapter begins by explaining why Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen for this study. The chapter proceeds with an introduction to IPA as a research methodology. It then describes the teacher participants in the research, including how they were recruited and accessed, and explains the methods used to collect, store, and analyze the data. The chapter concludes with the interview protocol and the steps that were taken to ensure the study's trustworthiness and validity.

Research Design

Qualitative research studies seek to understand the views of people engaged with a specific situation (Creswell, 2008). Studies are conducted by considering a problem of practice or a situation that would benefit from further examination. Qualitative research recognizes the importance of listening to people by asking general, open ended questions and results in better understanding of key phenomena (Creswell, 2008). The specific goals for this study were to understand and explain how high school teachers perceive the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need. Quantitative research seeks to understand variables and the impacts of those variables on other variables. In contrast, qualitative research approaches allow teacher participant responses and opinions to be the data (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative methodology, specifically IPA, was selected for this study to best understand teacher perspectives.
IPA as Research Methodology

As described by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), the IPA research methodology selected for this study assists in gaining clear understanding of the teacher participants’ thinking about the topic by allowing for the flexible, conversational interviews where questions, answers, and interpretations evolve. Because of this, the researcher was able to consider the themes that appeared during the interviews and clarify understanding in conversation with the teacher participant (Smith et al., 2009). IPA studies purposefully seek to understand teacher participants' explanations of their own thinking in conjunction with the researcher making sense of the teacher participants’ statements. Merriam (2009) explains this phenomenon by adding that because reality is socially constructed, there is not an agreed upon reality, leaving many options for making sense of a situation. Thus, reality becomes a societal understanding, or an agreement of sorts, about what is happening. This sense making is also called constructivist, because in phenomenological theories reality is pieced together or constructed (Merriam, 2009).

It follows, then, that IPA is informed by the theory of interpretation, or hermeneutics, and by the belief that people seek to make sense of their experiences (Giddens, 1986; Smith et al., 2009). Giddens (1986) explains IPA as incorporating double hermeneutics, because both the teacher participant and the researcher explain what is occurring (Giddens, 1986; Guba, 1981). The teacher participant presents and describes their thinking on a topic or situation, then the researcher analyzes the discussion to clarify and understand the phenomena. In this study, teacher participants were asked to explain their perception of the promise made by the district to the community and to explain how they understand the promise as it impacts their work with students.
Research Traditions of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is rooted in phenomenology, or reasoned inquiry, a philosophy that seeks to know what is at the core of people’s awareness (Stewart, 1990). Phenomenological inquiry originates from the philosophical belief that situations should be considered as they are authentically, rather than as what they ought to be or what they could be (Husserl, 1983). It explores people’s described life experiences and places importance on their interpretations and personal reflections of the happenings (Smith et al., 2009).

Husserl (1927) conceived of the philosophy of phenomenology as looking at, or reflecting on, one’s own thinking and beliefs as well as realizing what was happening as the thinking took place. Patton (2002), in a discussion of Husserl’s work, suggests that we really only know what we experience by considering our own perceptions along with the meaning we make out of what we have learned. With phenomenology at the core, the goal of IPA methodology in this study was to learn about teacher participants' lived experiences, including their thoughts, opinions, and perceptions of those experiences, through in-depth interviews or purposeful conversations.

IPA methodology was chosen for this study because the design allows for the teachers who have a shared experience in the district promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need to consider it in their teaching practice. IPA methodology allows for incorporation of teacher participant responses and reflections to questions to explain how this shared experience impacts their teaching practice.

Teacher Participant Recruitment

The Highline School District has 39 schools with nearly 1,000 teachers and a diverse population of 19,600 students speaking 101 languages (Highline, 2017). The teacher
participants selected for this study came from two district comprehensive, or traditional program, high schools. The research considered teacher perspectives from both schools to gain understanding beyond the cultures of individual schools.

Although the district’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need applies to all students from pre-kindergarten through 12th grade, and necessarily to all teachers as well, the focus of this study was on teachers in high school, grades nine through twelve. High school teachers were chosen because a significant reason for the district's promise is support of the goal to graduate a higher percentage of high school students on time each year.

Teacher participants in the study had between five and 20 years of public school teaching experience because, according to Rice (2010), teachers are their most effective between their fifth and 20th years of teaching. As such, the teacher participants are mid-career teachers who have developed and settled on their teaching style, are likely to be consistent in their dealings with students, and are actively interested in teaching students (Klassen & Chiu, 2010). Teacher participants were from any subject area department in the high schools because, as noted by Davis (2003), teacher-student relationships are typically based on emotional factors like acceptance, fairness, and low conflict levels rather than the subject of the class.

A total of six high school teachers were selected for interviews. This sample size is within the number suggested for an IPA study of three to six teacher participants and is sufficient to allow comparison of common and uncommon discussion points among teacher participants (Smith et al., 2009). The sample was also limited to teachers in large, comprehensive high schools (more than 1400 students) and eliminated small schools of choice in the Highline School District. This was done deliberately because the small schools typically have teacher
relationships with students as a main tenet of the school mission (Davis et al., 2014), and the present study sought to understand the perspective of teachers where this is not the case.

**Teacher participants.** Potential teacher participants who met the qualifications for this study were identified through the Highline School District teacher seniority list, a public document. Teachers had similar years of classroom teaching experience and teach in one of two demographically similar high schools. Teacher participants may teach in different subject areas, but that difference did not impact the study because an individual’s teaching philosophy and relationships with students are not correlated with specific subject areas (Goodwin, 2010; Harter, Whitesell, & Kowalski, 1992). This has been confirmed in a meta-analysis study of teacher-student relationships by Cornelius-White (2007) that considered a number of factors, including teachers’ certifications and degrees, the subjects they taught, and their level of subject matter knowledge. The conclusion was that teacher respect and compassion for students are correlated more highly with student achievement than the other factors considered (Cornelius-White, 2007).

All the teachers in the selected schools who meet the criteria for participation were invited via a personalized letter from the researcher to be part of the study (Appendix B). The follow up e-mail to each teacher’s school email account contained the same message (Appendix C). There were no obvious risks to the teacher participants in this study, but teachers may have been concerned that the information they provided could be used for evaluative purposes. As this was not the case, safeguards to preserve confidentiality were clearly explained to the teacher participants both in writing and in discussion. Confidentiality was maintained by creating and using a pseudonym for the school and for each teacher participant as well as by providing secure storage of data collected (Creswell, 2008). The only person other than the researcher, adviser, and professional transcriptionist with access to interview data was the teacher participant.
In addition to obtaining IRB approval from Northeastern University, this research was approved by the Highline School District Data and Assessment Approvals Committee. The District committee asked for a summary of the study, including an explanation of the value of the research to the district and a proposed timeline. The district also requested that the results of the study be shared with the committee, and other entities within the district they recommend, once the research was completed.

Data Collection

The data collected for this study consisted of researcher notes and transcripts of semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions (Appendix D). The questions were structured to allow teachers to give answers in their own words and to offer explanations (Creswell, 2008). The interview questions (Appendix D) were grouped under the four main headings of general questions, questions asking about teachers’ perceptions of the district promise, questions about teacher experiences with the district promise, and teacher beliefs about teaching and supporting high school students. Teachers participated in one interview and did not have the questions in advance. This was purposeful to insure teachers did not spend time considering how they ought to answer but instead offered spontaneous reflections on their work, without prior consideration.

General questions. The general questions asked teacher participants questions about their experience and memories of their own teachers. The first four questions, “What grades and subjects do you teach? Have you taught other grades/subjects? Have you taught in other schools/states/districts?” and “How long have you been a teacher?” were intended to gather information to better understand the teachers’ work situations. The second set of three general questions, “Tell me about a favorite teacher you recall from your K–12 school years. What made them a favorite?” and “When you are the student these days, what is important in an instructor?”
were asked for two reasons. The first reason was to consider what important attributes of teachers the teacher participant notes and the second was to understand what they need from a teacher themselves.

**The first research question.** The first research question, “How do teachers in the Highline School District achieve the school district's stated mission of knowing students by name, strength and need?” asked about teachers in the school district in general rather than focusing on them as an individual teacher. The interview questions specifically asking about the first research question sought to understand what teachers need to know about students in order to teach them. The first set of questions sought general information about teachers knowing students by asking, “What do teachers need to know about a student in order to teach them? How do they gather the information?” The next set of questions pursued more specific information and sought to know how teachers know their students, “Describe academic needs high school students have. What kinds of strengths do your students display? Do those strengths impact learning in your class? What social needs do your students have?”

**The second research question.** The second research question, “What are teachers’ perceptions of the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength and need?” sought to know how teachers perceive the district promise. To understand teacher thinking about the three elements of the promise, the interview included specific questions about the teacher participant’s perception of each element and the action it required of them: “The Highline School District talks about knowing students by *name*; how do you define this? What does this require from you? Highline School District talks about knowing students by *strength*; how do you define this? What does this require from you? Highline School District talks about knowing students by *need*; how do you define this? What does this require from you?”
Another interview question pertaining to the second research question asked about the perceived impact on the work of the teacher participant, “How does the district promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need impact your work as a teacher?” The final question related to this part of the research asked the teacher participant to share their thinking and conclusion about the promise, “Explain why you think the district promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need is or isn’t a realistic promise to make to the community.” This question was included to better understand the teacher participants’ perceptions of the promise by considering the larger impact and constituency effected by the promise.

**The third research question.** The third research question sought to understand the teacher participants’ views of high school support of students, “What do teachers believe could be done to better teach and support students in high school?” This section began with questions which restated the research question, “What do you believe can be done to best teach high school students? What do you believe can be done to best support high school students?” to solicit detailed responses. The third question asked the teacher participants to consider the thinking of a well-known teacher educator. This question was printed for the teacher to refer to as well as read to them by the researcher: “Marzano suggests that teachers can cultivate a positive relationship by knowing students by name; asking them what they thought of recent occurrences, such as a sports game, popular movie, or song; asking them what they’re interested in; and simply inquiring whether school is going well for them. What do you think about or make of this suggestion?”(Marzano, 2011). The purpose of this question was to understand authentic teacher thinking about a current educational theory and to understand their thoughts about one popular belief about teaching and supporting students. The final question asked the teacher participants whether they had other information or thoughts they would like to add. The purpose of this
question was to allow teacher participants the opportunity to elaborate on an earlier response or to pursue a line of thinking that had not been considered in previous questions.

**Interview Protocol**

The interviews were held in person. The interviews lasted from 30-90 minutes and were audiotaped by the researcher using digital recording devices. All interviews were administered by the researcher.

Teacher participants were invited to review the transcripts of their interviews and to make any additions, clarifications, and deletions they deem necessary. All six of the teacher participants declined the opportunity to read the transcript. They were informed that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time prior to analysis of the interview content (Smith et al., 2009). Confidentiality was ensured by creating and using a pseudonym for each teacher participant and for the school (Creswell, 2008). Access to the interview data was limited to the researcher, the researcher’s adviser, the teacher participant, and the professional transcriber. Teacher participants were offered remuneration in the form of a $25 Amazon or Fred Meyer gift card.

**Data Storage**

The digital recorder, the data card containing the interview, and the interview transcripts are locked in the researcher’s home office desk. Access to the interview data is restricted to the researcher, professional transcriptionist, and the researcher’s adviser. The transcripts, other than those specifically quoted in the written report of the research, were shredded at the completion of the formal dissertation presentation and any editing of the thesis (Creswell, 2008). The audio recordings are saved on an SD card that is locked in the researcher’s home office desk. Five years after the completion of the research, the SD card will be destroyed.
First coding - Data Analysis

Following an interview, the researcher reflected on the interview by reviewing it and adding to the field note journal. It was important throughout this process for the interviewer to note and record ideas, realizations, categories, and other insights that could possibly inform the research (Smith et al., 2009). The importance of journaling was twofold as it (a) documented the interview date, time, and (b) recorded anything notable about the interviews, for example the classroom setting or the teacher participant’s gestures. The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriber using Microsoft Word 2016.

Data analysis was completed by the researcher using Microsoft Excel 2016 to further code, arrange, sort, and organize the data. Coding was performed using a spread sheet created by the researcher and NVivo 11. Coding the notes, including looking for as many descriptive categories as possible, began after the audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed (Glaser, 1967).

Coding interview data. The first coding of the transcripts used in vivo coding and provisional coding simultaneously. In vivo coding used the specific words of individual teacher participants as the categories, keeping the language authentic and the meaning unaltered (Saldaña, 2013). By focusing on the language, in vivo coding identified key points that the teacher participants emphasized as well as highlighted patterns of shared ideas and examples (Saldaña, 2013). Provisional coding focused, in addition, on the three aspects of respect that are the basis of the conceptual framework for this research (Saldaña, 2013).

Following the first-round coding of all the interviews, initial categories were considered as informed by the respect framework as well by similarities and differences between the interview responses. The second round of coding then used axial coding to identify categories
and subcategories for each teacher participant’s interview. Axial coding considers one coding category as the central phenomenon, then considers its relationship to the other categories (Creswell, 2008). The secondary categories relate to the central phenomenon and include roots of the phenomenon, actions taken, aspects of the situation, and results of the actions (Creswell, 2008).

