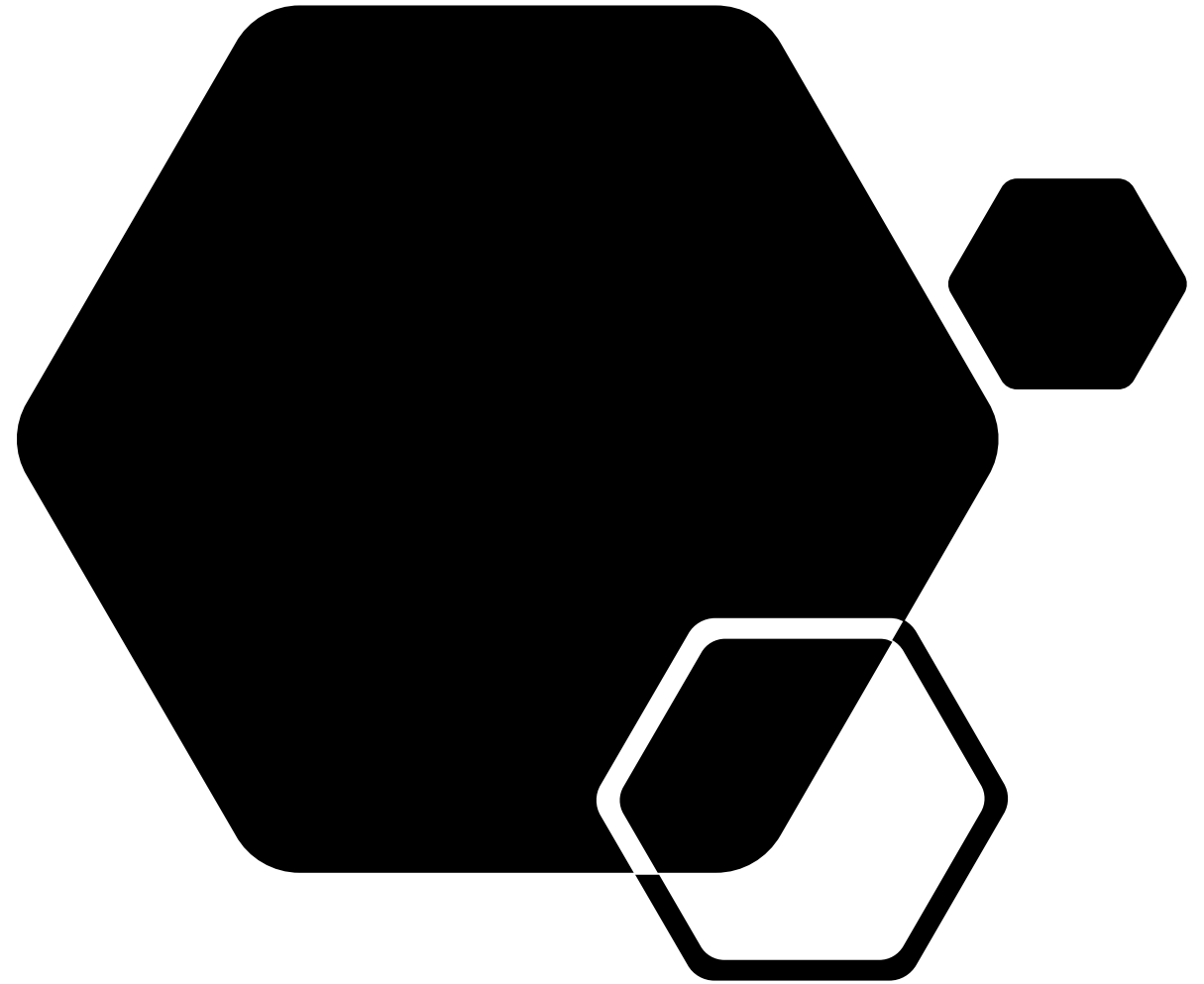


# A Study of One School District's Success in Latinx Student Dropout Prevention

Anahid Bertrand, D.Ed.

Julie Alonzo, Ph.D.

University of Oregon



# Background

---

The decision to drop out of high school is not a single occurrence, but rather a progression that may commence as early as middle school with disengagement and withdrawal from school through poor attendance and lack of confidence in academic skills (Eccles & Roeser, 2011; Entwisle et al., 2004; Fredericks & Eccles, 2002; Wigfield et al., 2006).

