Redefining Safety: Latinx Migrant Perspectives on School Safety in Rural Pennsylvania High Schools

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Redefining Safety: Latinx Migrant Perspectives on School Safety in Rural Pennsylvania High Schools

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Abstract

Redefining Safety: Latinx Migrant Perspectives on School Safety in Rural Pennsylvania

High Schools aims to answer the research question: What does a safe educational space look like for rurally based high school students from immigrant families? This thesis draws on my lived experiences growing up in a mixed-status immigrant family in rural, PA. Drawing from anthropological and interdisciplinary research that explores how marginalized communities experience and navigate systemic violence, this thesis explores themes in the Latinx immigrant community such as a contradictory sense of hyper surveillance and invisibility. Inspired by abolitionist and geographer Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s research, I focus on “placemaking,” with respect to high schools. This thesis is attentive to how (un)safe schools are made. I analyze how harmful systemic barriers are created and enforced, thereby contributing to schools in which Latinx migrants navigate exclusive or punitive conditions. I also analyze the placemaking that occurs by Latinx migrant communities and their allies. This includes the resistance of the political, economic, and social barriers. This thesis combines an analysis of language and policies in Adams County public high schools’ student handbooks with semi-structured interviews with migrants who recently graduated from these high schools, parents of students who attend(ed) these high schools, and educators who currently teach at these high schools. The data collected informs migrant students’ sense of safety in schools. This thesis illustrates that Latinx migrants, alongside allies, are empowered to resist and transform the barriers they face. This can look like trauma-informed, culturally responsive material and movements that are led by and center Latinx migrants and their needs. This research contributes to a larger body of knowledge around what makes schools safe. It is transformative because it includes perspectives that redefine what physically and emotionally safe learning spaces look like.
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Introduction

“¿Cuándo vas a volver?” te oigo preguntar Y me tiemblan los labios

Si yo pudiera volar, poder tener alas Y estar a tu lado

“When will you return?” I hear you ask and my lips tremble

If I could fly, have wings and be by your side

Lágrimas del Corazón by Montez de Durango

When I was 4 years old, my dad left the United States. He returned to Mexico. Every time he called, I would ask him the same question: “¿Cuándo vas a volver?” At that age, I did not understand the immigration system, I just experienced it.

In legal terms, this was a voluntary departure: “Voluntary departure permits an individual who is otherwise removable to depart from the country at their own expense within a designated amount of time, in order to avoid a final order of removal.” (Thompson 2020) After my family
migrated to rural Pennsylvania, my dad had multiple run-ins with the police. The police involved la migra (Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)). After continuous threats from them, my dad got tired of hiding and running. They told him departure was his best option if he ever intended to come back to the U.S. to see his family. This family included my mom, who was 23 at the time, my 6 year old sister, me at 4 years old, and my newborn brother. Family separation occurs in migrant families when legal or asylum status is not granted to each family member. Separation can happen at the border when families are attempting to cross or after entering, via the deportation (removal) of some family members. In December 2004, my sister and I held hands as we said goodbye to my dad, unable to understand why our family was being separated.

In a way, the “wings” mentioned in the lyrics above are “papeles” (papers). Latinx migrants often reference citizenship/legal status in the U.S. as papers. Having papers permits access to the United States. For families who have migrated and experienced separation, having papers is like having wings. These wings would fulfill the wish of reuniting with loved ones. I always wished my dad could have wings and fly back home. In reality, he needed papers.

When I started kindergarten at Bermudian Springs Elementary School the next year, I did not know English. I was placed in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class and in a group called Banana Splits for kids with divorced parents. I thought I did not have many friends because I did not know English. Determined to fix this, I learned quickly. I still did not have many friends. The little girls, who were all white, said I was different. Throughout elementary, middle, and high school, I made friends with the few other Mexican students at the school. They were the only people I felt comfortable with. This was valid. Throughout the years, not all, but too many white peers and staff I interacted with agreed that all Mexicans should be sent back to Mexico. In high school, I was the only non-white student in all of my honors classes. I had peers
get angry when I was acknowledged for high scores or well-done assignments. They said Mexicans are supposed to be dumb or asked me how it felt to be Mexican and smart.

Having graduated and been away from the area for a few years now, there’s a part of me that wants to stay away and never look back. However, my little sister is currently a first grader at Bermudian Springs Elementary School. Latinx migrant families, including mine, have settled in Adams County, PA. They are there to stay. Knowing that my younger siblings are growing up in the same environment I did, motivated me to conduct this research project.