The third round of coding, data analysis, involved defining the theoretical and specific groupings, recognizing their overlap, and combining them into succinct, relevant categories. Graphic organizers were created for each teacher participant interview in order to sort data and to consider themes across interviews (Appendix A). When considered together, the final categories explain the major interview events. Guba (1981) notes that it is important while analyzing the data to consider patterns while also remaining aware of interesting, previously unrecognized, variables. Lastly, the final categories, together with a review of the larger interview and field notes, were synthesized into a generalizable understanding to answer the research questions (Saldaña, 2013).

Trustworthiness

In proceeding through the research with fidelity, safeguards were built in from the beginning; likewise for the study to be sound, it must guarantee internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Guba, 1981). The safeguards were intended to respect teacher participants and their needs. This was achieved by (a) clearly explaining the research to the teacher participants and making sure they understand their role in the process, (b) clearly communicating with the teacher participants to address their questions and concerns, and (c) reviewing with the teacher participants the procedures for protecting their privacy. Teacher participants were provided the opportunity to speak freely and to develop their thinking during
the interview, and as prompted by interview questions and follow-up, to ask clarifying questions (Smith et al., 2009). Trustworthiness was ensured by controlling for non-informative variables, outliers that ought to be treated as such, and the researcher's remaining objective while analyzing interview data.

**Summary**

This research study sought to understand teacher perception of the school district promise to the community that students are known by name, strength, and need. Qualitative methodology, specifically Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), was selected for this study because the teacher participant’s words provided the responses to the questions researched. Teacher participants were chosen from the faculty of two of the school district’s comprehensive high schools to allow for differences in the school cultures that could impact the study. The data collection consisted of one 30–90 minute interview of each teacher participant, who had the opportunity to review the written transcript of the interview.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand high school teacher perceptions and experiences of knowing students by name, strength, and need. The study also sought to learn teachers’ suggestions for strengthening high school teaching and support of students. This study used Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which allowed teacher participants to discuss their perceptions and share stories of teaching experiences. IPA has been called a double hermeneutic process because the teacher participants are making sense of their experiences and the researcher seeks to make sense of the shared experiences as well (Smith et al., 2009). The teacher participants all work in a school district that has promised the community that the students are known by name, strength, and need. Three questions provided the basis for this investigation:

1. What are high school teachers’ perceptions of the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need?

2. What are high school teachers’ experiences with the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need, and what are the outcomes of those experiences?

3. What do teachers believe can be done to best teach and support high school students?

To answer these questions, the researcher interviewed six high school teachers, three from each of the two comprehensive high schools in the district. Fifty-one prospective teacher participants were identified as meeting the criteria for this study of having between five and twenty years of public school teaching experience. All of them were contacted via a letter (Appendix B) and an email (Appendix C) that were sent to the teachers’ school addresses. The letter and email included the same information, including contact information for the researcher.
In total, 10 potential participants responded, all via email. Responding teacher participants communicated with the researcher through email, phone, and/or text messaging to set up interview times and locations. Four of the respondents were not able to schedule timely interviews due to summer travel schedules. All the correspondence was noted in the researcher’s journal.

Each of the teachers interviewed for the study has between five and 20 years of public school teaching experience. They are all veteran teachers, offering well-explained thinking about their work in schools. These six teachers had differing perspectives of the district promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need, yet during analysis of the interviews several common themes began to coalesce around each of the three research questions.

These themes are listed and more fully explored later in this chapter, following an introduction of the participating schools and the teacher participants, as part of the presentation of the findings for each question. The themes are also related to the theoretical framework of the study in Appendix E. This chapter then closes with a summary of the overall findings.

**Participating Schools**

High School One is in the center of the Highline School District and High School Two is in the district's southern section. The district is adjacent to a large West Coast city, and six smaller towns lie within its boundaries. An international airport located near the middle of the district creates a vast area that must be navigated around in order to move between schools on either side. Because high housing costs in the large city have forced many people in the local labor market to live in surrounding areas, the Highline School District has been impacted by high population growth. Between 25% and 40% of the district population, compared with 25% of the county population, speaks at least one language other than English at home, and 31% of the
population is foreign born (Felt, 2014). Sixty-nine percent of the district's students are eligible for free or reduced meal programs, and adult unemployment is about 10% (Felt, 2014). Within the Highline School District boundaries, 26.3% of the population has earned a bachelor’s degree. This is well below the regional population average, 56%, for the county containing the district, and slightly below the national average, 27.9% (Felt, 2014). The school district offers high school students program options to encourage students to remain in school and to consider further education beyond graduation.

High school students may opt to attend the school closest to their home for all or part of the day or may choose an alternative school program. All high schools in the district have the goal of offering Advanced Placement, and High School Two houses the International Baccalaureate Program. Highline School District programs for high school students typically have the mission of providing instruction based on specific student needs. Schools include a high school with an aviation and aerospace focus, a skills center where students choose from 21 technical courses of study, learning centers for students returning to school, and five additional alternative programs. High school students may take classes at a local community college without paying tuition and earn both college and high school credits toward graduation requirements. Students who attend small high school programs are invited to participate in athletics at their neighborhood school.

The school day begins at 7:30 am and classes dismiss at 2:05 pm, when after-school activities begin. The schools in this study each have many sports for students to participate in as well as opportunities such as band, clubs, student leadership, and after-school tutoring several days a week. Tutoring is provided by teachers and is available to all students and has proven
especially popular with students who are learning English. Appendix F compares the two schools demographically by considering data about both the students and their teachers.

Highline School District has been working to keep students in school and engaged in learning, a topic of much discussion is the “zero suspension” policy. The policy is based on the understanding that students need to stay in school to learn academics and to manage their own behavior. There has been a great deal of debate in the community and around the country about this policy. For example, teachers have been public in their pronouncements that they are leaving the district because they no longer believe the schools are safe. Some exiting teachers have pointed to the district's policy that students ought to stay in school, even after displaying all but the most aggressive, disruptive behaviors (Rowe, 2016). The Highline School District superintendent acknowledges that teachers have left the district over the zero-suspension policy, and adds that doing what is right for students is hard work. The superintendent is also quoted in a recent article noting that students act out in school when they do not have strong relationships with adults (D'Orio, 2017). Further, the superintendent suggests that a significant drop in suspensions and the rise in graduation rates might be ascribed in part to teachers working hard to build relationships with students (D'Orio, 2017).

Teacher Participants

The veteran teachers gifted me with their authenticity and wisdom. It is their stories I am telling through my analysis, and I appreciate the professionals they are and the thoughts they shared.

All the teacher participants work in the Highline School District at one of two comprehensive high schools. The sections that follow introduce each of the teacher participants in this study. Their subject areas, gender, age, and ethnicity are specifically left out to alleviate
typecasting. Each teacher has been given a non-gender specific pseudonym, and they are presented carefully to insure their privacy. Because the data analysis offered no difference in perspective that was specifically unique to an individual school, the teachers are not identified by their school.

**Barden.** Barden and I met a few days after school was out for the summer. The far corner of the coffee shop seemed like a quiet place to talk but proceeded to get noisier as our conversation progressed. After being a teacher for 13 years, Barden took the noise and chaos in stride. During our conversation, Barden spoke both of “being born to teach” and of thoughts about leaving the profession for a “less complicated job where you go home on time.”

Barden’s teaching experience is in special education programs and typically has fewer students than teachers in the general education program. When Barden described interactions with students and administrators, each person was quoted with their own unique speech patterns. The emphatic belief that students need to have personal and emotional needs met in order to learn was evident throughout our interview. Barden recounts, for example, offering food and money to students so they would not be hungry. Barden’s recollections of tough situations with students included the time spent with students after the situation was resolved, when teacher and student checked in with each other to make sure all was well.

**Blaine.** Blaine and I met in a local coffee shop at a table that, even with a music speaker above it, was the quietest in the place. The window just behind Blaine was open, although we tried to close it when landscaping machinery started up outside. Blaine was concerned, wanting to make sure the audio recording of the interview would still be usable. Blaine had a common-sense approach in answering questions about students, clearly describing teaching as fulfilling. For example, when I asked about knowing students, Blaine explained that it means, “Not just
who they are, but their background, where they're coming from, what they knew previously, what they need to know now.” Blaine has taught for 17 years in public schools as well as time spent teaching overseas. As a veteran teacher, Blaine expressed concern about less experienced colleagues who may become easily overwhelmed by the work and job expectations in teaching, again demonstrating an awareness of what is happening in the larger community and not just in a specific classroom.

**Garnet.** Garnet and I met in Garnet’s garden. A second career teacher, Garnet has been teaching for 11 years in public schools. Garnet mentioned respecting administrators and colleagues, regardless if they always agreed on actions to take. When I asked Garnet about teaching practices, the answers displayed a commitment to ensuring students master the content of the class. In a discussion about working directly with students, Garnet shared an example of a recent time when students struggled with the homework and testing system that was in place. Under Garnet’s direction, students provided input and suggestions for improving the system, which Garnet read carefully to create two options for a replacement system. The students voted on the option they preferred, and it was successfully implemented.

Garnet was concerned that students lacked grit, that they were missing the ability to take a hard look at themselves and decide on intentional actions to strengthen academic shortcomings. The solution Garnet proposed was for students to be organized into classes based on their abilities and learning needs, such as becoming a more fluent reader or gaining specific math concepts. This change, Garnet advocated, would create classes where students were made ready to learn what was being taught in the regular classes.

**Robin.** My interview with Robin took place in Robin’s home. With the seventh year of public school teaching recently completed, Robin paused to think, then reflected about the past
year while answering questions. Robin talked about previous work as a preschool teacher, wishing that this work was better paid because Robin very much enjoyed it. Preschool was partly appealing to Robin because teachers constantly collaborate and know each child well. These are both concepts Robin strives to incorporate in high school but feels that neither is truly possible; high school teachers have differing curricular and teaching style preferences, and there are too many students to get to know well. Robin takes the time to talk with the students who arrive in class early but regrets it is typically the same students, leaving many others who are not part of the informal conversations. However, when Robin realizes that a student is not as familiar as others, Robin makes a point of initiating a conversation to learn about them.

**Waylan.** When I knocked on Waylan’s front door, summer had already begun and schedules set aside; our interview had been forgotten. Waylan was apologetic after recognizing the error and invited me in. The interview went ahead as scheduled.

Waylan did not originally set out to be a teacher but realized along the way that it was a calling that could not be ignored. In discussions about influential teachers, Waylan spoke of high school teachers who understood their students’ abilities and needs, using that knowledge to push students toward challenging learning. One teacher left an impression by using games and other fun activities as part of learning content and skills. Waylan seeks to incorporate similar activities in class and has sought professional learning opportunities to gain skills. Waylan would like to collaborate with other teachers, too, and believes doing so benefits students and their teachers.

Waylan became emphatic when discussing concerns about students not being prepared for high school level work. Until high school, Waylan explained, students pass classes regardless if they have mastered the material. In high school, when students must earn credits
toward graduation, they are surprised when they fail a class. The solution that Waylan proposes is to end “social promotion,” allowing students to progress through the grades without learning the curriculum. Students, Waylan suggests, need to repeat classes and even entire years of schooling.

Knowing students is a challenge for Waylan because there is an internal conflict between what is possible with more than 120 students to see each day, what is comfortable, and what benefits students. Waylan shared a powerful story, an event that was also a reminder of the impact teachers make, of a student who came with a dilemma and asked for advice. Waylan recounts being caught off guard, as students do not frequently do this. This student had been in the advisory program with Waylan for two years and in Waylan’s class for a semester. At the end of a series of conversations, Waylan told the student, “I am so proud of you.” The student, a senior in high school, replied, “You’re the first person that’s ever said that to me.”

**Willis.** My interview with Willis was the only one that took place in the teacher participant’s classroom. Seeing Willis in this place helped me get to know the teacher in ways I had not anticipated. Tools and materials like pencils and paper for students to use were easily accessed around the room. When Willis talked about teaching, it included arm waving and pointing to the place, for example, where a student typically sat or a book was stored.

Willis became a teacher as a five-year-old encouraging an infant sibling to hold a pencil and has been dedicated to the profession ever since. After college Willis worked with troubled youth in several settings before returning to school for a master’s degree and has since taught in special education programs. Knowing students and their needs is the heart of teaching for Willis, who gave example after example of student strengths, needs, personality traits, and methods for helping students learn. Willis also pointed out that the work teaching special education means
interacting with fewer students. Recollections of students included a student who earned time to
dance to by completing work and a student who needed space to feel safe in the classroom.

Results

This qualitative study used data gathered from semi-structured interviews with six
teacher participants to understand high school teacher perceptions and implementation of the
district promise that students are known by name, strength, and need. Teacher interviews were
analyzed, and common themes emerged. These themes are related to the corresponding research
question. An exception is an additional theme that was not related to any one research question,
but which every teacher chose to discuss. This theme is presented following the discussions of
the three research questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

Research Question 1:

What are high school teachers’ perceptions of the Highline School District’s promise of
knowing students by name, strength, and need?