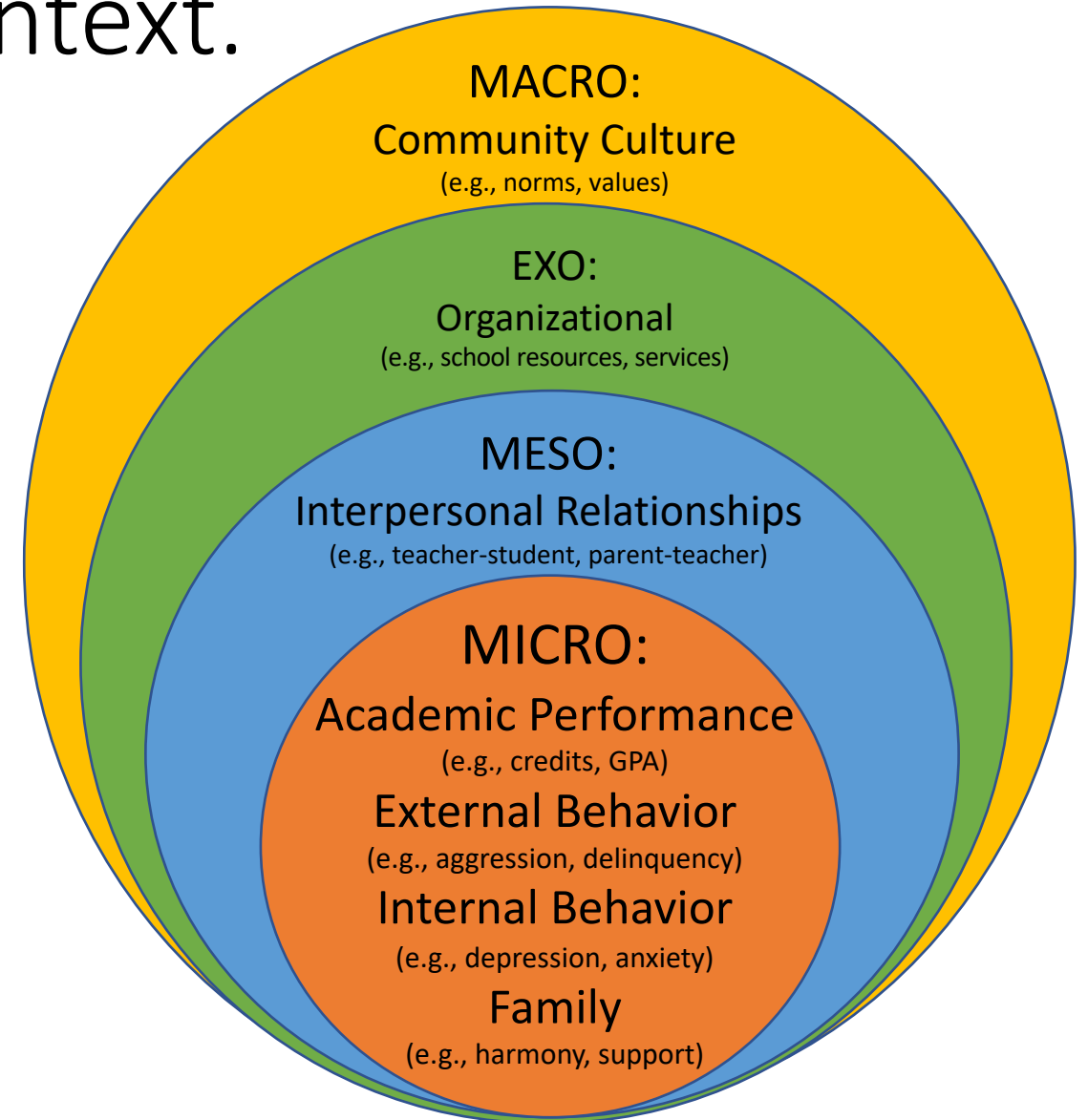
---

Decision-making, class participation, high teacher expectations, and lack of aptitude comparison to peers relate to **positive** school motivation and engagement (Eccles & Midgley, 1989, emphasis added).