I spent the last 4 years taking courses with BIPOC (Black, indigenous, people of color) professors, working towards a Sociology/ Anthropology major and Educational Studies and Spanish minors. I’ve learned about the different social forces that informed my experiences. I’ve learned about U.S. colonialism and imperialism. I’ve learned about trauma and human rights. I’ve learned about cycles of social reproduction. I’ve learned that educational spaces are potential sites of change. I’ve learned different approaches for changing harmful patterns, such as the ones I experienced. I’ve learned what it means to feel safe in a learning space. In college, I’ve had mentors to guide me and friends to grow with. I’ve had the space to learn and make mistakes. I’ve been able to show up as myself in a room and had my perspective acknowledged and appreciated. I hope to create a cycle out of this kind of teaching and learning experience.

Throughout the process of conducting my research and writing this thesis, I continuously thought about placemaking, a concept Ruth Wilson Gilmore, prison abolitionist and scholar, discusses in her piece “Abolition Geography.” Gilmore (2017) defines placemaking: “a normal human activity: we figure out how to combine people, land, and other resources” (245). I am attentive to “placemaking,” throughout this piece in two main ways. First, I discuss the placemaking patterns in our current state which lead to Latinx migrants, alongside other
marginalized populations, being exploited and hyper-surveilled. Second, I discuss how communities who are negatively affected by these systems (in this study I focus on Latinx migrants), collaborate to “placemake:” resist and transform oppressive and harmful systems.

A clear example of abolition geography: self-organization and placemaking, occurred in Black history in DuBois’s study of Philadelphia’s seventh ward. People brought “sensibilities, dependencies, talents…to make where they were into places they wished to be…” Further:

“…they left abundant evidence showing how freedom is not simply the absence of enslavement as a legal and property form. Rather, the undoing of bondage -abolition- is quite literally to change places: to destroy the geography of slavery by mixing their labor with the external world to change the world and thereby themselves- as it were, habitation as nature- even if geometrically speaking they hadn’t moved far at all.”

(Gilmore 2017, p.249)

In this study, DuBois centered a population that faced exploitation and punitive circumstances. Gilmore (2017) applies a geographic, abolitionist lens and discusses how the Black Americans in this study embodied the sense that “freedom is a place,” and found “alternatives to the…redistribution of human sacrifice” (245). Through mutual aid, collaboration, protest, and defiance of hyper surveillance and punishment, they created their own community and place.

Drawing from radical traditions and interdisciplinary theory, Gilmore and other abolition scholars expand upon approaches to widespread exploitation and hyper surveillance. They ground these approaches, such as placemaking, in Abolition: a “political vision with the goal of eliminating imprisonment, policing, and surveillance and creating lasting alternatives to punishment and imprisonment…an abolitionist vision means that we must build models today that can represent how we want to live in the future.” (What is pie, n.d.) My work expands upon
placemaking and incorporates abolitionist approaches. Gilmore (2017) states: “Abolition geography is capacious (it isn’t only by, for, or about Black people) and specific (it’s a guide to action for both understanding and rethinking how we combine our labor with each other and the earth)” (258). I studied the perspectives of Latinx migrants from rural towns in conversations about the schools and spaces they grew up in and the schools and spaces they wish they had grown up in. Grounded in geographical ideas of place and space, my work contributes to ideas of what “safety,” as a place and state of being, looks like for Latinx migrant students and their families. I investigate what we need to abolish or create to get there.

In this thesis, I explore different notions of safety and security within rural public high schools that serve increasing populations of students from Latinx immigrant families. My research aims to answer the question: What does a safe educational space look like for rurally based high school students from immigrant families? This research contributes to a larger body of knowledge around what makes schools safe. I define safety in educational spaces as a condition in which all students are physically and emotionally protected, equally and to the fullest extent. Safety means that external and internal threats to students are limited, and if they occur, they are addressed. To create safe learning spaces, the conditions must be that students can show up as themselves and be acknowledged and appreciated for who they are, not for who we want them to be. It is essential to create spaces where students can be vulnerable without facing repercussions. I focus on safety for Latinx migrants, because for this population, normative safety / security protocols (security cameras, police, prisons) translate to hyper surveillance, over policing, and punishment / removal. Fear is prevalent in the Latinx migrant community due to these punitive conditions. I aim to address these fears by defining safety from the perspectives of migrants. In my research, I identify the carceral and punitive aspects of life
and school in rural PA for Latinx migrants. Then, I seek alternatives to such practices, from the perspectives of migrants and their allies.