Table 2

Themes from Findings Related to Research Question 1

- Knowing students well is logical but not possible
- Teachers are split on the value of the school-wide advisory program
- School community issues impacted both schools
- Teacher participants teach each student the same way

Knowing students well is logical but not possible. All the teacher participants believe
that knowing students by name, strength, and need makes sense because students want to be
known by the staff at school, but none of the teachers perceive that it is a realistic promise in
actual practice.
Waylan stated that, “I know all my kids by name for sure.” Blaine concurred saying that, “They like it when you know their name,” later adding, “Not like I'm calling them Mr. So-and-So or Miss So-and-So.” While Willis, Barden, and Robin concurred that knowing student names as quickly as possible is imperative in creating a positive classroom environment, several teachers acknowledged that some names take more practice and specific pronunciation help from the student. Garnet affirmed knowing students by name but added that, because of having so many students, students are told, "I could memorize you either by first name or last name. If I memorize you by last name, it'll be Mr. or Miss."

Barden, Willis, Robin, and Waylan each explained their perception of the district promise to know students by name as including knowing who students are as individuals with distinctive personalities. Barton and Willis, both teachers with special education training and experience, explained their perceptions as to what ought to be known about students. In Willis’ words,

I think teachers need to know their student's family situation, their living situation, their cultural situation. You know we have kids who may be crabby because they are celebrating Ramadan and they have not eaten. We have kids who may be starving because the only thing they eat are the meals that we have here. I can't tell you the many pairs of shoes that I have bought with my own money because kids are coming with shoes that are flapping and their feet are poking through.

The teachers need to know past failures of prior teachers, administrations, and schools because when you try to communicate with their parents and their parents are crabby, it's mostly because they've had horrible experiences in the past.

Given all that might be known about students, teachers have the perception that they seldom know their students well. Robin thoughtfully explained that the promise of knowing
students is important because it demonstrates that teachers care about them. Robin asked students to write a contract introducing themselves, stating their goals related to the class, and noting areas where they anticipated needing help. Robin said,

It is challenging, I'm getting better. I didn't use the contracts as well… I got them all to write it and then I wanted to sit down one-on-one with them and go over it with them, and then … You signed it, now I'm signing it, we're agreeing together. I just didn't finish it with all of them.

Each of the non-special education teachers, as they reflected their own perceptions of knowing students, said that although they knew about some students beyond their names, it was not typically much information.

Two of the teacher participants, Garnet and Blaine, further observed that no benchmarks exist to measure if students are known by their teachers, nor is knowing students an element of teacher evaluation, leaving teachers to perceive that knowing students is a suggested, rather than mandated, practice. Waylan disagreed with this perception and observed that knowing students is critically important, noting that the promise of knowing students should not be optional for teachers and that students want to be known and acknowledged.

During the interviews, each teacher participant clearly remarked that knowing more than student names is not possible with so many students assigned to them; they all noted that teachers typically have 120 to 150 students at a time spread throughout their classes. Robin, discussing working to know students, commented, “…at the high school level, the main thing is…there's too many students. Even looping, teaching the same students for several years…at the end of the year I'm finally getting to know them.” Other teachers perceived that knowing students in their classes made sense, yet Waylan stated, “I know that I don't live up to that
standard.” Barden and Willis, as special education teachers who typically see fewer students, each observed the impact they could make on student education as compared with colleagues. “I am not really sure how they could know all of those students,” Willis said, “they have like 160 of them.”

Teachers are split on the value of school-wide advisory program. Each of the teachers interviewed has, in addition to their subject area teaching, responsibility for an advisory group averaging 20 students that meets two to three times a week for a half hour or so. The district has included the advisory program to provide a setting where students can belong to a group that is smaller than a typical class. Advisory program sessions include specific activities for getting to know other members of the group and developing a sense of community. The expectation is that teachers will know the students in their advisory and create trusting relationships with them. Lessons are created by teams within the school and provided to teachers. Nearly all the teachers interviewed mentioned that the lessons are typically well created. Teacher perceptions were evenly divided as to the value in the advisory program; half of them were clearly advocates for the program and the other half saw little value in the program as it currently operates.

Supporters of the advisory program perceived that their ability to advocate for students, the benefit that the lessons offer students, and the information provided about preparing for college and career were worthwhile. Robin was thinking ahead to the new school year, considering how to begin with a new group of students in an advisory program group and to be ready for the entire year, “We have lots of different activities… A lot of community building stuff and learning names is a big part of it. Each other, not just the teacher knowing their names, … them knowing each other’s names.”
Willis also perceives the advisory program as a positive part of the school program saying, “Advisory to me helps my kids.” Willis believes that the advisory program is good for all students, “So as far as I'm concerned, there's no excuse for hating advisory unless you don't want to spend extra time with that group of kids. You know you're supposed to be their special adult; you're supposed to be their advocate...” Garnet said, “Yeah, it [the advisory program] works for me. I wish that they had it structured as a four-year, multi-year advisory.” The advisory program supporters, while supporting the concept of the program, also all identified changes that would strengthen the program, such as remaining with a group of students for multiple years.

Teachers who perceive little value in the current structure of the advisory program were adamant in their disdain. Blaine remarked that advisory program is hard when teachers and students do not have ownership, “Well one, because it's like another prep. Even though I don't do any prep work for it, just taking the time to get to know a whole other group of students and there's no grade for it.”

“I don't see any point in it. I hate advisory with a passion,” Barden said emphatically. “I have to bite my tongue every time we meet... My kids said they would rather have tutorial, every day, in advisory, than the other stupid stuff.”

Waylan responded to a question about advisory program helping to know students, “No. I've just had a really bad run of advisory. ...They [students] had all been thrown together. They had been told since the beginning they would all be together all four years with the same teacher ... I got them and they were all angry.” Waylan also talked about possible changes to the advisory program adding, “We're looking at different possibilities for next year,” noting that there might be some positive changes in the works.
School community issues impacted both schools. Both high schools experienced impactful community issues during the past year. Each staff was engaged in meetings near the end of the school year to discuss the specific issue and make plans for moving forward.

In one school, the issue was related to lessons presented in social studies classes that were upsetting to some of the students. Teachers discussed learning about the concern at the very end of the school year and attending a meeting with district administrators. A frustrated teacher from that school said, “…kids went to the school board to complain about the minority issue, and now kids aren't feeling supported, and you're telling us this the last week of school?” A second teacher worried about the effect the concern had on the school culture, “We had a big thing this year that will still be affecting us next year.”

The other school dealt with incident of targeted student vandalism after a large rock in front of the school that is frequently painted for various occasions by students was decorated to celebrate gay pride. Another group of students painted over the work, expressing their anti-gay beliefs. As a teacher described it, “…a group of mostly seniors snuck in and painted it white with the American flag, put the word Trump on top of it, and then posted that to social media with the caption, ‘Fixed it.’ And the school exploded.”

Another teacher from that school said the incident came up during the advisory program as one of confusion, “a lot of the kids were thoughtful about their response, at least in my group of students, in advisory, that they just wanted to know why people would put out the ‘we fixed it,’ [on social media] and they just didn't understand.”

In each instance, teachers expressed the importance of students' demonstrating their agency, their own power, to express beliefs and exact change in their schools. The teachers also encouraged students to be heard as citizens with concerns relating to national political issues that
impacted students and their families. The teacher participants in this study perceive high school as a place where young people learn about advocating for issues they support. Garnet told the students, “…you need to decide, is that consequence [of protesting the issue] worth the point you're trying to make with the protest?” Robin also discussed the school issue with students, “…here are the concerns and other students agreed, but we had... not a debate but just like a discussion…what are your thoughts about this?” Waylan mentioned a discussion with students in the advisory program and Barden shared the perception that empowerment begins with supporting students, making sure they know, “…we are here with you breathing, but we are going to get through this together. And we care about you.”

**Teacher participants teach each student the same way.** Teacher participants described their perception of typical teaching practices in terms of “whole group” instruction, or teaching every student the same lesson the same way at the same time. This contrasts with planning instruction based on individual learning styles and knowing individual student's strengths and needs. Teachers were evenly split in their discussion of knowing students academically.

The special education teachers, Barden and Willis, clearly perceived that teachers must know students to insure academic instruction is appropriately matched to student abilities. Beyond recognizing students' academic abilities, the special education teachers discussed perceptions of other factors in student lives that may need to be addressed before learning takes place, such as hunger or other basic needs. These teachers also recognized, along with reading and writing well, the “soft skills” of problem solving, knowing how to ask for help, making presentations, and communicating with others as necessary to succeed in school. Robin also perceived knowing students as being able to assign appropriate work saying, “part of knowing them really well, knowing strength and need -- I mean really strength and need.” Later, Robin
seemed to consider the challenges this might present, “Also, the part about the strengths, right? If I know them, how am I incorporating ... It's hard to incorporate that.”

Blaine partially disagreed, offering the perception that, “Their strengths are not as necessarily important.” Waylan and Garnet each mentioned the need for students to be prepared for the level of work expected in high school classes. Waylan explained, “The standard of you need to be at X reading level by the time you get to high school and if not, then you shouldn’t be in high school.” This would, they explained, accommodate the needs of a homogeneous class of students rather than the more cumbersome current, heterogeneous groups. Waylan and Blaine each perceived social promotion, moving students from grade to grade each year whether they have mastered the grade level standards, as making teaching high school especially challenging. Through middle school, they observed, students don’t need to master the content to pass the grade. This changes in high school where students need to pass classes to earn credits toward graduation.

**Summary of findings for research question 1.** In regard to research question one, the findings indicate that teacher participants perceive the promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need as a sound idea in theory but not in practice. The findings also indicate that teachers know their students by name, but half the teachers do not believe that the promise means anything beyond that. There is a nearly unanimous belief among teacher participants that it is not possible to know as many students as teachers are assigned. Findings also included that while half of the teacher participants perceive that providing instruction designed to meet specific student needs is an element of knowing them well, the other half of the teachers hold decidedly to the perception that students ought to be ready for instruction as it is taught to the class.
Research Question 2:

What are high school teachers’ experiences with the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need, and what are the outcomes of those experiences?

Table 3

Themes from Findings Related to Research Question 2

- Teachers getting to know their students individually
- Teachers ask students about their strengths and needs
- Helping students develop knowledge about themselves as students

Teachers getting to know their students individually. Teacher participants expressed the belief that knowing students by name is just the beginning, but apart from the special education teachers they expressed that this was tough to accomplish. All teacher participants declared that they know students by name; for some it is a priority to learn names during the first few days of school. Several of the teachers discussed the time they spend insuring they have the correct name or nickname for each student and that they also use the correct pronunciation of student names.

Teachers talked about concerns they have about students. Waylan said, “I think you've got to listen and keep your eyes open and notice what is happening.” When Waylan offers to listen, “Some kids just don't open up. You can try and you can try and they won't.” In conjunction with Robin’s concern about time, “To do that, [connect] with every one of your students, would just take a tremendous amount of time.” Teachers expressed the desire to help students. Barden summed up the concern, “I will be there for them, to fight their battles for
them. It's so hard for me to figure out how to help them, but they know I'm on their side.” Robin noted that, “It just seems like such a challenge for high school teachers when kids are coming and going.” Willis said that allowing students to be themselves and for that to be okay with teachers is important to establishing a relationship, giving the example of a student who, “threw a book at me and the next day I acted as though he was my best friend.” Waylan had another perspective, seeking first to create a classroom environment that is safe for all students, then getting to know individuals, “For the other kids, it's like, 'Okay that's 1 of 150 or 1 of 130.' For the other ones, if I can just make them happy, if they can just have fun in my class, then that's good too. That's enough.”

Students who are well known are the students who stand out in a classroom. Waylan mentioned, “I know for sure I'm saying the kid's names who are more difficult to manage in my classroom. I'm sure they're hearing their name all day long.” In contrast, Waylan continued, “Then, those who are quiet don't get the oil [don't get noticed], of course. Blaine noted that in order to know any student, teachers should remember that “…it all goes... back to listening, but being reasonable when they have a need that's legitimate that you listen to their needs.” Waylan and Blaine described their efforts to engage all students in active learning every day and to participate with more students in order to encourage students to engage with and learn from each other. This engagement, the teachers explained, promotes relationships in the classroom community.

Teachers were glad to have students seek them out for a conversation, though the teachers noted students came to them with problems infrequently. The typical reaction to a student needing a teacher's help was surprise at being someone the student felt safe to confide in. Waylan gave this example of a conversation with a student, “We're talking about her college plan
this spring…I didn't know anything about her, all I knew was her name. She was just in my advisory class and why is she going to drop all of her life details on me?... and my socks were totally blown off. It was just such a sad story.” Teachers were emotional when they talked about students approaching them for support, expressing that those rare times were powerful reminders of why they chose to be teachers.

**Teachers ask students about their strengths and needs.** The teachers in this study, with the exception of the special education teachers who create individual education plans for each student, clearly stated that they teach all students the same way; they typically do not differentiate curriculum or assignments for students with specific learning needs.

Teachers recounted rarely knowing specific student needs, instead stumbling on them during class. Robin expressed frustration about working with the special education students in class saying, “One of the biggest barriers I felt with the special ed. students... just to get their accommodations is like several steps. So, that's a barrier to getting to know their needs, their strengths.” It seems that while special education teachers know their students well, it may be a challenge for them to share appropriate information about students with other teachers who work with them.

Garnet gave the example of a time when the entire class was having a hard time, “I was like, ‘Oh.’ You shake your head and you go, ‘Okay, recalibrate.’ This is not review, this is the first time through this.” Several teachers asked students at the beginning of the term to share information about their strengths and weaknesses, but the task did not add much to their understanding of the students.