# Social Ecological Model of Uri Bronfenbrenner applied to the school context.

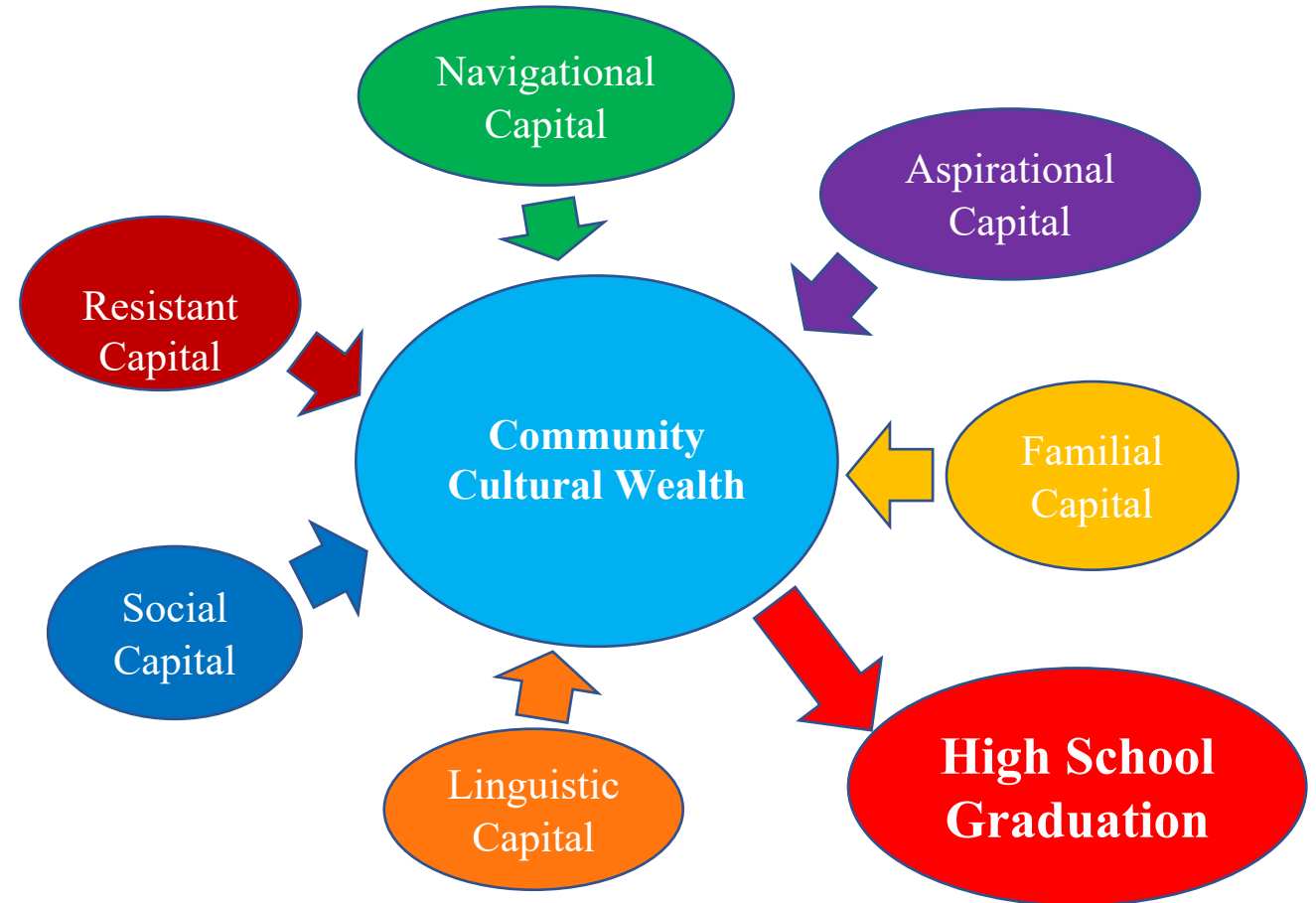
People's development is associated with the ecological environment in which they live (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

It is comprised of four interconnected systems that influence each other: the microsystem (the **individual**), the mesosystem (the **relationships**), the exosystem (the **organization**) and the macrosystem (the **community**).



Yosso's **Community Cultural Wealth** applied to the school context.

Yosso's **Community Cultural Wealth** model centers on the additive, strength-based approach through a minimum of six kinds of capital: aspirational, navigational, linguistic, social, familial, and resistant (Yosso, 2006).