**Research Methodology**

My methodology is inspired by ongoing Educational Studies research grounded in critical race theory and abolitionist theory such as Eve Ewing’s ethnographic research in *Ghosts in the Schoolyard* and Savannah Shange’s research in *Progressive Dystopia*. This type of research, described as critical or transformative research, is framed by critical race theory approaches. This includes acknowledging the power dynamics that exist within institutions, such as schools or neighborhoods. Further, critical race theory principles center the experiential knowledge of Black, indigenous and other people of color (BIPOC). The research in these communities is not exploitative or a “one and done” approach. It aims to empower participants and acknowledge the agency they have in transforming or resisting oppressive structures.

Ewing and Shange’s identities and positionalities deeply informed their projects. They acknowledged their positions within their projects as former educators or leaders in the schools and communities they researched. They were also long-term members of the communities they chose to focus on. By recognizing their commitment and ties to their work based on their identity and historic / current presence in Chicago and San Francisco, Ewing and Shange’s pieces held a sense of familiarity for the city they chose to study and the people they involved and centered. Their pieces were authentic and fulfilling to a level I believe can only be achieved by being a part of the community you choose to research.

Similarly, my identity as a former student at one of the rural high schools I am studying and my identity as a Latina who is part of a mixed-status immigrant family in rural Adams County, PA informed my methodology and research project overall. I feel deeply committed to
helping cultivate a safe school environment for migrant students because I grew up attending
school in the same rural district in Adams County, PA from kindergarten to senior year of high
school. I am extremely aware of the divisions between the Latinx community and the white
community in Adams County, PA. I am also aware of the sense of invisibility towards migrants,
especially those who are undocumented, because the resources for them in this area are limited. I
reflected on my own experiences with family separation, exclusion from a larger community,
and discrimination as I wrote this piece. I also used the connections I made while I grew up in
the Latinx migrant community in Adams County. I interviewed peers who shared experiences
with me and identified as migrants. I interviewed migrant parents whose children I had attended
school or afterschool programs with. The teachers I chose to interview were educators who I
knew had direct experience working with the migrant community in the area.

Many of the participants I interviewed shared personal details about their status or other
issues with migration they’ve been having with me after we finished the interview. I welcomed
this openness and have been trying to stay connected with these individuals because going away
for college made me feel disconnected for some time. When I accepted admission into an elite
school, Swarthmore College, with a full ride scholarship, I moved a 2 hour drive away from
home. I did not realize how different life would be. Living near a city with a large Latinx migrant
population reminded me of the power in cultivating communities and organizing within these
communities. Attending college on a cash-free campus with BIPOC Professors and resources for
first-gen, low-income, undocumented, and underrepresented students in general, exposed me to
the kinds of resources and spaces we can demand and create. Despite the disconnect from the
home and community I grew up in, being a student at this institution also inspired and
empowered me to address the disparities I grew up with. This research project is one approach to addressing these disparities.

**Handbook Analysis**

The first step in my research process was to collect and perform a critical analysis of data regarding general school safety and security from student handbooks available on high schools’ public websites. I analyzed different sections and policies from four student handbooks from the public high schools Bermudian Springs High School (BSHS), Biglerville High School (BHS), New Oxford High School (NOHS), and Gettysburg Area High School (GAHS) from the 2021-2022 school year. These handbooks correspond to the high schools that the migrant participants I interviewed attended, and inform the structures of the institutions these students studied and socialized in. I focused on sections of the handbooks most pertinent to students’ physical and socioemotional safety and then analyzed how and for whom safety was portrayed in these handbooks.

I started by reading the handbook for the high school I attended, Bermudian. The references that immediately and initially caught my attention were phrases or policies that signaled indoctrination or forced assimilation, by emphasizing citizenship or loyalty to the U.S. Aside from this, I also noticed the frequent use of the words illegal and unlawful and how these words were capitalized and emphasized through the handbooks. I noticed a pattern of policies which limited and controlled student movement at all times whether physically or in their internet use. The next major section that I analyzed was the discipline code because the handbook explicitly states that this piece is meant to support the safety of all individuals in the school community. (BSHS, 23) After the discipline code, I analyzed the handbook’s policies on bullying and discrimination because these sections could involve and deeply affect migrant
students. Throughout all of the pieces I noticed an emphasis on the connection between schools and law enforcement or the courts. I found themes related to policing, surveillance, erasure, and exclusion. I repeated this process for the other three handbooks and found similar patterns and themes in each.

