VOICES OF PACIFIC ISLAND NATIONS
EDUCATION+WISDOM=ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES

TOFASAILI:
EDUCATIONAL RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS IN PACIFIC ISLANDER STUDENTS
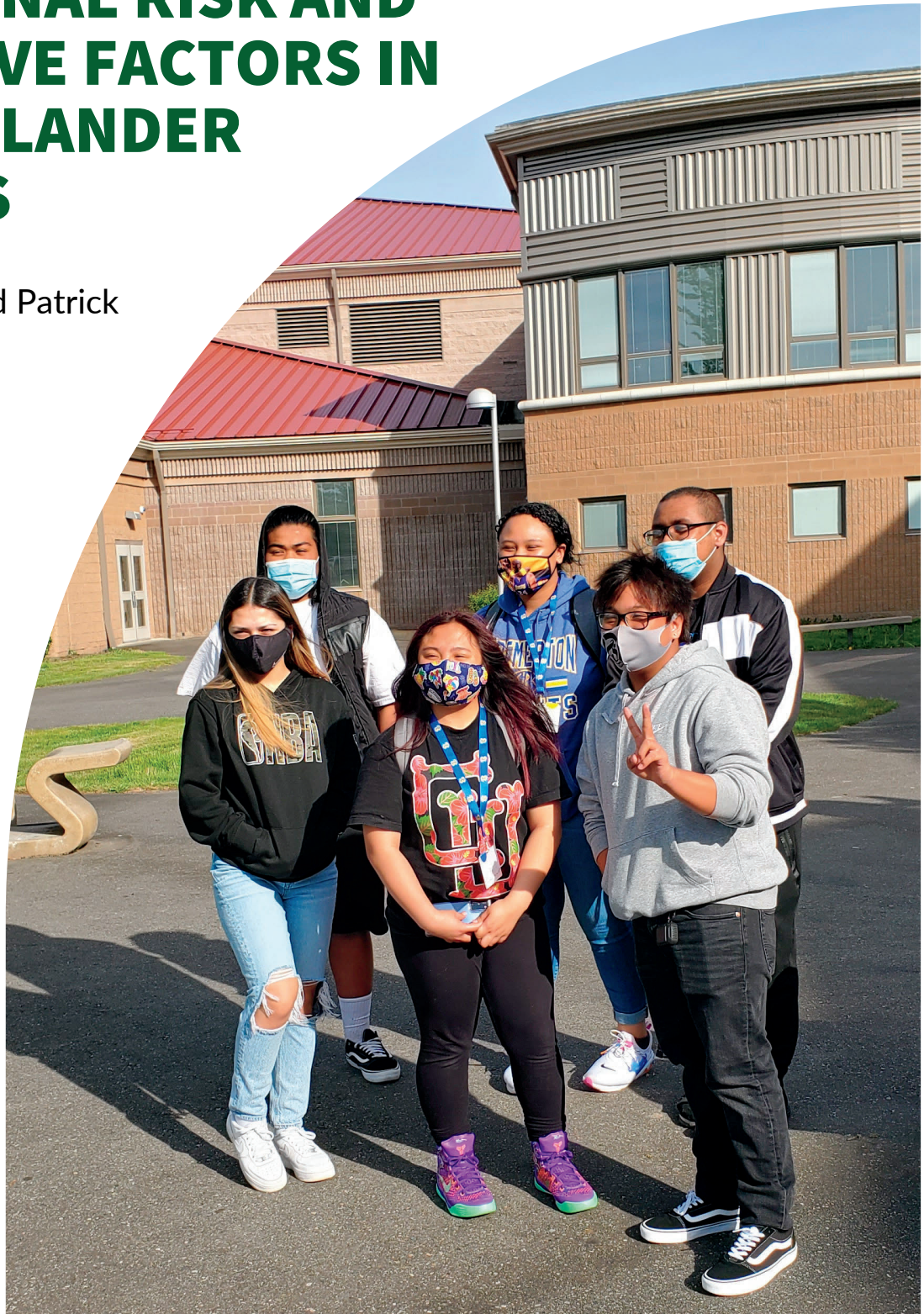
By Joy Lile, Ph.D. and Patrick Woo-Ching, MPA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Voices of Pacific Island Nations (VOPIN) is a Kitsap County-based 501.C.3 non-profit dedicated to improving academic outcomes for Pacific Islander (PI) students. In 2017, VOPIN partnered with Washington State University Extension (WSU) Extension of Kitsap County to study and understand how to support and serve PI students and families, based on longstanding data documenting lower than average academic achievement in PI students. This report explores specific needs and strengths that PI students and families present, and offers recommendations for policy and programming to address them.

BACKGROUND

Combining Asian American (AA) and Pacific Islander students into one category in demographic and academic data has had the unintentional consequence of falsely representing the academic standing of PI students. After academic data was disaggregated in the 2010s, it became clear that PI students have significantly lower academic standing when compared to their AA and White peers. This study builds on past research suggesting that PI students experience cultural duality between home and school settings, and presents *risks and protective factors* (i.e. factors contributing to or detracting from success) for PI students in school settings.

METHODS

This study used the Community-Based Participatory Research approach to build partnership between researchers and community members. The research sample included forty (40) parents and students who participated in group or individual interviews. The results were coded and used to develop themes to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Protective Factors were identified within the family context, including parents' *High Value of Education* and cultural values of *Interdependence*, *Respect*, *Discipline*, *Pride*, and *Strength*. Protective factors also existed within family-school interactions, including *Concrete and Emotional Support from parents*, *Parents' Engagement in School*, *Student-Teacher Connections*, and *Diverse and Welcoming Schools*.

Risk Factors that were positioned within the family context or family-school interactions included parents' views of the *Child's responsibility for learning*, parents' *Difficulty navigating school*, feeling *Between cultures*, and financial needs including *Basic Needs* and *Paying for College*. Educational risk factors rooted in the school context included *Racism in School*, *Discipline*, *Language*, and *Lack of Student-Teacher Connection*. Results also included *Programming Recommendations* from parents and students about the types of cultural, educational, mentoring, financial, and other programs they think would help PI students.

DISCUSSION

The results connect to and expand upon the idea of *cultural duality*. Cultural factors in the home and school, including relationships and support from families and school staff, provided protection for student academic outcomes. Culture-school and family-school interactions were sometimes a source of risk, when there was a clash of cultures and students felt that one had to be minimized or neglected. The *Racism as a Root Cause* approach helps to frame recommendations for enhancing equity in student outcomes.

AAPI 2019 | Samoan Ava Cerem
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INTRODUCTION

Voices of Pacific Island Nations (VOPIN) is a community-based nonprofit focusing on the equity and inequality that Washington State and Kitsap County's Pacific Islander (PI) population currently endure. VOPIN is committed to inspiring Pacific Islander students and families by providing high-quality, culturally responsive services and resources to eliminate educational and opportunity inequities. VOPIN serves as a bridge to develop strong relationships between schools, students, parents, and the community.

The Tofasaili project was conceived as a research partnership to better understand the needs of PI students and their families related to education and cultural representation in schools. Tofasaili means *to study* or *to take a close look* in Samoan. As a strengths-based project, we endeavor to bring the strengths of PI cultures and families into the school system, so that students may benefit from school-community-family collaboration. VOPIN seeks to help facilitate this collaboration and improve educational outcomes for students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THIS PROJECT INCLUDED THE FOLLOWING:
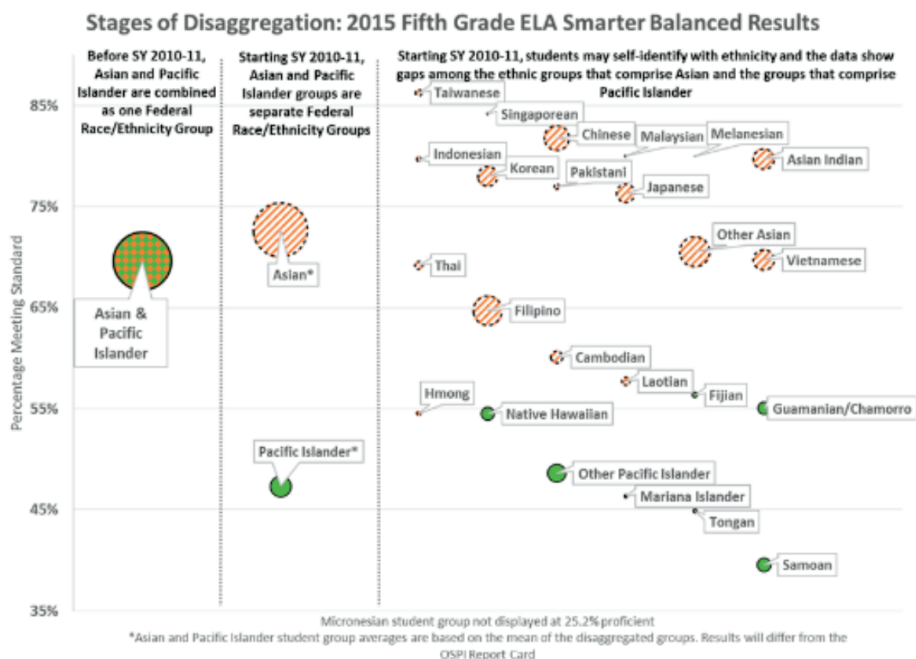
1. What does the school system/community do well to engage PI families/students?
2. What does healthy, thriving community engagement look like for PI students and families?
3. What are the effects of PI cultural practices/mores/traditions on PI student/family engagement?
4. How do we bring the strengths of PI cultural identity/practice to support student academic outcomes?