A model of community cultural wealth. Adapted from: Yosso, 2005

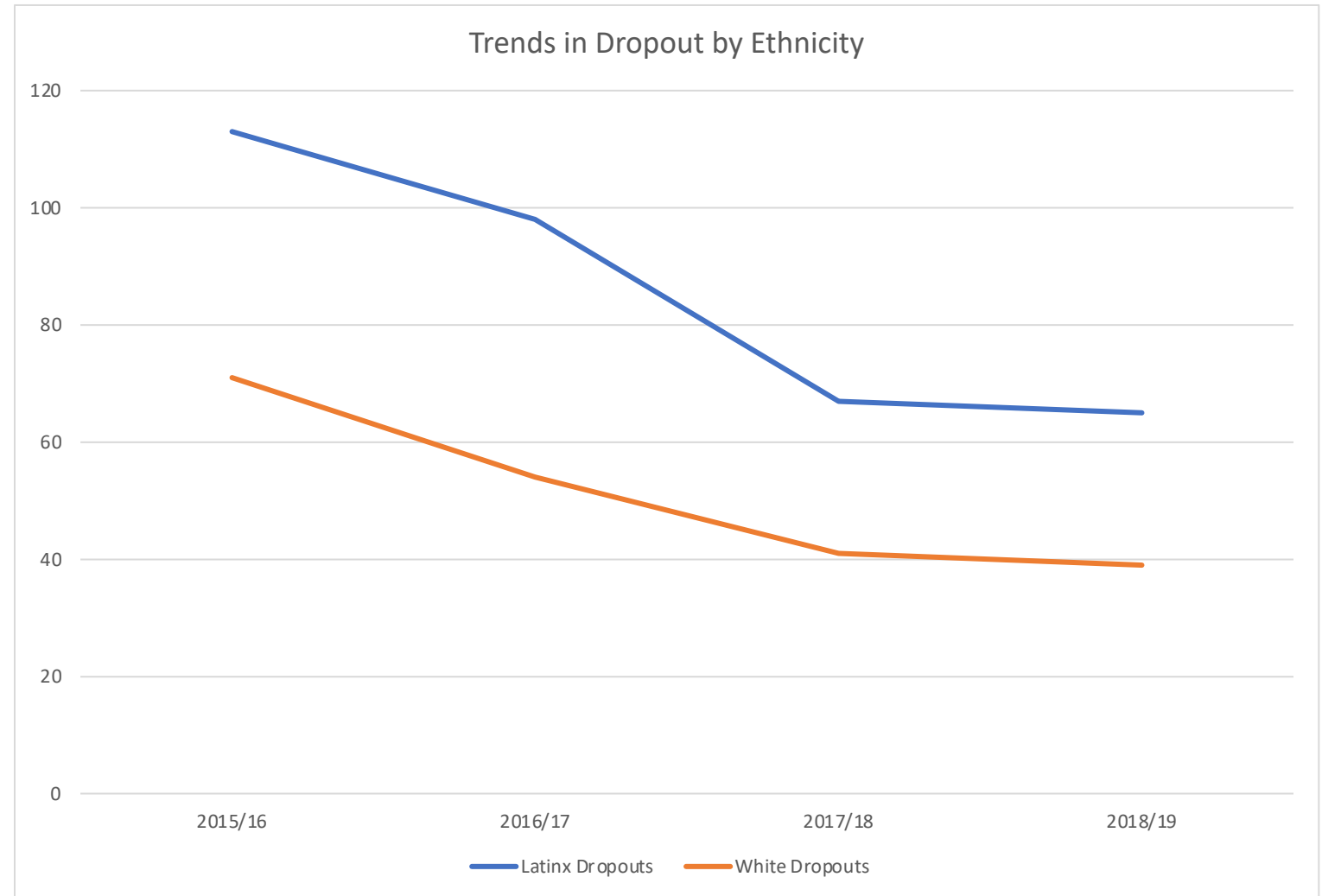
# Method

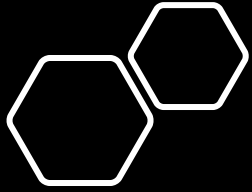
- Mixed Methods Dissertation Study (Bertrand, 2021)
  - Analysis of district dropout trends
  - Analysis of district *Student Needs Survey*
  - **Interviews with seven key District employees**
    - Assistant superintendent
    - Data specialist
    - Credit recovery options teacher
    - College and career pathway director
    - Alternative principal
    - Graduation coach
    - Student support services teacher