The teacher participants reported that students were not comfortable sharing details about themselves. When students were not open about their needs, teachers expressed frustration as to
how to know them. Robin and Blaine discussed their obstructed efforts to gather information about students. Waylan shared that, “Some kids just don't open up. You can try and you can try and they won't. Even then, they say one thing and maybe that's not really the truth or they think they don't have any strengths.”

**Helping students develop knowledge about themselves as students.** Teacher participants each expressed the need for high school students to become independent learners by taking charge of their own learning. Garnet asked students, “to figure out whether you have that internal what it takes to get you where you want to go.” Robin invited students to help establish classroom norms by saying, "You are capable and old enough to have a say and to help figure out how we operate in the class," adding that, “it allows me being less of an authoritarian.” Willis’ approach to helping students become more aware of their needs begins with offering individual students support. Willis described a student as needing, “… someone to sit beside him and say, ‘… keep going. Two more.’…his needs are purely academic... he, I call it feral, he was feral for so long… he does not have any ability to manage himself.”

**Summary of findings for research question 2.** Teachers get to know their students in a variety of ways but clearly stated that they do not have the time needed to know students well. Teachers usually know students by name but do not grow relationships. The teacher participants spoke of interactions with students who demand the most attention and having to plan to make sure they spend time with quieter students. When teachers wanted to know more about individual students, apart from the special education teachers, they asked the students to tell them about themselves, but they also stated that this was not an ideal practice because the students may not want to share information about themselves or may not understand their own strengths and needs.
Research Question 3:

What do teachers believe can be done to best teach and support high school students?

Table 4

Themes from Findings Related to Research Question 3

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<td>• Supporting students and ensuring the school is a safe place for students</td>
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<td>• Creating optimal classroom environments with academic choice</td>
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<td>• Teachers working with students for more than one school year</td>
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<td>• A need for training in how to know students</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Administrator’s presence and influence in the school community is important</td>
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<td>• Teacher participants want to be known by name, strength, and need</td>
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Supporting students and ensuring the school is a safe place for students. The school community issues that impacted both high schools brought teachers' concern for student safety to the forefront, and teachers frequently used the issues as examples during the interviews. Robin explained, “We had a big thing this year that will still be affecting us next year… instead of bringing us together to work through it together, they took it and caused this big division.” Referring to staff discussions near the end of the school year concerning the community-wide issue, Garnet noted that, “Other teachers have said they have done this before and nothing's ever happened.”

The schools were also impacted, teachers explained, by political happenings in the country. The teachers expressed concern that students did not feel safe at school, because it is a government run institution, amid confusion about immigration that impacted some students and
their families. Barden noted the principal encouraged teachers to focus on the curriculum saying, “We are not talking politics! Nobody's talking politics. Someone said, 'Hey, our Hispanic kids are being bullied and we need to pay attention to this.'” Teachers felt that the school administration was not supporting the students to express themselves. They felt torn, believing teachers should support students, but the administration wanted them to “not be political.”

Blaine agreed with supporting students but noted that students need differing kinds of support, “But a lot of them were just upset because they weren't getting their education, like disrupting [school]… with all the protest disruption, which rightly so, they weren't necessarily so upset about the protest, but … people were trying to get work done.”

**Creating optimal classroom environments with academic choice.** Robin, Barden, Waylan, and Blaine all spoke of teaching using outdated or limited books and consistently lacking materials for student use. One of the schools is in an old building that is going to be replaced in the next few years, but in the meantime the less than ideal building conditions are impacting teaching and learning. A teacher participant mentioned, “It's tough going, and that school is leaking and moldy and nasty and cramped… It's not motivating really, the building,” suggesting that safety, both physical and emotional, may be impacted by the facilities. Besides the physical structure of school and the tools used for learning, Waylan mentioned that teachers also build on student interests and, “whatever they're bringing to the circle at this moment.” Willis concurred saying that the key is to be prepared, “…one of the things in this line of work is you have to do what you have to do before you do what you want to do.”

**Teachers working with students for more than one school year.** Several teachers interviewed had the opportunity to teach students for more than one year and explained that the additional time with students supported knowing them better as individuals. Willis and Barden
spoke of their work with students over more than one year as key to students trusting them, opening the door for teachers to be supportive. The teachers mentioned that looping with students, staying as their teacher for several years, was a good solution when it worked for the school. Robin explained that having had the opportunity to teach a group of students for two years allowed for more of an understanding relationship that made classroom interactions and discussions richer. Teachers also mentioned advisory as a time when they might work with students for longer than one school year. Blaine has been frustrated with the advisory program recently but acknowledged, “It kind of works when you have students over a period of time... I had a group of sophomores all the way through [being] seniors so that was good… but we've changed our format so many times.”

Half of the teachers are supporters of the advisory program and half are not in favor of it, but all the teachers had ideas about strengthening the program. Logistically, teachers were in favor of staying with the same group of students throughout their high school careers, with one teacher suggesting there could be a “rolling advisory” with students from each grade in each advisory group. Several teachers mentioned a movement to expand advisory to four sessions a week in the future, but said that most teachers were against the idea.

**A need for training in how to know students.** Each of the high schools have provided professional development on equitable teaching practices and the cycle of poverty, but teachers did not recall specific training in knowing students. Robin said, “I...could maybe pick some things out that did help me, but nothing...like here is something we're giving you to help you with this goal.” The teachers could not recall more than a brief introduction to exploring student needs and strengths in their teacher training programs. In contrast, the special education teachers did have specific training in considering students and their academic and social needs,
collaborating with parents and other professionals to create the best possible plan for student
growth, and learning about continuously checking in on students’ progress and well-being.
Waylan talked about connecting with students and the struggle it can be, thinking maybe some
help with understanding how to connect with students would be useful. “What we want, is for
these kids to do well … and to move on and to grow as people, as students and go out to be
successful in the world. That's what we want. That's the bottom line.”

**Importance of administrator’s presence and influence in the school community.** The
consensus from teacher participants was that administrators are busy, leaving teachers without
the support they need to provide the best education for students. The suggestions for
improvement that teachers offered most often were for administrators to be more present around
the school and to take more time to ask questions and listen to teachers and students. Willis
noted that, “I think administration feels that they are giving us respect by letting us do our own
tardy policy and electronics policy; there is a huge disconnect there.” Willis went on to explain
the confusion caused by each teacher trying to implement their own electronics usage rules,
leaving students frustrated and confused by the lack of a consistency. Barden expressed the
belief that, “as an admin, you don’t want your teachers to not feel supported.”

**Teacher participants want to be known by name, strength, and need.** Teachers want
to be known, too. Each teacher participant spent time talking about how they would like to be
known by their administrator and how they would like to be asked about their thinking and
reasoning and then to be heard, especially on matters dealing with their students. Barden wanted
administrators to know, “You gotta know your own teacher’s needs...” Blaine was frustrated that
this year’s evaluation did not seem important to the administrator, and reflected that it seemed
like Blaine wasn’t respected either, because it, “…was rushed in the last minute.” Garnet
observed that the administrator, “…never talked to me…never said, ‘I notice that you're strong in this, or I notice that you're weak in this,’ although it would be helpful.” Willis talked about the one-sided conversation with administrators, “The administrator asks me what I am doing to get them to come to school but… I’ve never been asked what else I am doing to help them.”

**Summary of the findings for research question 3.** Teachers believe that several things might be done to better teach and support high school students. Many of the teachers wanted to ensure that school is a safe place for students to be heard and for their teachers to support their voices. The physical setting of the school is a concern for teachers in the older school that is scheduled to be replaced, and several teachers mentioned the need for additional and more current curriculum and materials for student use. Teachers who had the opportunity to work with students for more than one school year see its benefits and hope to have that opportunity again. Teachers discussed the challenge of having enough time to get to know students with so many students assigned to them. They added that knowing students was not a significant part of their teacher training. Teachers emphasized the importance of administrators being seen around school as well as supporting teachers and students with well-enforced policies. Every teacher participant mentioned the importance of being known personally to the school administrators.

**An additional finding: a need strong school-wide communities.**

Table 5

Themes from Findings Related Building a Strong School-wide Community

- Schools as physically and emotionally safe communities
- Teachers as supporters of one another
Schools as physically and emotionally safe communities. Teacher participants in this study repeatedly mentioned their support for students to be heard at school, most especially on issues of the student safety. Teachers were unsure, though, of how best to provide the support. Thoughts the superintendent shared around the 2016 presidential election (Enfield, 2017) were a source of frustration for teachers. The superintendent, writing in support of safety and equity in schools, noted that, “as educators we each have an obligation to our students and families to ensure they feel safe (Enfield, 2017).” Teachers were critical of the words “feel safe,” believing instead that students should be safe. Barden said, “They're afraid to be deported; we need to give them some sort of reassurance, that we are here for you. Nobody's gonna call anybody on you when you're at school. You are safe here. And that is not the message they got.” Robin noted that, “I mean there's basically so much racism…now,” and mentioned that there had been incidents of students yelling racist insults on the school campus.

The emotional safety of students in other capacities was also mentioned by the teacher participants. Waylan noted that some kids have hard lives, and school does not feel safe to them. “They think that they kind of have to stand up to adults in a bunch of cases and stand their ground. They probably get told what to do and who they are and how to do it plenty in their lives.” Waylan suggested ways to help students know there is a place for them at school, “Try to put the power back in their hands in the classroom. Give them choices, let them be leaders in the classroom.” Willis also spoke of the need for students to belong in school, giving the example of a vulnerable student, “He needs constant reassurance that he is a good kid. He doesn't see himself as a scholar or a learner.” Robin responded to the question if the school is emotionally safe saying, “I feel it’s gotten… Well, we are working on it.” Blaine commented,
"What they really want is somebody who is teaching them what they are supposed to be learning… I think that is the most impactful thing. They want people to know who they are too, but they want to know they can respect a teacher…"

Physical safety is also a concern at the high schools. Robin noted that there are physical fights in the school, and when asked if the school was safe replied, “Just on the face? No!.. how safe is it? I feel like it is on the safer side.” Waylan addressed school discipline in general, not just aggressive behaviors, saying that it is very important, “I think everyone would agree with that. How does it work? Not well. It’s gotten slightly better this year and the plan is to get it better and continue bettering it.” Willis spoke of a student who caused a significant disturbance and noted that it was not handled well but, “I think since then we've improved on restorative justice.”

Teachers as colleagues of one another. Teacher participants mentioned their colleagues in a variety of ways during the interviews. They spoke of collaborative partnerships with other teachers, teachers who supported their efforts with students, as well as times when other teachers were problematic.

Waylan enjoyed opportunities to collaborate with other teachers, “This was magic… It was absolute magic working side by side with… teacher for one class… We got a whole month of really, really in depth information.” Willis mentioned collaboration with colleagues, “I would say that 80% of the teachers here… work with me… and I think it's because they feel supported by me.” Robin mentioned being interested in collaborating with subject area colleagues, saying that they were nice people, but adding, “I taught it…[with] zero guidance [from others]. Not even other people to collaborate with… the other teachers… I just don't teach the way that they
do …[their] way of operating is just like go online, find stuff to do, and do it. For me, it's … planning.”

Barden, Willis, Garnet, and Waylan also talked about challenging experiences with other teachers. Barden was emphatic that, “There really aren’t many team players.” Willis noted that a percentage of teachers consistently did not participate in teacher conferences and other events designed to support students. Garnet was frustrated about colleagues who had students the year prior and, “had never taught them a thing.” Waylan tried to understand people who could not support changes to school programs and policies, “I've heard their voices. They're just digging their heels in. I don't know. Yet they say, ‘I'm not leaving.’ Then some great people leave. We've just had really great people leaving this year.”

**Summary: The need for building strong school-wide communities.** Teacher participants were very aware of the physical and emotional safety needs in their schools. They noted that emotional needs are complex for students. Physical safety included concerns about protecting students from violence and, in one of the schools, protecting students from problems caused by an aging, deteriorating building. Teacher participants talked about wanting to be part of a community that supported students; they want to be able to collaborate with other teachers, to trust other teachers, and for teachers to be supportive of each other in their common goal of educating high school students.

**Overall Summary of Study Findings**

The findings in this chapter present teachers' perspectives and experiences with the district promise that students are known by name, strength, and need. The findings also describe what teachers believe would be beneficial to help and teach high school students. Through analysis of the interviews with six teachers, common themes emerged.
The teacher participants believed that it is important to know their students, but they also believe that they teach too many students in a day for this promise to be realistic. Teachers typically treat each student as having similar learning needs. When teachers did want to learn about students, they typically ask the students themselves. Among the group of interviewees were two special education teachers, both of whom shared practices that differed from the rest of the group. These two teachers know their students well and differentiate learning experiences. The participating high schools both have advisory programs to help in supporting students, and half of the teachers support the program while the other half do not.

Teachers offered concerns about their schools being safe places for students both emotionally and physically. Each school dealt with a school-wide incident this year that impacted students as well as the community as a whole.

The findings also suggested that school community-wide regard for all students, faculty, staff, and administration is strongly worth considering. While this issue was not a research question, it was a recurring theme in each interview that teachers wanted to work with other teachers. Teachers also wanted to have students feel safe in the school community, to feel known, and safe at school themselves.
Chapter Five: Discussion of the Research Findings

This chapter consists of four sections. The first revisits the problem of practice that is the impetus for this research. The second section presents the findings along with the themes these findings suggest. The third section considers the research findings as framed by the respect conceptual framework and empirical studies reviewed in Chapter 2. Finally, this chapter concludes with the limitations of this study, significance of the study, and suggestions for further research endeavors.