BACKGROUND

 The peoples of the Pacific Islands possess a rich cultural heritage marred by colonialism, resource exploitation, forced annexation, and lack of political and economic capitol.[1] These factors lead to high rates of emigration to the continental United States, where socioeconomic status, language barriers, and racism lead to educational, health, and economic disparities. Asian American (AA) and PI families emigrate from very different socioeconomic situations in their countries of origin and experience differing levels of racial, social, ethnic, and language barriers and prejudices in the US. Combining AA and PI identities into one category obscured these disparities. It was not until 1997 that the US Office of Management and Budget created the racial category of Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (NHPI), which unmasked many of the disparities that PI immigrants experience. Other systems have since adopted disaggregation as well.

In the US, students from Pacific Islander (PI) immigrant families experience low academic achievement compared to other groups.[2] The apparent challenges of PI students in American educational systems have led to some reforms at the state and federal levels. For some time, PI and AA students were combined in educational data collection, which hid disparities for PI students.[2] The Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) disaggregated PI and Asian American data in 2010, finding that Asian American students experienced high academic achievement which masked low achievement and high risks for PI students.[3] Disaggregated data has led to improvements in students services for PI students, but more work is needed to overcome disparities.[2] Figure 1 shows the stages of disaggregation that unveiled the extent of educational disparities for PI students in Washington state, based on OSPI's data.

Stages of Disaggregation: 2015 Fifth Grade ELA Smarter Balanced Results

1.deGuzman, J.-P., Peredo Flores, A., Kaupalolo, K., Sasaki, C., Vaughn, K., & Pualani Warren, J. (2011). The Possibilities for Pacific Islander Studies in the Continental United States. Amerasia Journal, 37(3), 149–161. https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.37.3.2207417761165n42
2.Nguyen, B.-M., Nguyen, M. H., & Nguyen, T.-L. K. (2013). Advancing the Asian American and Pacific Islander Data Quality Campaign. Asian American Policy Review, 24, 55–67.
3.National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE). (2015). The Hidden Academic Opportunity Gaps Among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: What Disaggregated Data Reveals in Washington State. iCount. Retrieved from http://capaa.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/iCount-WA-Report.pdf

In 2008, the disaggregation of data on Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) collected by the Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)[4] began to show specific disparities in student outcomes that were masked by grouping high-achieving and a low-achieving students together. Fifteen percent of Native Hawaiians and 7.2% of Samoans in Washington held a bachelor's degree in 2013, compared to 32% of residents statewide.[3] In 2013, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students made up 11.9% of the AAPI category in Washington state and yet accounted for 22.3% of special education placement and 51.5% of disciplinary actions in the AAPI group.[3] PI students experience lower grade level testing in Math and English, higher chronic absenteeism, and lower graduation rates than their Asian American or White counterparts. These disparities impact the family unit and exacerbate high generational poverty rates for the Pacific Islander community. PI households in Washington state have a lower household income than the state average ($52,515 compared to $58,592 in 2013).[3] With over 11,000 PI students in the state of Washington in 2015,[5] PIs are one of the fastest growing racial minority groups in the state,[2] so solving these academic problems for PI students could have large-scale impacts on poverty and inequality in the region.

THEORETICAL LENS

This project also borrows a *Risk* and *Protective Factor* framework[6] from prevention science. Risk and protective factors are those that either erode or buffer the likelihood of positive outcomes in individual health and development. In this model, negative outcomes can be prevented by reducing or eliminating risk factors and enhancing protective factors. While this study is strengths-based, meaning that we focus on the strengths of individuals and families to support themselves, it also includes an analysis of the risks that may lead to poor educational outcomes, so that we may work to prevent them and enhance the protective factors that lead to student success.

AAPI 2019 / Samoan Ava Ceremony
Feiu Talala Project / Kitsap Regional Library / WSU Extension

2. Nguyen, B.-M., Nguyen, M. H., & Nguyen, T.-L. K. (2013). Advancing the Asian American and Pacific Islander Data Quality Campaign. Asian American Policy Review, 24, 55–67.

3. National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education (CARE). (2015). The Hidden Academic Opportunity Gaps Among Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders: What Disaggregated Data Reveals in Washington State. iCount. Retrieved from http://capaa.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/iCount-WA-Report.pdf

4. Washington State Commission on Asian Pacific American Affairs. (2017). Data. Retrieved from: http://capaa.wa.gov/data/

5. State of Washington Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2015). 2011-2015 Statewide Detailed Race/Ethnicity Enrollment. Retrieved from: http://www.k12.wa.us/dataadmin/EthnicityEnrollment.aspx

6. Hawkins JD, Catalano RF, Arthur MW. Promoting science-based prevention in communities. Addict Behav. 2002 Nov-Dec;27(6):951-76. doi: 10.1016/s0306-4603(02)00298-8. PMID: 12369478.

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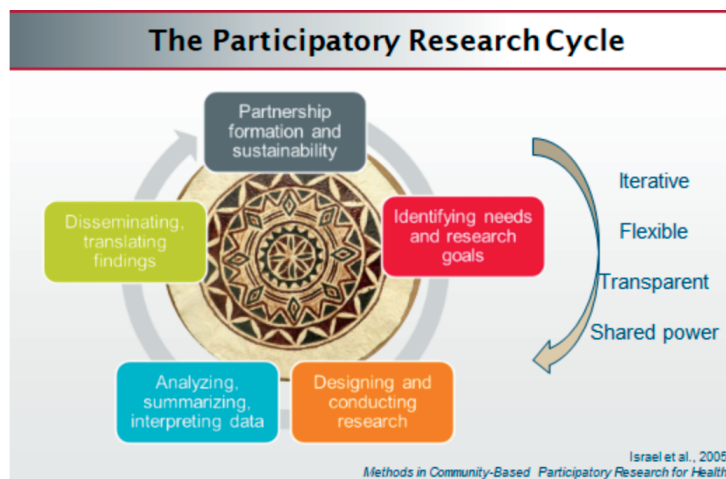
RISKS AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Some literature has been collected on the educational experiences of PI students. Educational risk factors for PI students include stereotypes about the ideal Pacific Islander, difficulty with acculturation, limited English fluency, poverty, and communication gaps between the school and family.[7,8,9] Acculturation theory suggests that *cultural duality* may play a role in low PI student achievement, due to a clash between expectations of the family and the American education system around interdependence and the importance of family over individual goals.[10,11]

Protective factors include cultural pride, traditions like *fa'samoa* (The Samoan Way), supportive peer and family groups, and cultural values of love, respect, reciprocity, and education.[7,11,9] Strong student-teacher relationships and tutoring programs can help students navigate school successfully. This study seeks to understand whether and how PI residents of Washington experience educational risk and protective factors, and what types of programming and supports community members would like to see.

METHODS

Tofasaili was conducted through a partnership that originally included Voices of the Pacific Island Nations (VOPIN) and Washington State University (WSU). Joy Lile, the WSU researcher, changed employers but continued to serve on the VOPIN board and work on the project as a volunteer researcher. Patrick Woo-Ching, Kuini Woo-Ching, Poasa Fa'aita, and Anthony Laguren all served as volunteer researchers on the project, and are also volunteers and/or board members of VOPIN. Joy Lile identifies as white, and the other researchers identify as Samoan and Filipino. Other VOPIN board members supported the project and participated in brainstorms and discussion about methods and results.

Tofasaili is a research partnership based in the principles of Community-Based Participatory Research.[12] Participatory research is an approach, rather than a method, that describes how partnerships and engagement with community drive the research process. CBPR engages community partners to identify community needs, collect and analyze data, and convey findings to stakeholders. The image below describes the Participatory Research Cycle.