# Setting

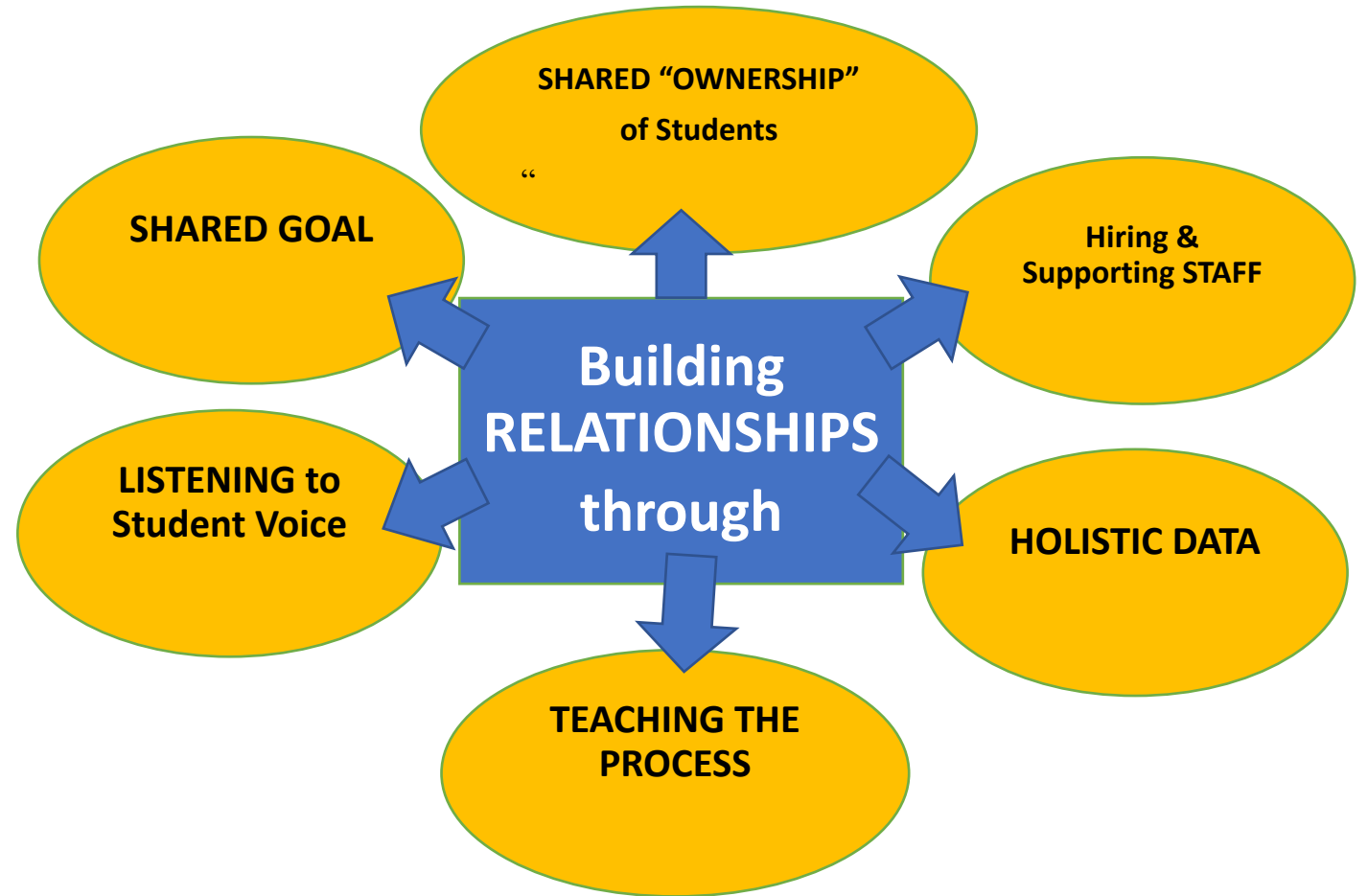
- Public school district in the Pacific Northwest
- 20,000+ students
  - 54.04% elementary, 15.24% middle school, 30.73% high school in 32 traditional schools and four alternative options
  - 45% White / 38% Latinx students.
  - EL = 26%
  - SPED = 15%
  - FRPL = 47%

Why this district?





# Summary of Key Findings

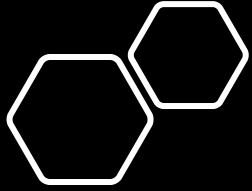




# Key Findings: Shared, Mission- Aligned Goal

The district's mission is to “engage and challenge all learners to ensure academic excellence” and the vision is a “shared ownership, responsibility, and commitment to success among all stakeholders.”

“... you need to know what your mission is, what your vision is. Then you put your structure to support that and then your resources to support that. What happens in most organizations is that they get bogged down in this structure-resource thing, and they don't know where they're going.” – Assistant Superintendent

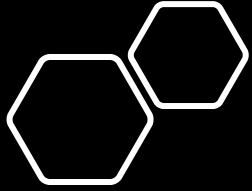


# Key Findings: Rich, Holistic Data

The District invested in a data system (District Capacity Assessment) that tracks students during their entire K-12 experience.

“...the data reveal not just that a student got a 76% in science, but also that she was in choir and in eighth grade she was part of the robotics club, and so you get this holistic view of kids. You can look up an individual kid, and you can pull it by attendance, or by whatever you need, and it has real on-demand updates every single night. That’s been really a game changer because anybody [who has access to district-level data] can look at it...Real on demand data has been a turning point, because you can’t chase kids if you don’t know them. And you just can’t know them by a percentage of how many classes they failed or passed, but by knowing all the angles.”