Revisiting the Problem of Practice

Policy makers in the Highline School District make the commitment to parents, students, and community that “every student in Highline Public Schools is known by name, strength, and need, and graduates ready for college, career, and citizenship” (highlineschools.org, 2016). The district leadership has enacted programs and supports for students aimed at keeping them safe, learning, and engaged in school. The Highline School District has been recognized for solutions to problems in pursuit of improving student education and support. (D’Orio, 2017). There is a body of research contending that this is a sound promise, one that is appropriate for a school system to make (Epstein & Jansorn, 2004; Matheson, 2010; Phillips, 2013; Sabol & Pianta, 2012; Wiggins, 2011), yet no clear definition of “knowing students” has been offered by Highline School District to the teachers, administrators, or the community.

The research for this study focused on high school teachers, the teachers who are tasked with preparing students for high school graduation and whatever lies for them beyond that milestone. The study sought to understand what teachers think of the promise, how they know their students, and what ideas they have to improve school connections with high school students.
Review of Methodology

The three research questions guiding this study are (1) What are high school teachers’ perceptions of the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need? (2) What are high school teachers’ experiences with the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need, and what are the outcomes of those experiences? (3) What do teachers believe can be done to best teach and support high school students?

This study utilized Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology to understand teacher perceptions of and experiences with the common phenomenon of working for a district that promises students are known by name, strength, and need. Each of the six high school teachers in the study works in one of two comprehensive high schools in the district and participated in a semi-structured interview. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Both the audio interviews and the transcriptions were reviewed numerous times to identify common themes among the teacher participants.

The findings from these three research questions are primarily discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 will add dimensions to the findings by considering teachers' perspectives, recommendations for school communities, and ideas for teachers' knowing students better by using a respect conceptual framework.

Exploration of Key Findings

The teacher participants in this study shared their beliefs, feelings, and experiences about the district promise. Their thoughts were colored by their experiences as veteran public school teachers and also included discussions of life experiences that help shaped their perspectives. Through considerable deep analysis of the interview recordings and corresponding transcripts,
themes emerged that are grouped together here as three collective key findings. Table six shares the key findings informed by these themes.

Table 6

*Key Findings*

- High school teachers see the job they were trained to do primarily as delivering curricular content to students.
- High school teachers don’t recognize the school community as promoting knowing individuals by strength and need.
- High school teachers caring about learning and supporting their students’ rights.

**High school teachers see the job they were trained to do primarily as delivering curricular content to students.** Teacher participants, with the exception of the special education teachers, were clear that teaching students the curriculum is the primary focus of their work. While the teachers noted that students may have specific learning needs, they do not believe they have time to identify or the ability to consistently address those needs. Further, they did not see accommodating student needs as critical to the work of high school teachers. Nonetheless, the teacher participants all were aware of the time they spent helping individual students. The special education teachers offered a different perspective on their work. Barden and Willis were clear that they believed that teaching begins with knowing the students, being aware of the curricular content and academic skills they have already mastered, and how individual students learn best.
Several teacher participants reported asking students to share their individual strengths and needs. However, as they reflected on their attempts to learn about students, the teachers decided that it was not helpful in the end. Robin was unable to finish meeting with students to know them better, and Waylan wondered whether students realize their own strengths or will readily admit what they see as failings to a teacher. Garnet decided that because there was no place to enter into the district computer system the strengths and needs that students wrote on note cards, the details about students could not be easily accessed, so the student information cards were destroyed. “Well, what the heck am I going to do with this?” Garnet recalled thinking, “I am not going to be spending my time flipping through an index of 120 3 x 5 cards every time I want to think about a student. It's just not feasible.”

**High school teachers don’t recognize the school community as promoting knowing individuals by strength and need.** For four of the six teachers, the school district promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need has little impact on their work with students. They know their students’ names and work to teach them the school subjects they were hired to teach. While all six of the teachers shared hopes and concerns about their students, four of teachers were at a loss as to what they might do to know their students or how they would address academic concerns if they knew students had needs. All of the teacher participants wanted to be known by the school community themselves and to have their unique needs met by the administration.

Teacher participants in this study want to work in schools where they feel supported in their work with students. The teachers also wanted the administrators to be present around the school throughout the day engaging with students and teachers. Each interview contained at least a few minutes of the high school teacher describing dealings with a challenging student and
concerns about a lack of supplies or textbooks and expressing frustration about their perceived lack of administrative support. Teacher participants clearly want school administrators to know them and to support them in all aspects of their work. Teachers want to be known but do not believe that they can offer the same support to their students.

**High school teachers caring about learning and supporting their students’ rights.**

The teacher participants were undoubtedly supportive of students expressing their opinions on issues that involved students and their families. Yet teachers were also unanimous in their concern about students entering high school unprepared for the rigors of their classes. There is a disconnect here. Teachers believe it is critical for students, as individuals with differing perspectives and needs for support, to have agency to express their beliefs, but they also say that students cannot be known as individuals because there are just too many of them. The divergence occurs when students express unmet needs that teachers, who otherwise spoke of supporting students, do not help rectify.

This disconnect was notably illustrated by events that occurred at each of the schools in this study during the most recent school year. At one school, the issue involved what was perceived as anti-gay vandalism. The other school experienced civil rights concerns about a social studies curriculum. According to the teacher participants, the school community experienced the tension of students, as well as some teachers, who wanted to be heard on the topics of concern and who wanted to create an appropriate forum for this to happen. At the same time, school administrators and other teachers wanted to ensure that instruction was not negatively impacted. The teacher participants spoke passionately about students having the right to their own perspectives and how they encouraged students to express themselves and be heard, and they hoped students would be taken seriously by the school administration and school
district officials. However, while the teachers encouraged students to express their beliefs and request support for their needs, they also clearly stated that they simply did not enough time to know and, by association, adequately address the needs of 120–150 students each year, thereby illustrating the disconnect between their beliefs and their practices.

Teacher participants discussed their concerns about students who are not successful in their classes. Several teachers shared the belief that the problem of unprepared students happens, at least in part, in the middle schools. Until they reach high school, these teachers explained, grades do not matter and students are automatically promoted without regard to mastery of curriculum content or skills taught. Three teacher participants believed struggling students should not be accommodated in their classes but, instead, repeat a previous course or be moved to an alternate class. They suggested that there ought to be more alternative programs or classes for students who are not able to “keep up” with other students or who have not mastered the minimum requirements to be successful in their classes. The three teacher participants with this perspective also described their teaching as providing the same content, experiences, and performance expectations for each student. Robin was unique among the non-special education teachers in mentioning an interest in gaining skills to support students with a range of academic needs and social needs.

If students come to them seeking social guidance or help from an adult, all of the teacher participants said they were willing to be trusted listeners. Waylan was surprised that a student wanted to talk about her challenging home life. Blaine was taken aback by a student who, in a conversation late in the school year, mentioned that her parents were not nice when they were on drugs. Both of these teachers shared their story of the conversation with the student during the interview, and they acknowledged that they were not sure why the student chose to talk with
them. Both teachers said they were empathetic and supported the student, but they did not feel well enough prepared to handle the situation. For example, they were not sure of school or community resources that might be made available to students. The four non-special education teachers noted that education in understanding students and their needs was not a significant part of their teacher training.

Teachers appreciate the academic and social supports that students are able to access at school. Waylan was not sure what kinds of help were available at school for students but observed that “…it seems like there are pretty good supports for students here.” Barden spoke highly of the school counseling staff, noting that they are engaged problem solvers and saying of them, “Those guys are saints.” Willis spoke of people around the school who are constantly aware of what is happening and are always willing to help students.

For the two teachers who work with special education students, experiences with student needs are very different. Neither of these teachers waits until a student comes to them with a problem, although they are available for that to occur; instead they watch students and check in with them. Willis and Barden notice what is happening with students; their training as special education teachers included an emphasis on knowing students and their needs. They each related stories of helping students in crisis. Barden talked about seeking support for a student who was potentially suicidal and for another student who was kicked out of the family home. Willis spoke of being there for a student who was acting out and for a student who just needed a place to calm down. Both teachers regularly give food to students when they are hungry, and both teachers make sure students have supplies needed to be successful in school.

**Summary.** High school teachers perceive that their work is teaching the subject area curricula to students. While they support their student’s rights to express their opinions and ask
for needs to be met, teachers are typically unable to accommodate student needs; this is a disconnect because teachers support, even encourage, students asking for help. Teachers shared that they do not know what assistance within the school community is available to students nor how students access those services. The exception to this conflict are the two special education teachers, who perceive knowing and caring for students as a critical part of their work. These teachers utilize the school community to support student needs. Teachers express, too, that they would like to be known and understood by the administrators in their schools but don’t feel that this is currently the case. Members of the school community pursue mutual acknowledgement, understanding, and assistance from others which might be summarized as seeking mutual, community wide respect.

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the work of Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) in the book “Respect: An exploration.” Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) names and defines six intertwined dimensions of respect: (a) empowerment, offering others the skills, knowledge and resources needed to allow them to make their own decisions and control their own lives; (b) healing, offering others a feeling of worthiness, wholeness, and well-being; (c) dialogue, listening carefully, and responding supportively; (d) curiosity, being genuinely interested in others; (e) self-respect, respecting others, and helping them to feel good about themselves; and (f) attention, offering others full, undiluted attention. Lawrence-Lightfoot discusses these facets of respect by sharing stories of people in a variety of professions. The six categories of respect were condensed to three aspects for use in this study as follows: (a) empowerment and healing were combined (healing is not a typical element of teaching practice) and are referred to as "agency" to align terminology with common, usual school usage, (b) curiosity, dialogue, and
attention were combined as "communication" to describe both spoken and unspoken interactions between people in schools, and (c) self-respect was retained as a unique aspect of respect referring to both teachers and students. These three aspects of respect, by adding the perspective to teacher-student relationships and specifically reorganized to address education, inform the framework for this research (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012).

Respect as a conceptual framework has been previously used in research of workplace interactions, such as communication between managers and employees, and in studies of nursing and change processes. In the present study the respect conceptual framework was used to allow interactions in schools to be considered without the traditional hierarchical deference to authority that respect terminology may suggest. As defined here, respect does not refer to a respect that is bestowed on a person because they hold a title or an office but, rather, to the mutual respect that grows between people. Further, the respect conceptual framework as applied in this study acknowledges that there is an innate power imbalance because of the institutionalized authority in traditional high schools. Respect, then, in this framework, considers the need for power to be minimized, typically by actions or words from the person with the most power, so authentic relationships can grow between people regardless of their “position” in the school.

For the purposes of this study, the respect conceptual framework was used as a way to define the perception teachers have of the Highline School District's promise that students are known by name, strength, and need. The teacher participant remarks included aspects of respect and how that respect is manifest in their school and their classroom. Garnet reflected, for example, that, “…what you do speaks louder than what you say. The district says, 'name, strength, and need,' but there’s no doing by name, strength, and need.”
Agency, as an aspect of respect, is the ability to make decisions and act on opportunities. Agency consists of the skills, knowledge, and resources that adults and students use to make their own decisions and control their own lives. In high schools, encouraging student agency promotes students' feelings of worthiness, an appreciation for their wholeness, and a sense of well-being. In short, encouraging agency is encouraging students to learn independence.

In both schools, students were involved with righting perceived wrongs by speaking up and asking for changes. Teacher participants appreciated the efforts students made on behalf of the school community by sharing that students learning to stand up for their beliefs is an important lesson. This explanation by teachers clearly converges with the respect conceptual framework and the importance of encouraging student agency. There is also a disconnect, though, a divergence for the framework, because the teachers did not mention the learning that took place as students asserted their agency to stand up in support of what they believed to be an injustice. Respect may take many forms, and in these situations respect for student agency could have been demonstrated by teachers discussing the impact that students made. For example, teachers might have told the students that their actions and the beliefs they advocated for supported other members of their school community and that the results would be far reaching. If students had heard that their actions resulted in greater equity and understanding in their schools, powerful lessons would have been shared.

There is a discrepancy between teacher participants' expressed beliefs about student agency and their actions toward their students. The respect conceptual framework speaks to mutual respect as a basis for teacher-student relationships and those relationships develop through conversations. There is a divergence from the conceptual framework as soon as the
teacher participants said that students wanted teachers to know who they are as people, and the teachers clearly said this was not possible. Garnet demonstrated this teacher belief by explaining that students were involved in creating classroom norms for “situations in class when I need rules.” Students may have offered other norms to support them, if they had been given the opportunity, converging with the respect conceptual framework and the importance of student agency. If students are allowed their own agency, to have authentic, purposeful opportunities in class to share their thoughts and to be heard, some of the disconnected student behaviors could be lessened.

**Communication, as an aspect of respect, is listening, understanding, and responding supportively.** Communication benefits people when they recognize that they are listened to, understood, and advocated for and when they know and appreciate the expectations others have for them. A consistent theme in this study was teachers’ belief that students were more receptive when the teacher could address them directly using their name. Blaine shared the observation that students “…like it when you know their name.” The respect conceptual framework diverges from expressed teacher actions when teachers advocate the use of teaching practices based on knowing students but then discuss not knowing how to create a classroom culture where teachers get to know students and student agency is celebrated.