The Participatory Research Cycle

Partnership formation and sustainability

Disseminating, translating findings

Identifying needs and research goals

Analyzing, summarizing, interpreting data

Designing and conducting research

Iterative

Flexible

Transparent

Shared power

Israel et al., 2005

Methods in Community-Based Participatory Research for Health

7. Calvin, J. R., Beale, R. L., & Moore, K. (2017). Acculturation and Allied Contributing Factors that Further Advance Cross-Cultural Management Learning and Education: A conceptual approach. Journal of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict, 21(2), 1–11.
8. Vakalahi, H. (2009). Pacific Islander American students: Caught between a rock and a hard place? Children and Youth Services Review, 31(12), 1258–1263. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2009.05.011
9. Yeh, C. J., Borrero, N. E., & Tito, P. (2013). Family and cultural predictors of depression among Samoan American middle and high school students. Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development, 41(2), 96–107. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2013.00030.x
10. Godinet, M. T. (1999). Exploring a theoretical model of delinquency with Samoan adolescents. PhD Dissertation. UMI.
11. Vakalahi, H., & Godinet, M. (2009). Family and Culture, and the Samoan Youth. Journal of Family Social Work, 11(3), 229–253. https://doi.org/10.1080/10522150802292319
12. Israel, B., Eng, E., Schulz, A. J., Parker, E. A., Satcher, D., & more, & 2. (2005). Methods in Community-Based Participatory Research for Health (1 edition). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Tofasaili partners took a strengths-based approach to formulate recommendations for educational policies and programs at the district and state level.This partnership began with initial meetings between WSU and VOPIN, during which the idea for a needs assessment to better understand the reasons behind educational disparities for PI students emerged as a priority. The partner organizations then created an MOU and applied for a seed grant to pursue the project. The MOU included ex-officio representation on the VOPIN board. Board members discussed research goals and questions and designed focus group questions at board meetings. All researchers participated in conducting the research and facilitating discussion with research participants, and in the analysis and dissemination of findings. This process continues to live up to Israel's description of the Participatory Research Cycle as findings have informed VOPIN's strategic plan and further needs assessment and evaluation, and as Dr. Lile has joined VOPIN's board as an official (rather than ex-officio) member.

Data were collected from 43 participants including a majority Samoan, five Filipino, one Tongan, and one Guamanian individual. Three volunteers signed consent forms but did not participate. The remaining 9 youth and 31 adults included 19 high school and college students and 21 parents or adult family members of students. Data were collected at 4 locations around the Puget Sound (see fig. 3) including focus groups with the following:

- A community college multicultural center
- A high school AAPI club
- A Catholic Church
- Multiple family groups
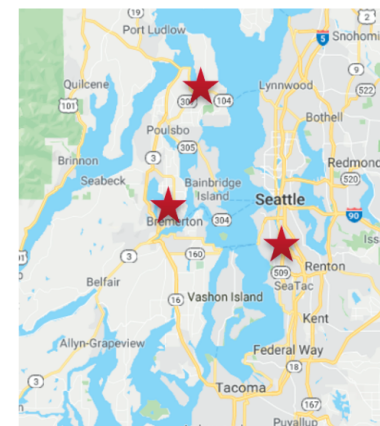
Data also included 1:1 interviews, with the same sets of questions as the focus groups. Youth were aged 13 and older, and with family consent, children in families were interviewed separately from parents - either alone or in groups. One focus group and some interviews were conducted in Samoan, with project volunteers supporting translation and interpretation.

The project was approved by the WSU Internal Review Board and funded through a WSU seed grant and additional VOPIN funding from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Data were collected from May 2018 to March 2019. Data were audio-recorded and transcribed. Volunteers supported transcription and translation of data from Samoan to English.

Analysis was conducted through an open coding/thematic analysis process.[13] Research partners reviewed transcripts and discussed themes together. Joy Lile then developed a coding system and applied it to the data, which was reviewed for validity by the other participants. Reliability was high, but in a small number of cases, VOPIN volunteers' perspectives on coding were prioritized, and Tofasaili research partners continue to review all reports and findings together for validity.

13. Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory (3rd ed..). Sage Publications.

RESULTS

Emergent themes included risk and protective factors within school and family systems. Protective and risk factors were grouped by the ecological contexts in which they play out - within the family and the family's cultural context, and within interactions that families and students have in the school context. Existing and desired programs are also described, so that these findings may directly support new prevention and intervention activities.

PROTECTIVE FACTORS: FAMILY CULTURE

Protective factors within the family culture were aspects of culture and family dynamics that were viewed as strengths by the participants, and which encouraged success for students and their families.

Code	Total	Percent	Parent total	Parent %	Student total	Student %
High value of education	31	78%	17	**81%**	14	**74%**
Culture: Interdependence	26	65%	14	**67%**	12	**63%**
Culture: Respect	14	35%	9	43%	5	26%
Culture: Discipline	10	25%	9	43%	1	5%
Culture: Pride	8	20%	4	19%	4	21%
Culture: Tradition	7	18%	3	14%	4	21%
Culture: Strength	4	10%	2	10%	2	11%

HIGH VALUE ON EDUCATION

A large majority of parents and students placed a **high value on education** as an important goal in life. Students spoke about their parents being supportive of finishing education, while many parents answered the question, "What is your hope for your children?" with statements about successfully completing high school and education. This answer was also echoed for students to the question, "What is your hope for yourself?" A few parents pointed out that sports were valuable because students had to maintain good grades to participate, and several Filipino students said that their parents pushed them into the medical field.

"I have five boys, all graduated high school, with two pursuing tertiary education. I have two grandkids, and one on the way. One main reason why I decided to leave Samoa and migrate here was for my children to have more opportunities for success."
- A15/parent

INTERDEPENDENCE

The most widely cited cultural value was **interdependence**, and participants spoke to close-knit communities, the importance of family, a strong sense of reciprocity, and the importance of their church as a cultural and service institution. A strong sense of reciprocity or "exchange" with the community was sited - of offering help when needed, and knowing that help would be there when they need it. The importance of family was also a main theme. Some students said that they liked their PI peers at school because they are "like family", and valued education so that they could support their family. Some families valued interdependence so much that it could be a hindrance on education - students and parents talked about the difficulty leaving family to pursue higher education, because they lacked social supports when they moved away for college. Some adults also talked about their experiences putting family before education by working to support their own children rather than pursuing higher degrees.

"Family is the number one thing... God and family ... Is a very big thing."
- Y03/HS Student

"The goal for myself is to continue to be a good father to them and to be a good father in our household, and continue to be a good head of the family. To be a good member of the Samoan community in the Catholic Church."
- A11 /parent

RESPECT

Participants valued **respect** for elders and parents, and respect overlapped with interdependence as the reason to help give back to one's community. Respect was related to independence, because "nobody is better than the other person, nobody" (A13). Students were respectful of their parents' decisions, as is expected in PI culture: "It's not my decision to tell them to do stuff…" (Y09). Adults spoke about the importance of being role models and living up to the respect they received.

"Pacific Islanders are smart and well-mannered people. I always talk to my kids about showing respect to elders in the community, their teachers and respect themselves as well."
- A02/Parent

DISCIPLINE

Discipline and proper behavior was held in high regard by parents, some of whom thought that schools needed to better discipline students or that more communication about discipline was needed between schools and parents. Some parents thought that physical punishment was needed to properly enforce discipline, while some rejected this tactic. Many agreed that parents and schools needed to work together to better communicate discipline to children.

"Back home, where we come from, we involve our culture with the school system. We involve home training together with education at the school place, back home. You sit down when you talk to me, you don't talk back to me. Even though that's home training, but it is applied back in our school back home. Whereas here, they don't practice that."
– A11/Parent

PRIDE

Pride in one's self, family, and culture were important to some participants, which came along with both pride in cultural heritage, but also in a sense of independence outside of one's smaller community. Interdependence and reciprocity with one's smaller community was balanced with the sense that PI communities are somewhat isolated, and outside of these small circles it's challenging to ask for help because it might reflect poorly on one's people and culture.

I know it is difficult for our PI parents, but we need to be open-minded and always ask for help or reach out to others in the community for help."
– A14/Parent

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TRADITION & STRENGTH

Linked with pride in ones' culture was also a value of **tradition**, of remembering the past and using it to teach youth and pass along culture. Traditional also meant carrying the culture forward into the future.