– Assistant Superintendent

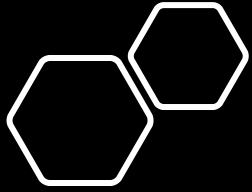


# Key Findings: Rich, Holistic Data

The data system not only holds historical data, but it also identifies students at risk on a **weekly** basis and **sends a report to educators**.

“Every single Monday it [the DCA] sends a list of all the kids that are ‘missing in action’ in the entire district to every administrator in the district. Every kid that’s a 10 day drop whether in high schools or not is on that list... Elementary principals have our kids for seven years. So, they build this great relationship with them for seven years and off the kids go and they have no idea anything’s going on. But when they get that list, they can click on the student’s name. And it will go straight to that student’s entire page in DCA, and I can pick up the phone and go, ‘Hey, you know Carlos (pseudonym)? What’s up with him? I see he hasn’t gone to school for 10 days.’”

– Data Specialist

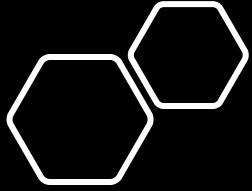


# Key Findings: Rich, Holistic Data

Data can provide a reflective equity tool into grading and teaching practices:

“I can see a teacher’s distribution of grades per class, and I can see the F distribution by race, ethnicity, etc. [Teachers] can self-reflect and self-analyze on what is [their] class demographic and based off of [their] demographic is [their] grade distribution leaning more one way than the other. Are we truly grading on the standards that we are trying to teach or are we trying [to change behavior]? Behavior is not a standard, so why are you going to grade a kid on, for example, coming tardy to your class? That is not a standard in any core content area...how do we disrupt this pattern ... are we making the exception of, ‘Oh this kid of color is close, so I’m just going to bump it up.’ No, it’s about holding a high expectation for all students. And it’s also a self-reflection on you as the educator to improve your practice not just make exceptions by simply changing the letter grade in your grade book.”

– Data Specialist



# Key Findings: Rich, Holistic Data

Data reveal a deeper narrative that measures the success of the *system* in supporting the student:

... at first, we were looking at the data to measure how a student is succeeding. Now we're starting to look more at, how do we use data to be anti-racist and anti-oppressive? and how do we use data to measure the success of our systems? ...If we have referral data, we could say it shows us that our Latino males are more likely to use drugs than our White students. Or we could say our Latino males are getting caught or they are not being supported to resist. Let's make sure we're looking at the data and understand what we're measuring and have a discussion about what we can have control over and can change. It's like measuring the soil.... A farmer isn't going to stand up and scream at their corn, 'You didn't grow out there, we are done with you!' We're not growing corn right. It's how we water; how we provide what was needed to grow healthy corn. "How do we make sure that we're providing what is needed for them to be successful in a system?"

-- Student Support Services Teacher

# Key Findings: Building Relationships

The first step in building relationships with students is **knowing them by name, strengths, and needs.**

“Instead of trying to force a kid in the system, look at the kid as a package, build a relationship with them, get them set, so when they get done with high school, they have a foundation, and then the doors start to open up for them. It’s all about the long game in my world. It’s immediate relationship stuff but it’s about the long game with the students... You can bring in different factors (e.g., socioeconomic) that have different effects on different students and different people... All that stuff just goes out the door when someone walks into my environment. I accept them as an individual. How did they get to where they got to? What do we need to do to help them be successful and grow as an individual and help them feel value in success? That's the goal, they can always catch up in academic areas, that’s not really as big of an issue as people think.” – Credit Recovery Options Teacher

# Key Findings: Building Relationships

The second step in building relationships is teaching communication skills while making sure both parties feel safe

“All people really want to you to say is, ‘I validate that you may feel this way.’ I help students deal with the difference between feeling your emotions and feelings if they’re okay, but also then looking at concrete facts and then going through the process, ‘What kind of questions did you ask this teacher? Have you communicated?’ I’ll help a kid with the communication process with the teacher. I always have the teacher’s back ...that helps teachers feel like they’re not attacked, and they’re empowered because most teachers care, and they’ve done all these things, and so you need to also validate the adult in the process. Those are intangibles that we look at in our program to try to make them successful, validating everybody involved in the process.”

– Credit Recovery Options Teacher

## Key Findings: Building Relationships

The third step is building trust between the individuals as well toward their own learning.

“Kids get to me, and they don’t trust anybody, anything. They don’t trust their own learning. And I’ve seen relationship also means establishing trust and then also finding ways that you can help them experience small success. You’ve got to pick your teachable moments. You have to be very aware, very diligent to stay with the kid because you don’t know when those teachable moments are going to come along .”