Despite their difficulties in classroom culture based on agency, teachers in this study shared some examples of teaching strategies which demonstrated communication with students and convergence with the respect conceptual framework. Waylan, Blaine, Robin, and Barden all talked about lessons in their classrooms that were motivated by student interests and questions. Willis mentioned times when knowing student interests allowed just the right incentive for students to complete work. Respectful communication between teachers and students consists of
listening carefully and responding supportively. Garnet shared the example of talking with students about the music they enjoy and asking them to share a playlist he might use in class.

Conversations that are authentic communication consist of asking clarifying questions and responding with ideas and suggestions rather than directives and converge with the respect conceptual framework. Communication is ongoing while teachers and students work together; communication occurs when people recall what was previously said and return to the topic together. Communication is an aspect of respect because it encompasses teachers and students listening to each other and acknowledging one another. Most teacher participants in this study shared stories about connections they had made with particular students. Waylan was startled when a student asked for advice while also sharing information about her challenging life. Blaine shared a very similar experience with a student. Barden talked about a student coming for help for a friend and working with the student to insure the friend got the needed help and was safe.

Communicating with students encompasses teachers' attending to both their students' academic and their social needs through creating appropriate learning environments and by using teaching approaches informed by student needs. Teacher participants suggested that they might know students better if they taught them for more than one year, and several also suggested that they would know students better if this were an expectation that was specifically included in teacher performance evaluations.

**Self-respect, as an aspect of respect, is a person’s personal respect for themselves and their character and conduct.** Teachers in this study unintentionally shared how they teach self-respect by example. Waylan spoke of taking time at the end of each school day to reflect on the day, what needs be revisited, who needs a clarification, what might be a better way to teach a
lesson the next time. Waylan clearly respects the profession and practice of teaching and, as informed by the respect conceptual framework, demonstrates self-respect by taking needed time to consider and craft educational experiences for students. Robin spoke of taking an opportunity to explain the thinking behind a lesson and ask students for their input, demonstrating the vulnerability of a teacher who is keen to improve their craft. Neither of these teachers are immune to the possible uncomfortable responses that students might offer. Yet, sharing their interest in professional improvement with students allows the students to gain understanding about self-respect and personal growth, certainly converging with the respect conceptual framework discussions of communication and self-respect.

Half of the teacher participants were considering adopting or trying out teaching methods to actively engage students in lessons. The teachers spoke about getting high school students up and moving around in the classroom and creating lessons that encompass topics of interest to their students. However, although teachers are working to create more engaging lessons for students, they still teach as if all students are the same and without agency, diverging from the respect conceptual framework. Teacher participants explained that they design lessons intended to be taught the same way to the entire class of students, without accommodating the strengths and needs of their students. Nevertheless, Robin noted that if a student approaches the teacher with a special request, for example exploring a topic a different way than was originally assigned, Robin typically allows the student to work in a way that suits them.

**Respect for a strong school-wide community.** Respect for a strong school-wide community is defined here as people in the school community actively getting to know each other, allowing respectful relationships to develop. This can be seen as a step past communicating to build teacher-student relationships to considering the school as a community
of people in relationship with one another. Although building a strong school-wide community was not part of the original respect conceptual framework for this research, it emerged as a strong, recurring theme in the interviews. The teacher participants clearly wanted to be respected by both their students and administrators, but the teachers did not show evidence of respect for either group. Barden observed that,

And in turn, they [students] ask me what I did and stuff, and I tell them because that's how we build a relationship. We can be a community. But if you don't ever talk to them about other stuff besides school, then they’re like, "hmm." They do have teachers like that, they don’t ask them anything, and they [students] could really care less.

Half of the teachers also expressed disdain for the advisory program, which is designed to allow students to have a relationship with at least one adult in school. In the advisory program teachers are expected to get to know a smaller group of students, check in with them to see how they are doing, and keep track of their academic progress. Teachers complained that the advisory program was another class preparation expected of them, there was no accountability for students because no grades are given, and, as Blaine commented, “I just don't think that the relationships are being built the way they [district administration] envisioned it.” Blaine also commented that students, “don’t want to do the team building activities and stuff… It's really hard to get them to put away their phones.”

**Discussion of the Key Findings in Relation to the Literature Review**

The key findings in this study are largely informed by the review of literature presented in Chapter 2. Discussions of the correlation between the findings and the literature review follow.
High school teachers see the job they were trained to do primarily as delivering curricular content to students. Four out of the six high school teachers in this study believe that their primary responsibility is to deliver the course content but the literature speaks to relationships with students as being the critical first goal to achieve. The two may not be mutually exclusive. It is possible to have the primary responsibility be content and still support students. Only half of the teachers in the study, though, clearly communicated that relationships with students were essential in high schools. Two of the teachers who expressed this belief are special education teachers with specific expectations to know their students. Students who are not authentically invited to express their thoughts in safe classroom environments will not choose to be vulnerable or to risk embarrassment (Horner, Wallace, & Bundick, 2015). Students who do not feel supported or are not allowed agency in school have limited participation in class resulting in less success in school.

Explaining the importance of teacher competence, Rowan et al. (1997), report that the effect size of teaching variables such as specific abilities to engage students and inspire learning are statistically and substantively significant. Given this finding, it is challenging for teachers to be effective educators without believing that establishing relationships with their students is imperative. When high school students were asked about connections with teachers, students explained that when their teachers did not communicate and were not interested in them, they lost interest in learning (Overman et al., 2014). Further, a lack of communication between students and teachers leads to a feeling of student insecurity, resulting in teachers and students experiencing mutual distrust and resistance (Noddings, 2003; Overman et al., 2014).

School success is directly influenced by students' belief in their own capabilities. Likewise, teachers who respect themselves and their abilities are better able to encourage student
growth. This is a not a skill that is intuitive for many people (Ecclestone, Hayes, & Furedi, 2005). Teaching may be undermined by feeling vulnerable and being unwilling to take risks with other people, including students. Teacher participants consistently insisted that they were doing the best they could with the situation they were working in since they lacked good teaching materials or textbooks, taught in a building that leaks when it rains, and felt unsupported by school administration. Teaching, though, is a profession where doubting one’s effectiveness, for whatever reason, may be harmful to others.

These beliefs about the nature of their work may come from teacher training programs. Teacher training does not typically examine how caring, human attention, and respect apply to teacher’s daily work with students, nor do teachers report having enough knowledge of specific student concerns (Wynne, 2008). It is worthy of note that the two participants in this study who were trained and are working as special education teachers hold nearly the opposite perspective from this overall finding. Willis and Barden clearly see student needs as the priority. In their interviews, both teachers mentioned the need for students to be safe and fed before they are ready to learn. Further, they agree with the belief that students need to have accommodations made in lessons to meet their learning styles and needs (Tomlinson, 2003).

**High school teachers don’t recognize the school community as promoting knowing individuals by strength and need.** Teacher participants noted examples of disrespectful administrative actions such as rushed, last minute evaluations, failing to engage in conversations with teachers to get to know them, and not supporting teachers in conversations with parents. Again, respect is identified here as allowing individual agency, communicating clearly, and embodying self-respect. If respect is created in relationships between people, knowing each other is a logical place to begin. This mindset is not a unique challenge; Lawrence-Lightfoot
(2000) notes that people often cite a lack of respect as a problem in schools. Promoting the building of a strong school-wide community will require school-wide conversations and introspection by each member of the school community about their own practices and beliefs around respect. This might include providing school staff with emotional intelligence training to help educators understand both their own and other’s emotions and positively impact classroom environments (Brown et al., 2010).

Being known signifies belonging, and school success correlates with feeling safe and belonging in school; everyone in the school community needs to be known by other members of the community. Respect, Lawrence-Lightfoot (2000) points out, goes unnoticed when it is present and is given attention when it is not. According to the teacher participants in this study, respect currently gets a huge amount of attention in these two high schools.

**Implications for Educational Practice**

In the recent past, the Highline School District supported small high schools, large high schools divided into smaller learning communities. Small high schools were initially created around the United States, in part, to respond to the need for high school students to have consistent contact with caring adults and to be part of a smaller community of adults and students (Ready, 2004). In Highline, these divided high schools have recently been dismantled and returned to their original function as large, comprehensive schools. While this study does not address the research around small high schools, it is important to note that one goal of the smaller schools was for students to be better known by the adults in their schools. This study considers the district promise of students being known by name, strength, and need which continues the district effort toward students being known.
The implications for educational practice around this district promise differ between schools; the Highline School District has high school program options where knowing students well is in the school mission statement. In addition, each of the schools in this study has put programs into place specifically to create a transition from middle school, although it is not clear from this study if students in the programs are better known. Teacher participants clearly knew that students want to be known and also believe that teachers have too many students to know them each well.

Teacher participants talked at length about the advisory program that operates in both schools and serves, among other functions, as a small group with an adult who, at least in theory, knows the students well and supports them academically and socially (Blum, 2005). The teacher participants in this study were split as to the value of the program and the lessons provided that many chose not to teach. Comments by teacher participants indicate that they believe most teachers in their schools are not supportive of the advisory program. Again, an effort to provide an environment for high school students to develop trusting, respectful relationships with adults is floundering.

In order to increase implementation of high school students being known by name, strength, and need, it is recommended that increased attention be devoted to:

(a) teachers’ increased understanding of themselves and their needs,

(b) the implementation of training for teachers in knowing typical supports and methods of positive engagement for high school students,

(c) fostering a school-wide commitment to advisory programs,

(d) embracing mutual respect in school communities, and

(e) high school teachers caring about learning and support their students’ rights.
Teachers' understanding of themselves and their needs. The job descriptions for teachers typically describe many aspects of the work that may or may not be completely understood by the teachers themselves. Teaching involves knowing the content to be shared and being prepared with multiple ways to present and explain the information. To effectively accomplish this work, teachers must also know their students' physical, emotional, and language abilities, organize their classrooms to be conducive to learning, collaborate with colleagues to best serve students, and provide appropriate, differentiated instruction.

In addition, and because teaching is a relational profession, teachers need to understand their own motivation for work that is necessarily about the students rather than themselves. Successful teachers respect their own capabilities and their own needs as professionals, which may include preferred class scheduling, classroom location, technology, or a myriad of other preferences that allow them to be effective teachers. Teachers who know and respect themselves and who recognize their vulnerabilities have more capacity to respectfully and authentically support students (Ecclestone et al., 2005). Teacher participants in this study did not recall learning about themselves or their own needs in their teacher preparation, although this is a usual aspect of training in other human service programs. Further, educators do not typically engage in discussions with administrators about their own experiences, beliefs, and motivations around teaching yet, as reflected in the participant interviews, they enjoy talking about why they chose teaching as a profession. Critical to creating a school culture based on respect is teachers, administrators, and other teachers knowing and expressing themselves and their needs. Findings from this study indicate that teachers who want to be known by administrators are not so different from students who want to be known by their teachers. Implications for practice further
suggest that people knowing their own needs, and sharing that with others, helps build respectful, supportive communities.

**Training in knowing typical supports and methods of positive engagement for high school students.** Teachers, administrators, and other school staff need training to learn why they should know their student’s strengths and needs and to learn how to accomplish this goal. There is a challenge here, though, because the promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need has not been clearly defined, which leaves the training without concrete objectives.

Teacher participants in this study explained needs as either academic or as needs for social services, which they believed to be outside the promise of knowing students. And apart from the special education teachers, no teachers referred to student strengths. This confusion about the meaning of the promise that students are known by name, strength, and need may render it useless. To prevent this from being the case, the following expansion of the promise is offered:

Knowing students by name includes not only recognizing students on sight, knowing their full name and preferred name and correct pronunciation, but also being aware of their culture and cultural preferences as they pertain to school, knowing how to contact their parents or guardians, and identifying the students' interests and ways of engaging them.

Knowing students by strength includes understanding their academic preferences, strengths, and areas of success, their school-related social skills, and their participation in arts, athletics, and social organizations.

Knowing students by need includes addressing academic and learning challenges through areas of strength to increase student confidence, accommodating identified physical and
emotional needs, and holding an awareness of students to notice changes in any of these that ought to be addressed.

Knowing students by name, strength, and need is not specifically addressed in staff professional development nor is it in the job description for new teachers. While significant training in knowing students by strength and need is included in special education teacher preparation programs, it is lacking in other teacher preparation pathways. Because teacher training programs do not typically include caring for, providing attention, and respecting students as part of teacher’s work, per Wynne (2008), the school district must provide the training for this goal to be valid. The goal of knowing students by name, strength, and need should be the core of school district trainings when new or revised content, pedagogy, or skills are taught to educators. For example, a new math curriculum training may include a focus on knowing what students have already mastered in order to plan appropriate lessons, or writing teachers may be exposed to graphic representations for pre-writing as a tool for visual learners. With this practice in place, teachers will be exposed to the importance of knowing students and the role this knowledge plays in student success.

Students who are known are more likely to thrive educationally and stay in school to graduate has been extensively studied and proven valid (Stuhlman & Pianta, 2002). When teachers build relationships, beginning with attention to learning about their students’ individuality, it results in interactions with students that are more impactful educationally because students experience the security that comes with belonging (Graham et al., 2001). The district has a goal that will benefit students if it is faithfully implemented.