"You want the best for your kids and you want their culture and where they are from, who they are. And you want the best for them. That's the most important that they know that you're doing the best for them and some. And it's not just for them, but for their families in the future and for the future of their family in the future."
- A13, grandparent

Finally, **strength** was cited as a value and a cultural characteristic, but not in a culturally stereotypical way. PI individuals spoke about their people being strong, both physically and mentally, but how strength is balanced by respect and interdependence. Participants spoke about how they work to combat stereotyped views about PI's aggression and achievement in sports with the understanding that they are also kind, loving, and caring. One student spoke about how cultural dances show the balance of strength and love:

"We love doing it and it shows that we're [powerful]. When we dance, it shows that we have power in ourselves and we are confident in our dancing and it shows that our Samoan community is not just being aggressive or hard headed. It shows that we're gentle and that we love to do things with other cultures. We also dance with other cultures. So then we combine it and it just shows that we like to be apart with everyone else and be equal."
- Y08/HS student

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PROTECTIVE FACTORS: FAMILY/SCHOOL INTERACTIONS

Protective factors rooted in family/school interactions where those which enabled families to engage in school, and participate in and support their child's learning. Some of these were rooted in the family dynamic, while some were rooted in how the school and student interacted in ways which were both individually and culturally supportive.

Code	Total	Percent	Parent total	Parent %	Student total	Student %
Parents provide concrete help	12	**30%**	6	**29%**	6	**32%**
Parents engaged with child's school	12	**30%**	10	**48%**	2	**11%**
Parents provide emotional support	7	**18%**	7	**33%**	3	**16%**
Strong student-teacher connection	15	**38%**	4	**19%**	11	**58%**
School's diverse and welcoming	8	**20%**	4	**19%**	4	**21%**

Many participants described ways that parents supported their childs' learning. **Concrete support** included helping with homework and being interested and involved with students' grades and plans in school. **Connection** with school included parents seeking out ways to contact and work with teachers, and having relationships with school staff and teachers. **Emotional** and moral support included parents providing "moral support" and talking through challenges with their child, and being generally encouraging to their students.

Concrete support:
      "***On English essays, I go to my mom. Because she's a speech pathologist, so she works with grammar. And I go to her so she can correct the grammar errors in my essays. And that helps me. And cause she re-reads it cause I'm up late doing it, so I'm done with working on it so there's probably a lot of errors and she fixes those.***"
   **-** Y01/HS student
Parent/school connection:
      "***We are aware of apps that parents can check their students' progress in school and I'm proud to say the teachers and school staff know us because we always keep the communication open with them. We know about program like 'Before school reading' is offered in school.***"
                        - A24/parent
Emotional support:
"***Even though my kids go to school to learn and study, but I find that they are always curious to learn more than what is taught at school. We usually have conversation about things in life. I believe in order for any students to succeed in school they need support and encouragement from the parents and families.***"
                        - A02/parent
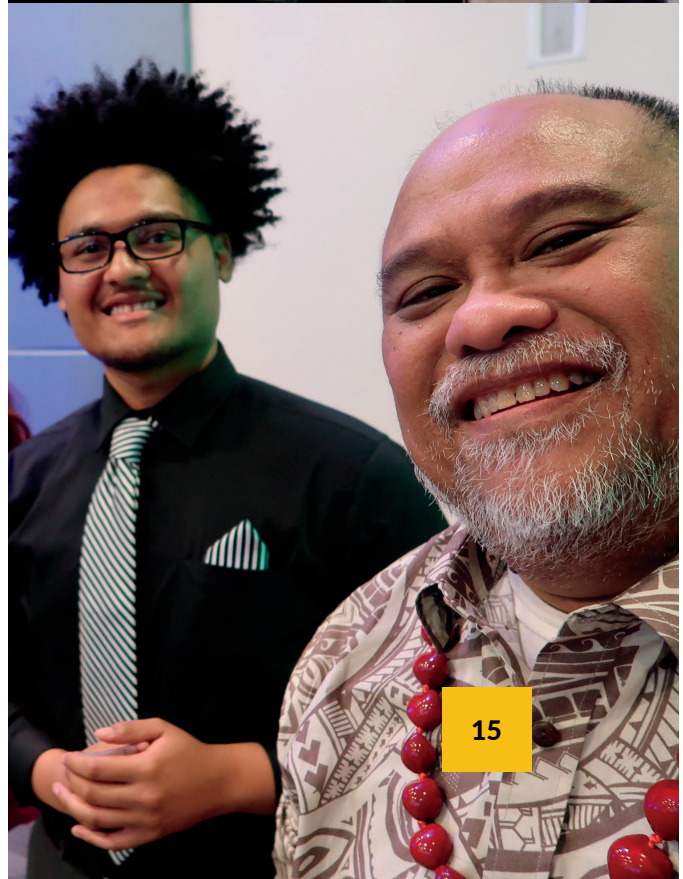
School environments also supported family connection and student learning. Strong **student-teacher relationships** were evident for some participants. Some also spoke about their schools being welcoming and diverse, valuing the unique culture that students and families bring, and having welcoming environments without bullying.


"If you have a problem with an assignment you can walk up to them and ask them about it. And they'll like sit down and help you figure out what you need to do with the assignment...Like half of my teachers that I have currently right now are helpful, they try to create like a bond with the students to get them to like feel like more at home at school."
- Y06/HS Student

"Y02: But now, high school, it's like more mature kind of environment and I actually like going to school. I like it cause it's very diverse and all that. ...It's a very welcoming environment. ..Y01: I feel welcomed at my school too. Cause of friends and I think everyone's nice. Or not everyone but most everyone's nice at my school. ..Y02: Yeah, the teachers at my school are nice. ...Y03: Yeah, same. I feel very welcomed in my school cause I know everybody there and I kind of like mostly friends with everybody...The staff is really nice. I get a long with my teachers, some of my teachers, very well. It makes me feel safe and comfortable."
– Y01,Y02,Y03/HS students
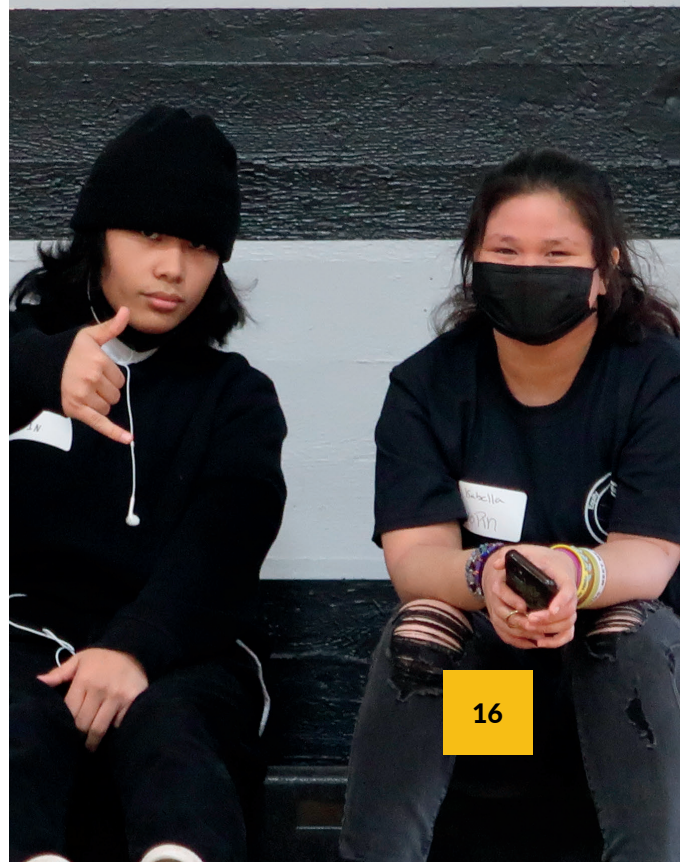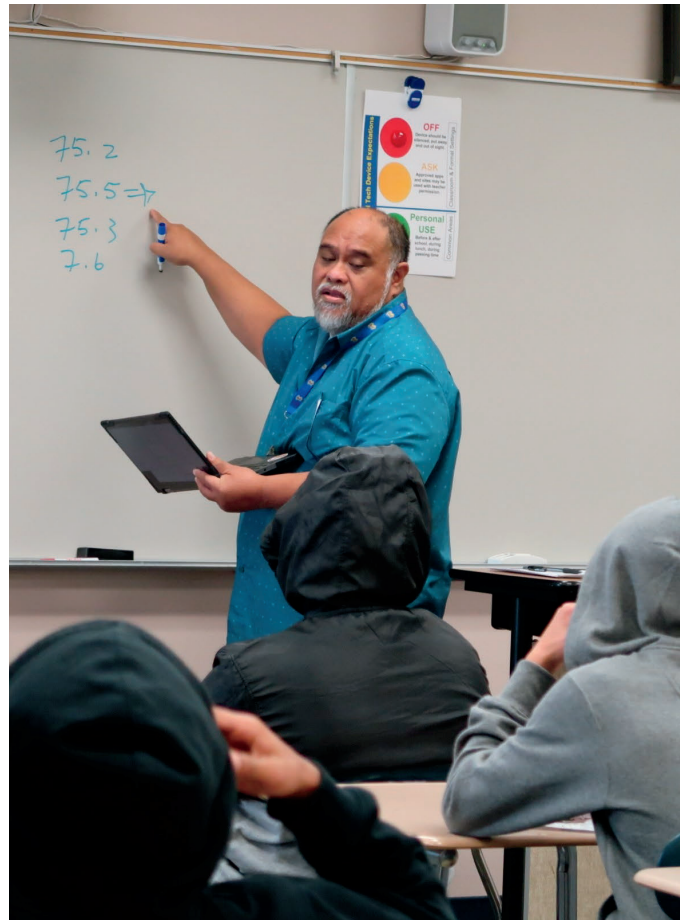
RISK FACTORS: FAMILY CONTEXT

Although the value of education was universally high in these PI families and students, some challenges in the family context and family-school interactions which inhibited students' learning.