– Credit Recovery Options Teacher



# Key Findings: Building Relationships

The fourth step in building relationships is validating students for their resilience and success.

“When a kid is standing up as valedictorian and says, ‘I never would have made it without so and so’, we want you to be part of your timeline and part of your experience. We don't want anyone who graduates or succeeds feeling like they owe anybody for that, but ‘You did it, you stood up, you have that resiliency, we're here, side by side with you and we're going to believe in you until you believe in yourself, this is you, and you deserve that pride and that moment of just glory for your successes and that shouldn't be ours.’”

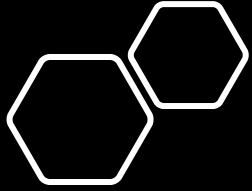
– Student Support Services Teacher

# Key Findings: Building Relationships

The final step in building relationships is reaching out to parents.

“You validate that they love their kid, that they’re doing a great job, you find something positive. And then you say, ‘Hey we got this together’... We don’t need to sit there and beat someone up over something. It is what it is. So how do we move forward? What’s the next try? That didn't work, let’s try this.

– Credit Recovery Options Teacher

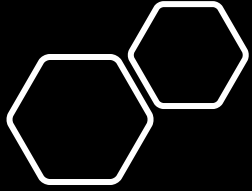


# Key Findings: Shared Ownership

Shared ownerships ensures that students are connected to their comprehensive school even if they go to an alternative setting for some time.

“Some school districts push their dropouts or near dropouts to their alternative school. They have 95% graduates while their alternative school only has 32%. We don’t do that. Our kids who go to alterative school are still owned by our high school. The reason we do that is to promote a partnership. If I’m at the comprehensive school, and I sent Sebastian (pseudonym) to the alternative school, I’m invested in how he’s doing. I say, ‘Yes, he’s still showing up on my 10th grade form every week. Wait, how’s it going? I haven’t even heard from him. I’m going to call the alternative school and see how it’s going.’

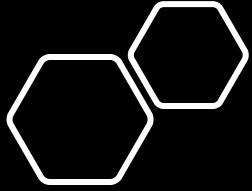
–Assistant Superintendent



# Key Findings: Shared Ownership

“...we’re trying to change the culture of instead of baton passing of ‘this is now your responsibility,’ because they’re in this program and...we’re just adding on the support, as opposed to transitioning support for kids. **These kids need to be snuggled like a blanket not to be passed off like a baton...**They still get the diploma from the traditional high school and their graduation rate is part of that traditional high school.”

–Student Support Services Teacher



# Key Findings: Shared Ownership

“...when I started working with the high schools, I said, ‘Okay, so we had 268 dropouts. Who are they? What’s their profile? What’s the pattern? Who are we missing? What’s going on?’ and they said, ‘Well, we don’t know. I guess, we get that from the state.’ I said, ‘What? They are *our* kids. Why are we asking the state about our kids? You have got to be kidding.’ In contrast, now you can ask any high school, ‘Who are the kids you’re most concerned about?’ and they may say, ‘Last year we lost 62 kids. I know where they were.’”

– Assistant Superintendent

# Key Findings: Listening to Student Voice

Surveys  
Empathy Interviews  
Including Students in PD Days

“...from the beginning, student voice has been the anchor. It’s not adults determining and deciding in silo what’s best for kids but it’s bringing in the kids and their voices. We first started when we presented to our School Board through student quantitative and qualitative survey data. We asked them, ‘What has worked for you? What is your experience on support? What is lacking? What do you need?’ And so that really started to shape this specific process. Now we’re organized into 11 different work groups, and we ask ourselves, ‘Okay, are students at the table? How are we capturing (their voice)? Is there a survey that is going to capture this component, even in the renaming process?’”

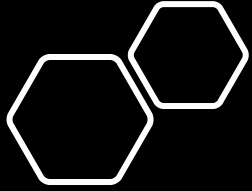
– Data Specialist

# Key Findings: Listening to Student Voice

Surveys  
Empathy Interviews  
Including Students in PD Days

“We didn’t tiptoe around teachers and their grading data. We just rip the band aid off from day one. We said, “Here’s your personal data and here’s how you compare to other teachers.” We said, “The kids don’t have time to wait for us. They have four years and they’re gone. We don’t have time to tiptoe around it and, quite frankly, the data is in front of you, because that’s your data. There are no ifs, ands or buts about it. Bringing the kids to the table, because they truly had the questions of inquiry, about how they were being graded and like, why is the grading scale the way it is right? Why is it 80% summative and 20% formative? It’s having to break those explanation down to their students also was like, “If I can’t eloquently explain to them why, then why am I really doing it?”