**School-wide commitment to advisory programs.** Advisory programs, or programs with similar goals of purposefully connecting students with an adult to build a supportive
relationship, are needed in high schools. Comprehensive high school teachers are responsible for 120–150 students in a school day, and knowing all of them well enough to advocate for their needs is challenging. In advisory program groups, teachers have small, consistent groups of students who they can get to know individually. Unfortunately, many high school teachers were not trained for the work that is important in advisory programs, including specific knowledge of the social and emotional needs of children (Brackett et al., 2011). When teachers know and address the developmental levels and developmental needs of their students, communication is relational and easily understood by their students.

Teacher participants in this study acknowledged that they had little training to work with students in the less formal capacity used in advisory programs. They explained that they were not comfortable with the informal format. However, teachers who are coaches, for example, do have close, respectful relationships with the student athletes on their teams; the same is true with band directors and drama teachers. Implementation can consider teacher and student interests when creating advisory program groups. If students have an interest in art, robotics, poetry, gardening, or hiking, is there a teacher with similar interests who might connect with them? School advisory programs exist to promote relationships between students and adults, which develop into mutual respect, in the interest of supporting students. Many of us make acquaintances because of common interests, advisory program groups of students with common interests makes sense.

Advisory program sessions should be a time that is acknowledged positively by teachers and students. Half of the teachers in this study expressed support for advisory programs and half expressed disdain. The disdain is challenging to understand when the goal is to support students to be successful in school. In an ideal situation, advisory program teachers are the child’s
respected advocate, the adult at school who knows them best. When a student stumbles in a class, the advisory program teacher should be their advocate to help them back to success.

Creating and sustaining a program that engages and supports students and is led by teachers will be a difficult task at the two high schools in the study. Nonetheless, the students deserve to belong and realize that at least one adult in school knows and cares about them, if they are expected to successfully stay in school.

**Embracing mutual respect by creating respectful school communities.** Respectful communities begin with individual agency, an aspect of respect which acknowledges individual autonomy. High school community members must recognize that knowing and respecting themselves and one another is important in the work that they do as educators and students; solid education and learning takes place in communities where people take the time to create respectful relationships. Teachers participants in this study were unified in saying that they want to be known and recognized. Students want to be known, too. Intrinsic in agency is the understanding that self-respect means knowing oneself and taking care of individual needs while respecting the agency of other people in the community (Verschueren, 2015). Supporting other people’s agency involves talking and listening to each other. People are expected to speak and share their thinking, be listened to, and work with others to insure emotional and physical security for everyone. Respectful communities happen when people are authentic about their strengths and needs; respectful communities happen when people are known.

**High school teachers care about learning and support their students’ rights.** The literature clearly validates the relevance of this finding, suggesting that teachers caring about and supporting students is an important factor in student success in high school (Beaton, 2007; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). The best support teachers can offer students is frequent attention and
acknowledgement. Positive teacher interactions with students promotes development of academic agency. When teachers communicate to students that they are secure in a class because the teacher knows them and cares, the students are more likely to experience academic and social success.

It was challenging for teacher participants in this study to explain how to go about knowing their students and their specific learning needs, partly because they had so many students to work with but also because of differences in styles of communication. While teenagers realize that peer support is important to feeling secure in school, they are likely to suppress their emotions around adults if they don’t feel the adults know them and support them individually (Horner, Wallace, & Bundick, 2015). The result is teenagers who choose to remain emotionally neutral and disengaged in class. Yet, students want to be known and respected by their teachers -- both are essential to student learning -- but their actions remain those of teenagers and as such may be misunderstood by adults. Moreover, students' perceptions of teachers are formed in the first encounters; teacher words and actions are important and long lasting, regardless if the words had a positive or negative impact on students (Van Ijzendoorn & Zwart-Woudstra, 1995). Students who are impacted negatively by teachers assume that teachers are not safe, leaving no foundation for relationships (Loutzenheiser, 2002). However, trusting relationships between teachers and their students are the basis for mutual respect.

Implications of Implementation Practices

Implications for practice begin at the school district and high school community level with community-wide discussions about commitment to individual students. If the goal is for students to successfully complete high school and graduate, implementation of appropriate supports is a necessity. Many of the supports that are most affective are based on respectful
student and adult interactions with the students' needs at the forefront. Teachers who are comfortable talking and working with students in what might be perceived as an informal setting are likely to have the most success. Teachers who themselves have been in challenging situations, like the three teachers in this study who lived and taught overseas, seem more likely to understand student concerns and needs. Because not all teachers have worked in foreign environments, teaching educators to seek understanding of student strengths and needs ought to be included in teacher education programs; the topics of knowing students and teaching them based on individual strengths and needs are already included as part of the content of special education teacher training. This education might also provide more teacher support for advisory programs.

In conjunction with knowing student needs, there are reasons for concern about student privacy. Teachers stated that they believed the original meaning of the promise was likely about knowing student academic strengths and needs, yet they also expressed concern about students having a safe place to live and food to eat. Research about student needs in tandem with local social service providers would inform this concern.

**Limitations**

Limitations of this study could include the small sample size. This is an inherent aspect of IPA research studies, which are undertaken to understand how people describe important aspects of their lives in great detail and explain what this means in their daily work (Smith et al., 2009). The group of teacher participants in this study may not be fully representative of high school teachers overall, because of their individual backgrounds. One example of this is the inclusion of two special education teachers. While their teaching experiences were not deliberately part of the teacher recruitment, their responses specifically informed the study
findings. Another group of teachers, those who taught overseas, might also be a limiting factor in this study; perhaps teachers with only public school teaching experiences have differing perspectives on knowing students.

The study included six teachers, three from each of two district high schools. This might be a limitation of the study because two separate school administrations have different systems and expectations, allowing teacher's interpretations to differ, too. An example of this might be the expectations for the role of the teachers during the advisory program. In analyzing the data for this study, though, no obvious differences between the two highs schools seemed evident.

Certainly, although the inexperience of the novice researcher can also be considered a potential limitation of this study, the planning and research were done with guidance from an experienced professional utilizing established research, analysis, and presentation standards.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is demonstrating that high school teachers generally do not know how to engage their students in conversations or activities that allow a relationship to form. Nor do the teachers know how to gather the information that students actually present about themselves and use it to provide optimal learning experiences for students. Teachers also do not know how to create classroom environments where relationships genuinely form between teachers and students as well as among classmates. Further, teachers were clearly uncomfortable adapting their lessons to students who were not prepared for the challenges they offered; in fact, half of the teachers suggested that unprepared students should be placed in other programs or special sections of the class or should not have passed the previous class.

Of the three teacher participants who accept that educating students with differing needs is part of their job, two teach special education students with identified needs that, legally and
ethically, must be addressed. The other teachers acknowledged that they persisted in teaching lessons whether or not their students were prepared to learn the material or were interested in the instructional methodology used to present it. This is in contrast with previous studies that considered accommodating student learning needs and found that understanding teachers are integral to student accomplishments (Bondy et al., 2007). In order for students to be successful in high school, they need to know they belong there, that they are known by at least one adult, that an adult is keeping track of them, and that the adult cares about them (Brackett et al., 2011).

**Future Studies and Directions**

Advisory programs were not included in the research questions in this study, yet the program became a focus during interviews. Teacher participants had strong opinions about the advisory program to share. Further research to understand what is currently happening in the Highline School District advisory program would be informative and could include data on curricula, placement of students with teachers, goals for the program as shared with teachers and students, and design of the program from year to year. Additional research could also identify which actions by teachers are currently working well in advisory programs. It was unclear if teachers followed and, when it was used, how the student responded to the lessons. Taking a step back and looking at the purpose of the advisory program spawns a few questions to consider. What is the feasibility of implementing a program that requires teachers to interact with students in ways that they feel ill-suited? Is the assumption that students will feel known and comfortable talking about themselves in the advisory program likely to occur in large, comprehensive high schools?

Looking closely at typical interactions between adults and students, outside of the advisory program, would be also useful as well. Students and teachers must understand that
mutual respect is the basis for relationships and respect is created between people who admire one another. This definition of respect is not based on expected acquiescence to people in power; rather, it is based on being human, and as Kant (1788/1996) believed, that people ought to be respected because they are people. Research to understand the role respect has in high schools would consider different groups in school communities and how they like to be known but is respect possible, or likely to occur, in a big school? What are school designs, teacher expectations, and community practices that might better support students?

Studies of high school teacher preparation programs would also be helpful. It would be enlightening to learn more about the preparation teachers receive in relationship building, what they understand about the brains and perceptions of teenaged students, and the experiences with high school aged students they are expected to have as teacher candidates. Other helping professions, such as counseling and pastoral work, require extensive self-exploration, yet teachers, who powerfully impact students, do not typically have this as an element of their training. Studies on the benefits of teacher self-awareness would be informative.

**Personal Reflection**

I chose to interview high school teachers because they have tremendous impact on students at an important juncture in their lives. The teachers I interviewed were all professionals who expressed care for students in the interviews. Most of my prior experiences with high school teachers had been with people dedicated to teaching content. I had hoped my experience wasn’t the norm because, as an upper elementary school teacher, I know my students very well. I believe students, rather than content, are the priority in schools. It is an honor when students visit to make sure I will attend their high school graduation, but I want each student to have a bunch of teachers to invite; I don’t want to be the last teacher who knew them well.
My purpose for this study was to hear if high school teachers thought the district goal of knowing students was valid and to learn how they went about creating a relationship with their students. All of the teachers knew their students a bit, but they did not accommodate their needs to maximize student learning or to build on student strengths. Some teachers even mentioned not really needing to know student strengths. If student strengths are not known, teachers teach to student deficits or some unidentified expectation, where they are guessing they might connect with most students. If a teacher knows student strengths, new topics and skills can be taught beginning from a solid, strong place.

I keep returning to what Willis said in the interview, “…there's no excuse for hating advisory unless you don’t want to spend an extra time with that group of kids. You know you're supposed to be their special adult, you're supposed to be their advocate and stuff like that.” Maybe every pre-service teacher ought to be required to spend a summer as a camp counselor or in some capacity where they get to know kids and spend time just playing with them. Then they will know if they can handle the important "getting to know one another activities" and other playful and fun interactions that grow respectful relationships between teachers and their students.

Conclusion

This study addresses teachers' perceptions of the district promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need by acknowledging that teachers think it is a logical, if impractical, promise. They understand that students appreciate teachers knowing their names. Most also expressed an understanding that relationships with adults in schools helps students stay in school to graduate. The teacher participants don’t believe that they have the time necessary to know their students because they are responsible for too many students each day. While the schools
have an advisory program with smaller groups of students where they can be better known by a
teacher, half of the teachers in the study were unhappy with the program. They viewed the
program curriculum as replete with “silly activities” and suggested that students don’t like the
advisory program either. However, the dissenting teachers did not readily have suggestions for
other ways to get to know their students. Nevertheless, teachers did indicate that they would
make more effort to know their students by name, strength, and need if it were part of their
annual teaching evaluation.

In short, high schools are challenging places to be students and to be their teachers.
Research is clear that when students believe there is a place for them and they belong in a school,
they are more successful. If teachers genuinely know students and use their strengths to help in
learning, students feel an even greater sense of belonging, they stay in school, and have more
opportunities after graduation. So, the solution is bigger than the role that teachers alone can
take on; school communities must be created through the respectful, caring efforts of all students,
faculty, staff, and administration. It does not begin at “the top” with administration, because
respect is not about power; it is about mutuality, people respecting people because they are
people.
References


doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.44.4.709


doi:10.1016/j.ijer.2011.07.001


doi:10.1007/bf02766777


Appendix A Graphic Representations of Interviews
Appendix B Teacher Participant Invitation

Dear (High School Teacher Name),

I am writing to ask your help by participating in a research study that I am undertaking in the Highline School District. This work is part of my doctoral degree program through Northeastern University and I am also a teacher in Highline. I am interested in understanding high school teacher perceptions of the district promise that, “students are known by name, strength, and need.” I am inviting teachers from both Highline and Mount Rainier high schools to participate.

The interview information are shared with the Highline School District and other educators but all the teacher participants will remain anonymous. I look forward to amplifying teacher thoughts, opinions, and ideas to the conversation through this study.

The interviews will take between 60 and 75 minutes and are scheduled at a time and place convenient for you. If you are available, I may also get in touch with you to cover any follow-up questions, although you are free to decline at any stage of the research. Other than potential discomfort in answering these questions, risks are minimal, given these interviews are strictly voluntary and confidential and interview questions are open-ended. You are given a choice of either a $25 Amazon or Fred Meyer gift certificate as a token of appreciation for your participation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Christie Brown at (206) 371-1636 or Brown.ch@husky.neu.edu. I can also send you a copy of a consent form, which gives you more information on the study. If you are interested in participating in this study, you may either contact me directly or give me permission to contact you by sharing your contact information via text or email. I greatly appreciate your help and look forward to meeting you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

My best,

Christie Brown
Appendix C Email Invitation

I left a note in your school mail box earlier this week and hoping you will consider working with me.

I am writing to ask your help by participating in a research study that I am undertaking in the Highline School District. This work is part of my doctoral degree program through Northeastern University and I am also a teacher in Highline. I am interested in understanding high school teacher perceptions of the district promise that, “students are known by name, strength, and need.”