Code	Total	Percent	Parent total	Parent %	Student total	Student %
Child's Responsibility for Learning	15	38%	4	19%	11	58%
Parents' Difficulty Navigating School	4	10%	2	10%	2	11%
Between cultures	8	20%	4	19%	4	21%
Meeting Financial Needs	6	15%	3	14%	3	16%
Paying for college	4	10%	2	10%	2	11%
Low value of education	2	5%	0	0%	2	11%

A majority of the students and some of the parents expressed the idea that often, it is considered the **child's responsibility** to engage with education. Many students said that their families did not engage with their schooling. Learning is something that happens outside of the home and, in many cases, outside of the close-knit connections of PI communities. Barriers to family's interest in and support of their children's education included parent's own lack of education and inability to help students learn new skills (like "new ways to do math" and vocabulary words), as well as barriers like language and institutional culture that inhibit parent engagement.

My dad only got into high school and my mom didn't even finish elementary... They didn't help me with schoolwork...I mean I'm doing fine, it's just when I have some questions, I don't think [my parents] would know what I'm talking about.
- A26/CC Student

Our parents, they're not educated on things like the school system, how to help their kids, how to give them the tools they need...they just expect us to go to school and learn.
- A06/Young adult

Culturally, a main barrier to engaging in school for both students and families was a feeling of being "**between**" PI and US mainstream cultures. Several students named groups to which they don't quite fit because of their and their family's immigration history, and confusion about how they identify. Some parents talked about preferring face-to-face interactions with teachers but receiving emails or needing to log onto apps to check student's progress. A few adults and youth spoke about the value of language, and how they lost connection to culture because they do not speak their PI language.

"They were asking what's the difference in America and in our culture. So they ask what kind of food that we eat? I know my kids, they don't understand a lot more about the culture but they try. My oldest son, he always searches. He just Googles it and just writes everything on there and he passes it along with the teacher and the class. So that's what he did. So they kind of like understand and where we're coming from. We're from Pacific Islander and they know what we do in our culture. And I'm trying to, the same thing like working after school, because they always ask me, "What can we do?" Like show them the culture, like dance and all that stuff, but..."
- A12/Parent

One college student spoke about the difference between oral and written cultures and how the value placed on dance, religion, and elders passing on culture is not understood or respected in mainstream US culture. He then went on to describe how he sees PI college students struggling to fit in because of mixed messages about respect and discipline:

"When I first signed up for classes at the community college, I made the mistake of not showing up on the first day of school because of transportation problems, but I didn't give my professor like a heads up, writing her an email that I wouldn't be able to make it on the first day. But then, because I was waiting to go talk to her in person, which is what I prefer, but not having the experience with using that platform ...so I didn't show up to the first day and I got withdrawn from my classes, but then I showed up later and I was able to talk to her. I still didn't get to enter the class...

I think some aspects of our culture is a setback to our students' success in school. Going back to discipline, when our parents talk, we listen and usually are not given a chance to voice our opinions. When students make it to [college], they always have that respect to the professors. When it comes to discussion, our students are hesitant to share opinions or participate in discussion because they don't want to overstep that boundary. They don't want to be seen disrespectful or being authoritative in some situations. Going back to what A22 said, there's no point of having respect and discipline if our students don't have the skills, cannot formulate opinions and ideas to communicate in discussion, and our students find themselves struggling thus setting up for failure.
- Y12/College student

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Financial struggles included meeting basic needs and paying for college, and lack of understanding about how to find support. Families put a lot of energy and time towards getting basic needs met and some did not know how to meet them or to ask for help. Fathers talked about being a "breadwinner" and being unable to engage with education because they needed to work, and students echoed this idea. Some students got support for extracurricular activities through their sports teams or clubs. Many participants described not knowing how to access financial aid or enroll in college, and thinking that it would be the same as high school.

"I: How has your parents supported you at school?...
Y: It's okay for them not to be there, 'cause they have other priorities to do. Like they're working and if they can't come to my thing. That's okay 'cause they have to pay their stuff, so that we can stay under a roof. "
- Y09/HS student

*"**With Y05 transitioning from high school to college...I had no idea.. we thought we should just fill out papers and you go to school...That's not the case. We were actually in the same predicament. This is why he's home. Because we don't have the funds. "***
- A10/parent

Only two students described their parents minimizing the value of education. In one case, an older community college student describes his father pushing him into the Navy rather than college after high school. In another case, a student's family prioritized his church summer program over a paper that he needed to write, which caused conflict. However, with the high value placed on interdependence, religion, family, and respect, there may be other conflicts between school and family which were not described.

RISK FACTORS: SCHOOL CONTEXT

Code	Total	Percent	Parent total	Parent %	Student total	Student %
Racism in school	14	35%	4	19%	10	53%
Discipline	8	20%	5	24%	3	16%
Language	7	18%	3	14%	4	21%
Lack of student-teacher connection	6	15%	1	5%	5	26%

Study participants described risk factors for academic engagement and success within the school context, including experiences of racism and prejudice in school, inequitably enforced discipline, language challenges, and low student-teacher connection.

A majority of students and a few parents described anti-PI racism and/or disconnection from their culture within the school context. Criticisms included teachers' and students' lack of awareness or incorrect assumptions about PI culture and history. Participants' classmates also made assumptions about PI students being good students but poor academic achievers, and students described teachers setting low academic expectations and voicing their opinions about Pacific Islanders' "natural" athletic ability. A smaller number described inconsistent discipline being used against PI students, which was an by-product of racism.

"What I see in my kids' school, PI students are recognized only in sports but very low in academics. It is sad to see that other PI parents prioritize and push their kids in sports only but careless about the students' education. And it's even sadder that some schools and coaches only keep PI students in teams because of their potential and strength in sports but not encouraging the students to study hard."
- A02/Parent

Parents and students disagreed about how they saw discipline issues in the school system. Some parents took issue with what they perceive as a lack of discipline in the classroom, and desired either stronger discipline practices that mirrored what they were used to in their home country, or more connection between the school and the parent about discipline issues, so that they could be more involved in discipline decisions. Students, on the other hand, more often saw discipline disproportionately carried out (as for Y08, above) or they saw how PI students had challenges integrating their own "culture of respect" into the school context.

The following student describes a typical racist microaggression interaction he has seen play out in his classes:

"Something bad happens in class...and the teacher looks straight to that Micronesian, and then they just go off, saying, "This is why you're not passing the class. This is why you never come to class. This is why your parents don't care for you." ...The disrespect in that doesn't make the kids want to come to class. Like, "What? Why would I come to class? Why would I go to school?" ...It all starts from that one comment. "You're just worthless."
- Y08/HS student

The interviewer asked for A01's thoughts about programs or services she feels should be introduced in school. She answered that kids need to be disciplined to show respect towards teachers and to each other...She believes that spanking should be enforced in school, it not only would be beneficial for students to stay focused and keep them out of trouble but discipline them to respect the teachers. She compares growing up in Samoa where discipline and respect is an important aspect of a child's education and it is concerning it is not enforced in our education system here, thus seeing kids acting out.
- A01/Parent (summarized)

Language was cited as a barrier to some families and students. Many students know some English when they immigrate to the United States but their limited English may mask a need for continued English as a Second Language instruction. Some parents also spoke about how they felt their child was testing lower than their actual grade level because of limited English, and wasn't speaking up about being placed in remedial classes or making bad grades because of language barriers.