– Data Specialist

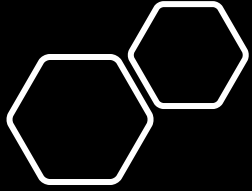


# Key Findings: Hiring the Right Staff

Hiring the right people means understanding why certain educators are more successful in building relationships with students and attempting to replicate their mindset of problem-solvers.

Another positive attribute of an educator is someone students can relate to because of their resilience in overcoming linguistic, racial/ethnic, economic and ability barriers in their own life. One participant described the importance of hiring people who “speak their language.”



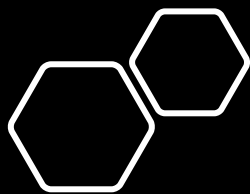


# Key Findings: Supporting Staff

Supporting staff means tending to people.

“We organized mental health activities this last quarter for administrators, and it was like 15 minutes of watercolor or 30 minute of yoga session. Different people signed up for different times and things that our administrators could engage in. I think that also tending to the people in the system has been something I’m really proud of. But I think that that also helps to pay off on, ‘We know we’re here, and we need to figure out these things, but we’re also going to take care of you, so that you also have enough that you can be with us on this journey as we plan forward. We know this is tough, but we have to keep going.’ We need to be ready to carry out that vision of what our district could be. But I think it’s also tending to the people in the system.”

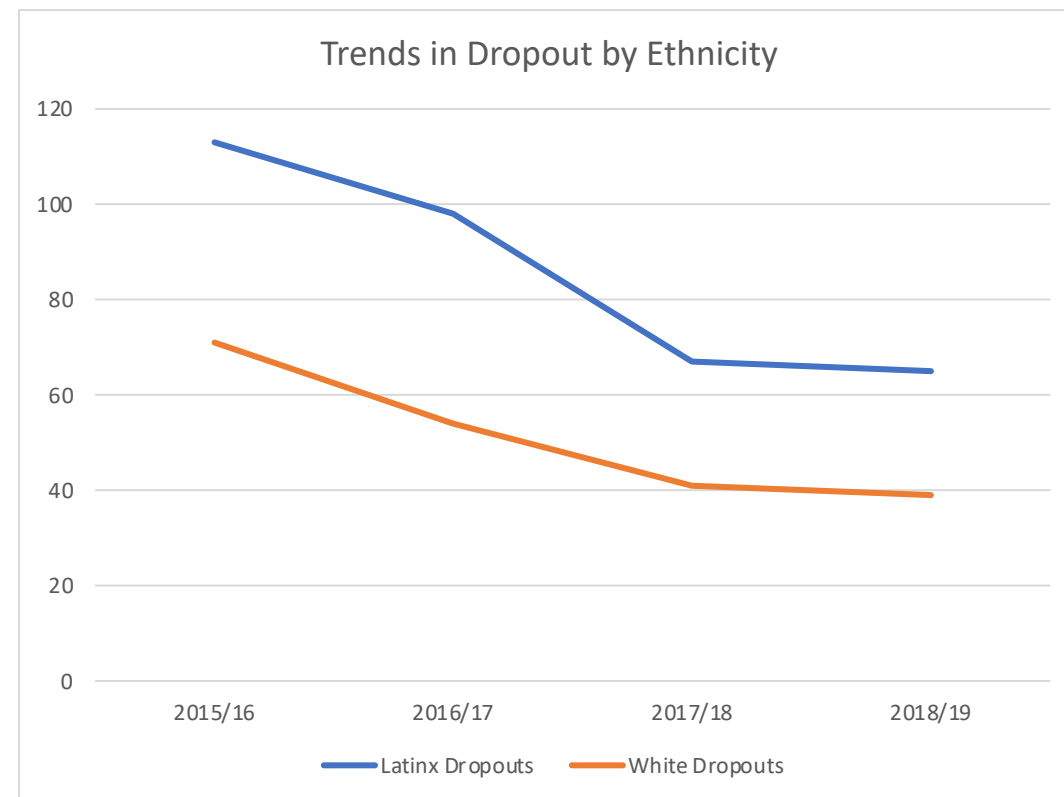
– College & Career Pathway Director



# Summary

## The district:

- Has shared, mission-aligned goals
- Regularly uses rich, holistic data
- Pays attention to building & sustaining positive relationships
- Embraces shared ownership of all students
- Listens to student voice
- Hires the “right” staff
- Supports staff



For more  
information:

---

Anahid Bertrand, D.Ed.  
([anahidhbertrand@gmail.com](mailto:anahidhbertrand@gmail.com))

---

Julie Alonzo, Ph.D.  
([jalonzo@uoregon.edu](mailto:jalonzo@uoregon.edu))