I am inviting teachers from both [Highline] and [Mount Rainier] high schools to participate. The interview information will be shared with the Highline School District and other educators but all the participants will remain confidential. I look forward to amplifying teacher thoughts, opinions, and ideas to the conversation through this study.

The interviews will take between 60 and 75 minutes and will be scheduled at a time and place convenient for you. No interviews can take place in the classroom of the student researcher. Your participation is entirely voluntary; if you do not contact me by my student email address, you will not be contacted again regarding this research.

If you are available, I may also get in touch with you to cover any follow-up questions, although you are free to decline at any stage of the research. Other than potential discomfort in answering these questions, risks will be minimal, given these interviews are strictly voluntary and confidential and interview questions are open-ended. You will be given a choice of either a $25 Amazon or Fred Meyer gift certificate as a token of appreciation for your participation.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research or with to volunteer to participate, please feel free to contact Christie Brown on her mobile phone at (206) 371-1636 or Brown.ch@husky.neu.edu. I greatly appreciate your help and look forward to meeting you. I look forward to hearing from you.

My best, Christie Brown
Appendix D Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol
Institution: Northeastern University; 360 Huntington Avenue; Boston, Massachusetts 02115
Teacher participant: Christie Brown

Date:
Time of the interview:
Location of Interview:
Interview Part 1: Introductory Protocol
Thank you for expressing interest in this study. My name is Christie Brown, and I am a teacher in the Highline School District and a doctoral student at Northeastern University. This research is being conducted as my doctoral thesis project.
As the Student Researcher, I am also the person who is conducting the interviews.
This is an interpretive phenomenological study, a study that interviews a group of people and looks for commonalities. Those common words are used as categories for answering the research questions.
1. What are high school teachers’ perceptions of the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need?
2. What are high school teachers’ experiences with the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength, and need and what are the outcomes of those experiences?
3. What do teachers believe can be done to best teach and support high school students?
The interview begins asking for some basic demographic information, then asks questions focusing on the district promise, teacher perception, teacher actions, and teacher thoughts about knowing students. The interview should last about an hour. All responses are kept anonymous and identifying information will never be published. Teacher participants who complete interviews and look over the transcription of their interview for any additions or changes they would like to make, will receive a $25 gift card to either Amazon.com or Fred Meyer.
With this brief overview of the study, do you have any questions?
With that said, are you interested in proceeding as a teacher participate in this study?
Terrific! Because your responses are important and I want to make sure to capture everything you say, I would like to audio tape our conversation today. I will also be taking written notes during the interview. There are two people who will have access to the audio files, a professional transcriptionist and I. The transcriptionist will have signed a confidentiality statement and the recording are assigned a pseudonym rather than your name. The audio files are destroyed within two weeks after they are transcribed. The transcript are identified with the same pseudonym that are used for you throughout the study.
I would like to begin recording this session now, is that alright with you? Good, the audio recording has begun.
To meet our human subjects’ requirements at the university, teacher participants must read and sign to this Consent Form. I’d like to go over this form with you.
The Consent Form for this study, titled “Examining urban high school teacher perceptions of the district promise that students are known by name, strength, and need” notes that teacher participants must be at least 18 years old. You are being asked to participate in this interview because you are a high school teacher with between six and twenty years of teaching experience. There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study, and there are also no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. Your part in this study are handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will only use pseudonyms, and will not identify you or any other teacher participant as being part of this project. The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time. You will receive a $25 gift certificate to Amazon.com or Fred Meyer upon completion of interview and reviewing the transcript of the interview. If you have any questions about this study, contact information for me as well as the Principal Investigator is listed, and contact information is also listed for the Director of Human Subject Research Protection at Northeastern University should you have any other questions about your rights in this research (and you can call that person confidentially, if you wish).

Do you have any additional questions or concerns about the interview process or this form? Do you give your signed consent? Terrific, thank you.

We have planned for this interview to last about 60 minutes. I have several questions to cover and, if time is running short, I will let you know, and maybe even stop your response, in order to finish the questions. Do you have any questions at this time?

Part 2: Interview Introduction

As I have mentioned, the goal of the study is to explore the perceptions high school teachers have of the Highline School District promise “Students are known by name, strength, and need. Today’s interview will cover the first two steps. I will ask you a few questions about your teaching career. Then the questions will focus on your work with students, and, finally, I will ask you what you think best practices might look like.

Are you ready to begin?

Part 3: Questioning

General Questions

1. What grades and subjects do you teach? Have you taught other grades/subjects? Have you taught in other schools/states/districts?
2. How long have you been a teacher?
3. Tell me about a favorite teacher you recall from your K–12 school years. What made them a favorite?
4. When you are the student these days, what is important in an instructor?

RQ 1. How do teachers in the Highline School District achieve the school district's stated mission of knowing students by name, strength, and need?

I am now going to ask you questions about teachers knowing their students.

1. (C, A) What do teachers need to know about a student in order to teach them? How do teachers gather the information?
2. (A, C) Describe academic needs your students have.
3. (A, C) What kinds of strengths do high school students display? Do those strengths impact learning in class?
4. (A, C) What social needs do high school students have?
RQ – 2. What are teachers’ perceptions of the Highline School District’s promise of knowing students by name, strength and need?
1. Highline School District talks about knowing students by name, how do you define this? What does this require from you?
2. Highline School District talks about knowing students by strength, how do you define this? What does this require from you?
3. Highline School District talks about knowing students by need, how do you define this? What does this require from you?
4. How does the district promise of knowing students by name, strength and need impact your work as a teacher?
5. Explain why you think the district promise of knowing students by name, strength and need is or isn’t a realistic promise to make to the community.

RQ – 3. What do teachers believe could be done to better teach and support students in high school?
1. What do you believe can be done to best teach high school students?
2. What do you believe can be done to best support high school students?
3. Marzano suggests that teachers can cultivate a positive relationship by knowing students by name; asking them what they thought of recent occurrences, such as a sports game, popular movie, or song; asking them what they’re interested in; and simply inquiring whether school is going well for them. What do you think (or make of) about this suggestion? (Marzano, 1993)

Part 4: Conclusion
1. That concludes the questions for the interview. Before we wrap up, do you have any questions?
The transcript of this interview are sent to you in the next ten days. How would you prefer to receive it email or hard copy? Where would you like it sent? (Insure that the method and address are captured correctly.) After you have read through the transcript and made any changes, additions, and deletions, please return it to me at either the email or envelop provided. When I receive it back, I will send you a gift card. Would you prefer Amazon or Fred Meyer? (Ok)
Would you prefer an electronic gift card or a physical card sent to you? (Ok).
Thank you!
## Appendix E Themes from Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Conceptual Framework</th>
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</table>
| **Agency** | - Teachers think the promise is sound but unrealistic  
- Teachers described their high schools as impersonal yet each leads an advisory group.  
- Both high schools had recent, disruptive school community issues | - Teacher participants usually know students by name  
- Teacher participants said there was not time to be curious about students or their needs | - Supporting students, and insuring the school is safe  
- Creating optimal learning situations |
| **Communication** | - Teacher participants teach each student the same way | - Teacher participants discussed student conversations  
- Teacher participants talked about lack of time and knowing students | - Teachers working with students for more than one school year  
- Teacher participants are not evaluated on knowing students |
| **Self/Respect** | - Half of the teacher participants mentioned wanting to teach students who are “ready to learn” | - Teacher participants ask the students about needs  
- Teacher participants shared desire for student ownership in their learning | - Teacher participants see administrator’s public presence and influence in the school as important.  
- Teacher participants want principals to know them by name, strength, and need. |
Appendix F Comparison of High School Demographics

Demographics of the schools studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High School One</th>
<th>High School Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Burien</td>
<td>Des Moines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Count</td>
<td>1203</td>
<td>1561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free or Reduced Meals</td>
<td>62.3 %</td>
<td>49.1 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Special Education</td>
<td>13.5 %</td>
<td>10.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four Year Graduation Rate</td>
<td>70.5 %</td>
<td>68.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Teacher Experience</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>13.8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers with Master’s degrees or higher</td>
<td>69 %</td>
<td>71.4 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High School One</th>
<th>High School Two</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Race/Ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>41.3 %</td>
<td>26.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaskan Native</td>
<td>1.0 %</td>
<td>0.7 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>14.1 %</td>
<td>13.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>7.7 %</td>
<td>11.7 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander</td>
<td>4.7 %</td>
<td>3.5 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>25.9 %</td>
<td>36.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or More Races</td>
<td>5.3 %</td>
<td>7.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>1.4 %</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2.8 %</td>
<td>5.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>1.4 %</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>90 %</td>
<td>83.1 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>6.5 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix G School District Approval

HIGHLINE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS. EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER, Office of Accountability
15675 Ambaum Boulevard S.W.
Seattle, Washington 98166
206.631.3004

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL TO CONDUCT STUDIES AND SURVEYS IN THE HIGHLINE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

All studies and surveys to be conducted in the Highline Public Schools must have written approval of the Chief Accountability Officer or a designee. If the study is to fulfill degree requirements, this form must be signed by the graduate advisor to the investigator.

Christie Brow, Student Researcher, Jennifer Oian EdD, Northeastern University, Principal Investigator
Date 4/30/2017

Home Address
Institution: Northeastern University, EdD candidate and Highline School District, Teacher
Office Address
Title of Study: Examining Urban High School Teacher Perceptions of the District Promise That Students are Known By Name, Strength, and Need

Value of results of this study to the Highline Public Schools
Highline promises the community that students are known by name, strength, and need. I will interview high school teachers to understand their perceptions of this promise and the actions they take to fulfill it. This information will assist Highline in knowing what needs to be done, with teacher training, for example, to insure this promise is practice.

School
Grade(s) no students — participants are teachers with 6 — 20 years of experience

School
(Grade(s) no students — participants are teachers with 5 — 20 years of experience)
School records requested for this study: None

Date study will: Commence Upon Approval - 11-1-17

collection: From 5/10/17 to 8/1/17 Expected completion of final report

by 11/1/17

Please note the number of participants and the approximate time required of each participant by grade level.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Students</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Principals</th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Others (Specify)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td># of participants</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Time/participant</td>
<td>60-75 min*</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>a</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Interviews with teachers will likely take place outside contracted hours

What procedures will be used to select participants? I would like 5 minutes to speak at a staff meeting at each school to invite participants and 2. The district seniority list will serve as a tool to ascertain teachers who meet the criteria and a letter will be mailed to them at school. If there is a need for further recruitment, I may need to expand my research to other high schools including Choice, WEIS, and others. I will seek guidance from the Office of Accountability.

Are parent permission forms required? Yes  

If yes, please attach a copy. If the project is approved, a list of students whose parents have signed parent permission forms must be provided to the Office of Accountability before administering tests or questionnaires.

List the facilities need at each school (tables, chairs, rooms, etc.) If the teacher chooses to have the interview in their classroom, the room is all that is required.

How will the results of this study be reported and to whom? This study is part of my doctoral work, it will be a written dissertation. A copy will be shared with the Highline School District and findings can be presented to interested parties in the district.

Highline Public Schools values the process of conducting research studies and surveys. Accordingly, as the principal investigator you agree to the terms and will provide the following information that accompanies this application.

- A brief summary of your research proposal or dissertation prospectus, if applicable, or a complete description of this research project or study. (Appendix A)
- A copy of questionnaires, forms, tests, and communications which will be distributed to participants. (Appendix B) A parent permission form, if appropriate.
If you are affiliated with a university, please provide your university's approval of your research on human subjects, if it is required by the university. (Appendix C)

- If you are affiliated with an organization, please provide company/agency policy regarding research/data collection on human subjects. (Appendix D)
- Alert the district if results are to be disseminated in any public forum. Include names/media sources that you will release information about the study.
- Submit copies of the results and/or outline of the presentation prior to dissemination.
- Submit copies of reports and findings from the study/research.
- If you are involved in independent or self-directed research, please provide copies.
- Recognize the value of individual's time and commit to minimizing the impact on district staff/operations.
- Plan on how you will communicate with teachers, principals and district personnel before, during and after the study.
- Completion of the Highline Public School Approval to conduct Studies and Survey Forms.
- Completion of the Highline Public School Data Sharing Agreement Form.

If the study is conducted to fulfill the requirements for an advanced degree, investigators must provide the Office of Accountability with a copy of the thesis or dissertation.

As an applicant to conduct a research study in Highline Public Schools, I agree to abide by the conditions of this application should it be approved.

Signature: [Signature]
Date: May 5, 2017

Action taken by the Office of Accountability
APPROVED subject to the conditions stated below

NOT APPROVED

Conditions:

Signature of Chief Accountability Officer - Office of Accountability
Date: 5/18/17
NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION

Date: June 9, 2017  IRB CPS17-05-01
Principal Investigator(s): Yufeng 'Jennifer' Qian Christie Brown
Department: Doctor of Education Program
            College of Professional Studies
Address: 20 Belvidere
         Northeastern University
Title of Project: Examining Urban High School Teacher Perceptions of the District Promise that Students are Know by Name Strength and Need
Participating Sites: Highline permission forthcoming

DHHS Review Category: Expedited #6, #7
Informed Consents: One (1) signed consent form
Monitoring Interval: 12 months

APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: JUNE 8, 2018

Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.
C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

Nan C. Regina, Director
Human Subject Research Protection

Northeastern University FWA #4630