"PI students face a big hurdle of trying to adapt to school system and making new friends and the big setback is the language barrier...It is a disadvantage to our kids being introduced in the school system without getting any support from their school and at home especially with English courses. So, when the students are being assessed based on testing, they are either held back to a lower grade and being ridiculed or bullied in school, then they resort to fight. Some students just move through the system until their graduation year, but it is too late."
- A20/Parent

Some students also spoke generally about struggling with teachers because they didn't feel connected or engaged with teachers or the school. Sometimes this was described as a general disengagement and lack of interest in school activities, and sometimes it was actively not getting along with a certain teacher or with school staff.

"To be honest, not really involved at school. Like I'm not in any sports or clubs. I kind of just go to school and then I go home...I've been told that I should, I just haven't found interest."
-Y02/ HS Student

PROGRAMMING: DESIRED AND EXISTING

	Desired Programming					
Program type	Total	Total %	Parent total	Parent %	Student total	Student %
Cultural	23	**58%**	8	**38%**	15	**79%**
PI Teachers/ Mentors	10	**25%**	5	**24%**	5	**26%**
Family Connection	8	**20%**	5	**24%**	3	**16%**
Educational	8	**20%**	1	**5%**	7	**37%**
Language	7	**18%**	6	**29%**	1	**5%**
Financial	1	**3%**	1	**5%**	0	**0%**
Religious	0					
Sports	0					
Service	0					
Mentoring	0					

PROGRAMMING: DESIRED AND EXISTING

Program Type	Total	Total %	Parent total	Parent %	Student total	Student %
	Existing Programming					
Cultural	15	38%	5	**24%**	10	**53%**
PI Teachers/ Mentors	3	8%	1	**5%**	2	**11%**
Family Connection	0*	* Parent-school connection is captured in "Parent-School/Well-Connected" above, but no specific program examples were given				
Educational	10	25%	7	**33%**	3	**16%**
Language	2	5%	2	**10%**	0	**0**
Financial	5	13%	4	**19%**	1	**5%**
Religious	10	25%	4	**19%**	6	**32%**
Sports	6	15%	4	**19%**	2	**11%**
Service	3	8%	1	**5%**	2	**11%**
Mentoring	3	8%	2	**10%**	1	**5%**

This study also collected information from parents and students about what kinds of supports and programs they had at school that were appreciated, and what they would like to see more of. Students were more aware of cultural and religious programs than other types, while parents were more aware of educational programs.

"I feel really excited [at our cultural events] because I feel welcomed. It's another me."
- A29/Community College Student

"A huge thing in Filipino and Guam is being Catholic. Yeah, my family is super involved in the church. We always do stuff for mass and stuff, and then my parents always pushed me to volunteer and work with Sunday school, Wednesday school. Mission trips, youth conventions. My parents are "You go to church every Sunday. You put God first, and then school, and then family." It's a huge thing, at least in my part of my culture it is."
- Y14/Community College Student

The most common request was for cultural programs where students could learn about their heritage. Ideas for cultural programs included PI clubs at schools, events and cultural celebrations at the school, and PI culture in the classroom - like learning about PI history as part of school or receiving credit for PI cultural learning like dance, storytelling, and navigation. Educational supports were also desired, like tutoring, parent-teacher connections, and counselors who could do more career and college planning with students rather than just pushing them towards a Bachelor's degree.:

"I suggest...giving credits to students for participating in dancing or learning something in our culture like navigation skills. Because our ancestors were navigators and they didn't just navigate the vast ocean without understanding astronomy."
- Y12/HS student

I: You mentioned something about study groups in PI. What else do you wanna see in a PI other than the dances? Y02: Just making sure that other PI students are doing well in school and they're on top of all their work and getting everything done. Make sure that they're studying and all that. But I feel like study sessions would help with that.
- Y02/HS student

Fetu Taiala Project / Kits

Parents thought that language programs would be valued, although the students in this study were not as concerned with language supports. Support for language programs included both more ESL supports, and some parents who advocated for Samoan or other language programs in the school system.

Many parents also desired more family connection with the schools, including support with things like navigating the school system, helping their children with homework, and open communication from counselors about how their child is doing in school. Only one family spoke about the need for more financial support or education, specifically.

"I suggest introducing Samoan language in the curriculum at high school levels. It is more like other languages like Spanish, Filipino are offered at school. It would be nice to see that being pushed to policy makers to have Samoan language as an elective for language credit. I know it would be beneficial for kids who were born here, but also our kids who just moved from the islands."
- A22/parent

"There are times my kids don't share things that happened at school until the teacher notifies us. And when I confront them about it, they respond that I always yell at them and they feel intimidated and not wanting to tell us. So, I wanted to ask for any help for parents that want to have a better open communication with their kids. I want my kids to feel comfortable and trusting to share with us. I know they are thriving in school but somehow I feel they don't share everything with us."
- A23/parent

Some parents and students thought that hiring more PI staff at the schools who could serve as mentors and role models would be useful, because it would provide more trusting connections with students and more people who could lead PI clubs so that students wouldn't have to. Some students noted that burnout was associated with leading PI clubs, because they felt they had to do it all themselves and didn't have an adult mentor.

I think, just having role models, Pacific Islander role models, be there to help me out, and to show that there's other people like me, a Samoan that's succeeding in life would help me and other students.
- Y12/HS student

DISCUSSION

Being a Community-Based Participatory Research project, the aim of this study was to produce real and valuable insights on the needs of PI students and families around the Puget Sound. However, connections to previous literature and theory are also clear. The discussion is separated into two main sections: 1) a discussion of how these results fit into past theory and what they say more broadly about the strengths and needs of PI students and families, and 2) recommendations for specific programming and supports that VOPIN might adopt to bring the strengths of PI culture into educational systems.

INTERCONNECTED COMMUNITIES

The strengths of Pacific Islander students and their families in navigating the culture and systems of the United States lay in interconnected and mutually caring communities. PI parents in this study had a strong desire for their children to succeed, and participants spoke of their families and culture with a sense of interdependence, respect, and pride. Eighty-five percent (34) of participants expressed alignment with one or more of the cultural strengths described in this study.

In cases where the family and student's sense of "community" extended to the school, the interconnectedness brought supports that helped students thrive. Families who felt well-connected to the school were able to call or go online to check their students' grades and interact with teachers. Some parents prided themselves on how much they knew about their child's progress and how they presented as a "united front" with teachers when discipline or grade issues arose. Parents described differences between different schools' willingness to reach out to them, and also how they became more engaged with the school as their second and third children grew up because the connections were strengthened. These experiences show that it is not a parental "trait" to be more or less connected to school, rather that it's an outcome that can be impacted by the actions of teachers and school staff.

For the students, a sense of community and school included close connections with teachers, a welcoming and supportive environment without bullying and racism, and cultural clubs where they could express their cultural identity. Even in situations where PI students might be singled out with stale stereotypes about PI people, like on sports teams or in dance troupes, interconnectedness and a sense of mutuality helped them connect these experiences with education - as in the coach who cares about education and wants to be a role model to students, or the dance troupe where students get to interact with members of other cultures and show how their physical strength is interwoven with respect, compassion, and interdependence. In a few cases, caring mentors who were also part of the PI community supported students' connections with these activities, but this experience was missing from many students' stories.

CULTURAL DUALITY

While some PI families felt supported by the school, many students felt a sense of being "between cultures" and feeling challenged when cultural concepts and mindsets did not translate between the home and school contexts. The results align with and build upon the idea of "cultural duality" for PI students and families struggling with integration in the dominant American culture.[10,11] From the lens of bioecological systems theory, we can see family-school interactions and their impacts on youth at the "exosystem" level. When barriers are in place that prevent the family and the school from interacting in ways that support the student, the family can be cut off from the students' learning experiences and the school can be cut off from the strengths of PI culture. More focus on how the school is interacting with and supporting the whole family - not just the student - will build stronger institutions that feel more like "community" to families.

Both youth and families desired to show respect and engagement in education, but the ways in which some showed respect to teachers (avoiding eye contact, allowing the other to speak, not asking questions) may be interpreted by teachers as disengagement or apathy.[11] Other challenges of moving between cultures included differences between "oral" and "written" cultures, sense of time, and the importance of face-to-face interactions. Difficulties with cultural navigation resulted in real barriers like missing important deadlines and failing to identify or advocate for unique educational needs.

Language barriers added another layer to cultural navigation, and sometimes the need for ESL or translation went un-met because PI families did not know how to advocate for themselves or their children.

While participants valued education highly, some parents saw pursuing education as the child's sole responsibility rather than something requiring parental support, or they did not know how to support their children. Many provided "moral" support but could not provide the specific concrete support (homework help, talking to teachers, attending meetings) that children needed because of their own low education level or the financial needs of their household. Parents in the study perceived that they were providing high levels of school engagement and emotional support for their childs' education, but students' perspectives highlighted their teachers' roles in providing support more than their parents'.

Some parents were not engaged in school settings. This can cause conflict with the American education system, where individual families are expected to advocate for their children and often need to navigate complex systems to get their educational needs met. An inability to navigate educational systems can lead to future class divides in a self-perpetuating cycle, similar to the families that Annette Lareau describes in *Unequal Childhoods*.[14] The educational environment does not feel like a "community" to some of the PI families in this sample, rather like an impenetrable and inflexible institution that will not slow down or change course to meet their needs.

10. Godinet, M. T. (1999). Exploring a theoretical model of delinquency with Samoan adolescents. PhD Dissertation. UMI.
11. Vakalahi, H., & Godinet, M. (2009). Family and Culture, and the Samoan Youth. Journal of Family Social Work, 11(3), 229–253.
14. Lareau, Annette. (2003). Unequal childhoods : class, race, and family life. Berkeley :University of California Press

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RACIAL BIAS AND INEQUITIES

Racism was a central concern in this study, especially for students. Students experienced both direct and indirect bias and microaggressions. Some described how racist interactions left them feeling angry and isolated, which can lead to mental health challenges, misplaced aggression at injustice in the classroom, and increased disciplinary action.

Racist discipline practices in which school staff target PI students directly serve to create a negative spiral of racism, externalizing behaviors, and punitive responses. Because of their darker skin and cultural heritage in native cultures that prize strength, there is a mis-conception that PI people, especially young males, are aggressive. As of 2019, disciplinary rates for PI students are nearly twice of the rates for their White peers, over 30% higher than the rate for all students. This[15] was a damaging stereotype for many students in this study, and led some to disengage from school or extracurriculars - trying to keep their head down. These stereotypes can be self-perpetuating, because disengagement from school via racialized marginalization can lead individuals to delinquency out of a lack of other options for self- and community-preservation. Interestingly, some parents said that they wanted their children to be disciplined more at school - reflecting a disconnect between what the school and the family might consider "effective discipline". Few schools address racial bias head-on and work to un-do the harms of anti-Black, anti-Indigenous, and anti-immigrant racism in educational systems.
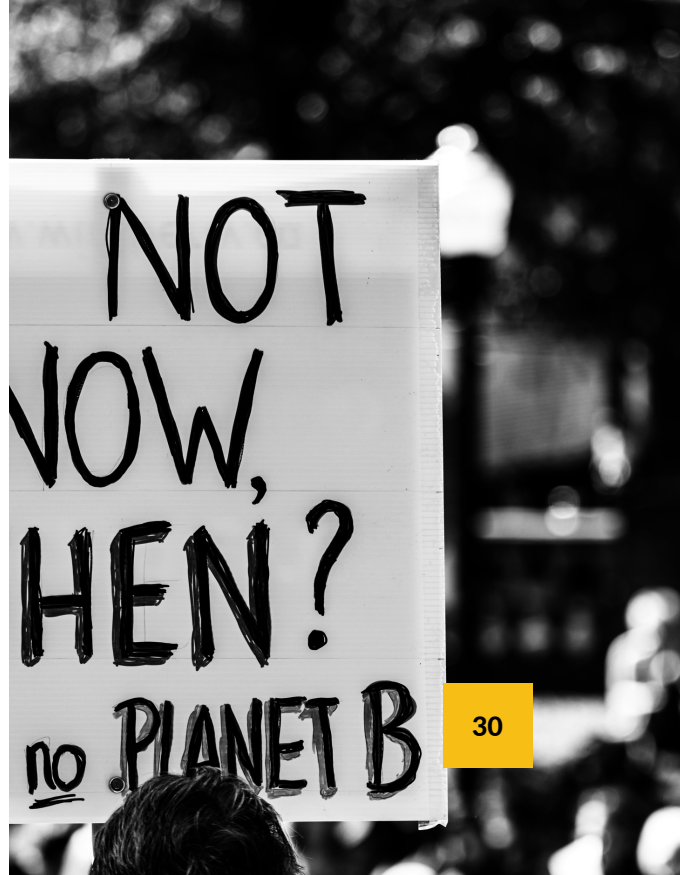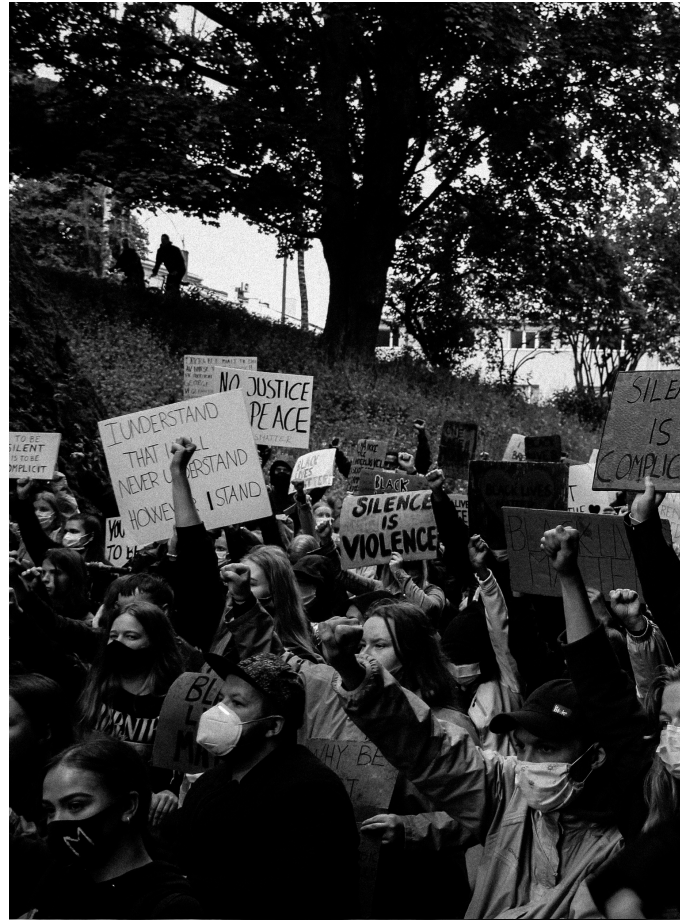
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Several parents and students in this study described a desire for school staff who reflect PI racial and cultural heritage. Though PI residents remain a small minority in Washington state, they are still under-served and under-represented as staff in educational and other systems which support students and families, partially due to low educational attainment in a competitive job market. Poverty is a challenge for PI residents, which is entangled with low educational attainment as both a cause and an outcome. While this study did not ask participants directly about their economic status, 20% of participants spoke about challenges with meeting basic needs, supporting students with extracurriculars, or paying for college. When parents have to work overtime or non-standard hours to meet their family's basic needs, connecting with school and engaging in their child's education may take a lower priority. Addressing poverty for PI families may play a role in increasing educational attainment and parent-school connection for PI students.

The *Racism as a Root Cause* approach[16] has gained traction in public health and prevention fields recently, and helps to contextualize the findings of this study. This approach to intervention design is suggested for use whenever a negative health or social outcome is experienced disproportionately by a racial minority, as is the case for PI students in the US education system.

The approach outlines four components of successful intervention: "(1) prioritize a specific, racialized group for a precise, rather than universal, impact" (as VOPIN does already by targeting supports at PI students and their families); "(2) work to change policies, systems, or environments, as opposed to changing people; (3) be institutionalized and sustainable to create a long-term impact; and (4) repair historical injustices by shifting resources, power, and opportunities to racially marginalized groups" (i.e. build capacity in agencies and community settings that are for and by PI students, families, and community members.) The final point in this approach is cited as an attempt at "reparations", or repairing past harms and inequities with differential investments in services, supports, and concrete needs for communities which are historical and current victims of racist systems. Program recommendations emerging from this study align with these components and ask educational systems to make targeted, sustained, systemic, and reparative investments in PI families and communities to improve racial equity.

16. Malawa Z, Gaarde J, Spellen S. Racism as a Root Cause Approach: A New Framework. Pediatrics. 2021 Jan;147(1):e2020015602. doi: 10.1542/peds.2020-015602. PMID: 33386339.

PROGRAMMING RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study lead to several recommendations for programming for both VOPIN and for local and state-wide educational systems. These recommendations are grouped together, in recognition that educational systems should work with grass-roots cultural organizations to address equity challenges and create more inclusive environments for students.
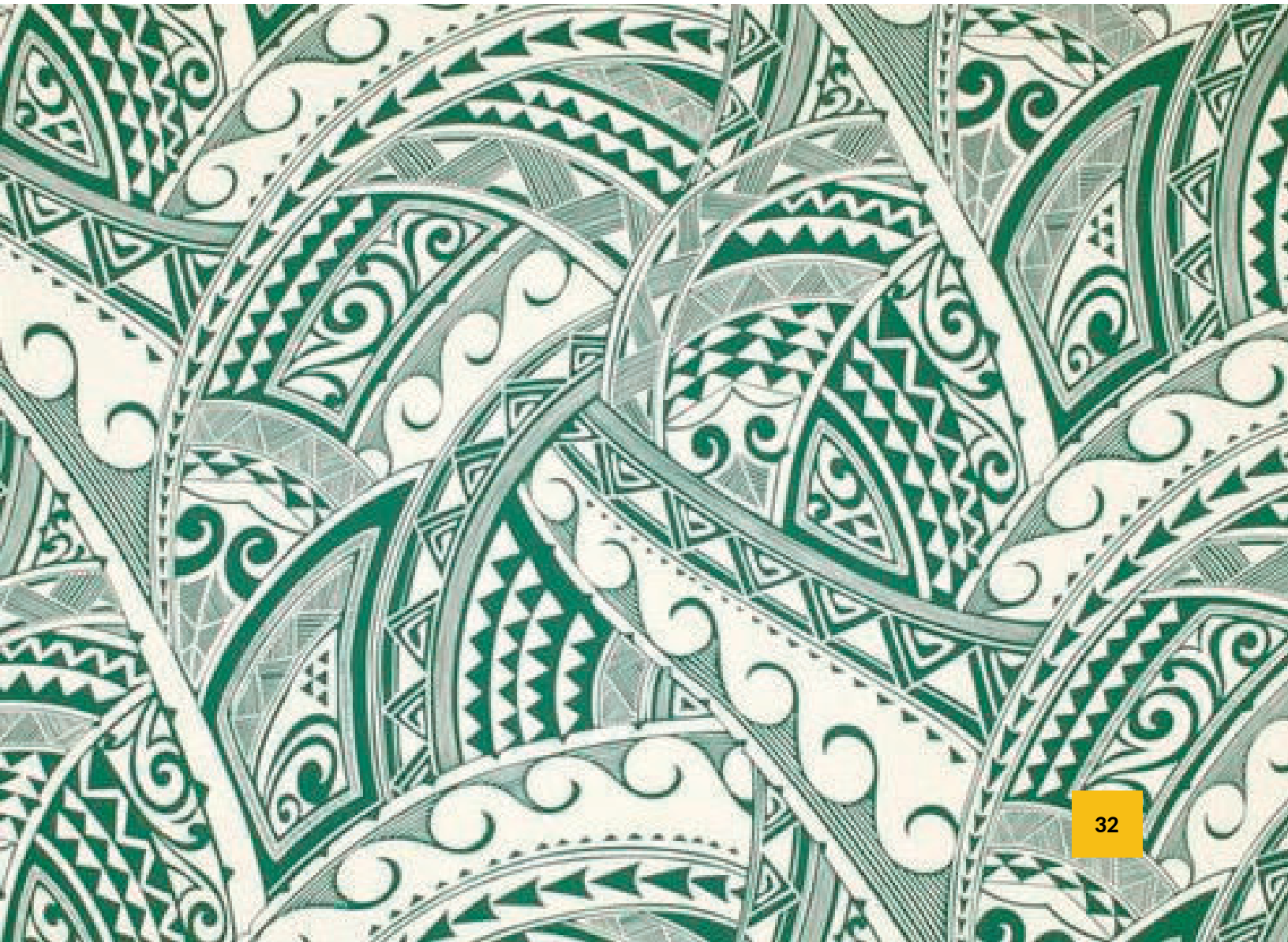
CULTURAL PROGRAMMING
FOR STUDENTS

Work with local PI leaders to bring cultural activities into the school. Cultural diversity should be celebrated, but too often saying a school is "diverse" is code for racist stereotypes about low student engagement. Show students that their culture is valued and important, and help them to discover and share the values that connect them to their heritage. Some of the most memorable statements from this study are from students who participated in and understand the value of their own culture, and learned ways to communicate that to others. Participants shared ideas for how to incorporate their culture in education, like learning the "deep meaning" of words in Samoan or other PI languages, learning the values and meanings associated with PI dances, and learning how to sail using Polynesian vessels and navigate using the stars.

Dancing is a strong part of cultural heritage for PI communities, and can also help students live healthy lifestyles and burn off extra adrenaline that might otherwise lead to fighting. There is a huge opportunity to better connect PI culture, art, language, and dance with positive cultural mindsets like interdependence, strength, and pride within the school system. Schools should not engage in "tokenism" or mis-representation of PI cultures by assigning white staff members to lead events like Asian and Pacific Islander Heritage Month - instead, research and outreach to find local organizations, volunteers, and students who can lead these activities. Supporting PI youth leadership and voice is a necessary part of PI cultural programming.

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DEMOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION

Hire teachers, educators, school staff, and volunteers who represent PI cultural and racial heritage. When there are adults at a school who reflect the ways that PI students look, talk, dress, and act, students are more likely to approach them for help. Also, PI teachers and staff are less likely to engage in racist stereotyping and over-discipline of students, and more likely to be able to identify when a student is struggling and can't ask for help. PI staff and volunteers can provide tutoring and extracurricular support so that PI students have a familiar face outside of the classroom. Language supports to help students who are non-native English speakers are a bare minimum support that all school districts must work harder to correctly identify and provide.

WHOLE-FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

Find ways to include and engage PI families in learning and education. Respect and pride play a key role in fa'samoa, and creating situations in which PI families feel respected and welcomed into the school can help with school outreach efforts. In oral cultures, face-to-face connections are important in building trusting relationships, and may be preferred over email, phone, or online portals. Whole-family tutoring sessions or PI family nights at school can help families connect and build relationships with school staff, and understand how to better help their children succeed. Family Peer Supports, or connecting PI families with a "family navigator" who reflects their culture and can help them connect with the school, could be a strong relational support. The fact that some families in this study were well-connected to their schools could serve as a foundation for recruiting family peer navigators and building community supports for less-well connected families. Connections between schools and local churches or local PI-serving agencies can also help PI families and communities feel more involved with schools.

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ADDRESS RACISM AND BIAS

Provide anti-racism, anti-bias, and cultural training, workshops, and ongoing learning opportunities to staff and students at schools. The *Racism as a Root Cause Approach* pushes us to change the system to fit the family rather than asking the family to change to fit the system. People who hold power and reflect white majority racial and cultural heritage must "do the work" to make schools more caring, compassionate, and inclusive environments for racial and cultural minority students, families, and staff. Partnership and shared leadership is a key component of this work, and true inclusion is achieved only through engaging racial minority groups as leaders and experts in their own strengths and cultures.

ECONOMIC EQUITY

 Develop programs and projects to support economic equity for PI residents, which will uplift families and students. PI community members as a whole experience lower socio-economic status than their White or East Asian peers.[17] Providing direct economic supports to students or their families could help relieve these burdens. Scholarship programs or partnerships with local businesses and churches could help support struggling students and families. Programs which encourage and enable students to maintain close ties to their families while seeking higher education, like community college or online programs, may help overcome a sense of cultural duality in university settings. Programs must take into account the pride that PI families have and the stigma that hand-outs can carry. Funneling financial support through PI churches or PI-run agencies may be a way to build upon the sense of interdependence and mutuality in close-knit PI circles, and build financial capacity in PI communities. Reparations, or funneling financial resources and capitol directly to racial minority organizations and individuals, is a core component of the *Racism as a Root Cause Approach* that aims to correct systemic power imbalances.

17. Noel, R.A. (2018). Race, Economics, and Social Status. US. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Retrieved from: https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2018/race-economics-and-social-status/pdf/race-economics-and-social-status.pdf

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CONCLUSION

This participatory research partnership shed light on the strengths and desires of Pacific Islander students and their families. This was a long, involved process that is not yet over, and shows the enormous benefit of partnering between research institutions and grass-roots organizations to conduct community-based research. It was clear that parents in this study wanted to engage in their children's education, but need more culturally relevant supports from their school systems in order to do so. It is also clear that racism and bias shape experiences for PI students and families, and much work is needed to overcome these issues. Culture is often an after-thought in educational settings that expect students to pass standardized tests and act in "standardized" ways. But, for marginalized groups like PI students, cultural connection is the key to providing supports that will meet families and students where they are and help them succeed. Hopefully, VOPIN can use these results to work with school systems in designing more effective student and family supports and help PI community members thrive.

AAPI 2019 / Samoan Ava Ceremony
Fetu Ta'iala Project / Kitsap Regional Library / WSU Extension

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