*Semi-structured Interviews*

After critically analyzing the student handbooks for each of the four high schools involved in my research, I conducted semi-structured interviews lasting between 30 minutes to 1 hour long. I started my interviews with six former high school students from Adams County, PA. These students all identify as migrant whether they are undocumented, have Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, or are documented students from mixed-status families. Two of the students I interviewed attended the same high school as me, Bermudian Springs High School. Another two of the students I interviewed attended Biglerville High School. One student I interviewed attended New Oxford High School and the last student I interviewed attended Gettysburg Area High School. All of these students graduated from high school between 2017 and 2022 so I got a range of experiences within similar timeframes. For five out of the six interviewees, I had previously built connections with them throughout high school so reaching out and scheduling an interview felt conversational and comfortable. One of the previous participants referred me to the sixth participant because although I did not have a connection to someone who attended Gettysburg Area High School, another one of the individuals I spoke with did. This is because the Latinx migrant community in Adams County, PA is small and many people know each other or of each other.

At the end of my student interviews, I used a method of data collection called Educational Journey Mapping (EJM). I retrieved this method from Subini Ancy Annamma’s
Disability Critical Race Theory research. Mapping is a method that allows researchers “to better understand an individual’s sense of place in a physical place” (Annamma 2017, p.23). I wanted to understand Latinx migrant students’ sense of place in their former high schools. Expanding on mapping as a qualitative research method: “Maps shed light on the ways in which we traverse, encounter, and construct racial, ethnic, gendered, and political boundaries” (Annamma 2017, p.23). Annamma’s research on girls of color with disabilities paralleled my work with Latinx migrant students as we were trying to create a space in which underrepresented students could illustrate their experiences in educational spaces. We wanted to gain an understanding of the different boundaries these students navigated in school. Educational Journey Mapping served as a way for my interviews to convey their sense of safety in their former high schools through a different medium. At the end of my interview questions, I read the prompt and gave them a written copy of it. I stepped away for 15 minutes while they drew their educational journey maps. Most interviewees said they had not colored or drawn in forever but would try their best. At the end of 15 minutes, many students needed more time so I gave them more. This was a very meditative and calm part of the interviews. I had them walk me through their maps and ended the interviews after that.

Another group I interviewed was 5 migrant mothers, some of whom were related to the former students I interviewed. I conducted four of these interviews in Spanish and one mainly in English, with some Spanish. As I mentioned earlier, I had connections to these interviewees because I attended high school or afterschool programs with their children. This facilitated the process of asking them to be a part of this project. It also allowed comfort and trust during these conversations. All 5 of the parents I interviewed migrated to Pennsylvania 20+ years ago. There was a general sense of success in their migration because it offered their children better
opportunities, specifically better education. With this in mind, the mothers still offered feedback on how schools could be safer and more welcoming for them and their children. I discuss the bulk of this data in chapter 4. I gave $25 gift cards to Walmart or Target to each of the student and parent interviewees to compensate them for their time. Most, if not all, of them were shocked and tried to turn away the gift cards. I insisted and explained that these were funded by my school for this purpose and got all of the migrant participants to accept the gift cards.

The last group of people I interviewed were three public-school educators from Adams County, PA. I recruited educators who have experience working directly with rural immigrant communities. Two of the teachers I interviewed previously worked for the LIU 21st Century PASOS program for migrant students. One of them, Ms. Arbor, served as a coordinator for the afterschool program when I was an attendee. The second teacher, Ms. Cole, was a teacher for the migrant summer school program while I worked as a teacher’s aide for the program the summer after I graduated from high school. The third teacher I interviewed, Mr. Path, is a government and sociology teacher at my former high school, Bermudian Springs HS. I maintained distant connections with these teachers and reached out to them via Facebook or email because I knew they were familiar with the resources and needs of the Latinx migrant community in Adams County. I conducted these interviews over the phone and made space in the beginning of each call to catch up and update them on my studies. These conversations felt genuine and I intend to reach out to thank them for their input into my project and to continue to maintain these connections.
Chapter 1: Existing Research

Introduction

My thesis: Migrant perspectives on Safe Learning Environments in Rural areas required researching migrant experiences with settlement and public education in rural communities. I analyze how Latinx migrants have integrated themselves in rural areas of the U.S. Departing from my personal experience in a migrant family in PA, Latinx migrants face economic, social, and political barriers when they decide to call rural PA home. In the first half of this chapter, I expand on how systemic and social barriers are present in rural neighborhoods and their public high schools. Migrants in rural towns, such as Adams County, PA are policed and rejected by individuals and policies. In schools, barriers are enforced as zero tolerance policies, hyper surveillance, and punishment. Informed by the socio-political landscape of a rural, Republican town, there’s also discrimination and rejection from neighbors, peers, and staff due to anti-immigrant sentiments. Focusing on Latinx migrants in high school, I spent time researching approaches to address systemic barriers in educational spaces, especially because these methods’ impact can also begin to address barriers migrants face outside of schools. I introduce these approaches towards the end of this chapter, and present the bulk of this research in the final chapter of my thesis.

Latinx Immigrant Presence in Rural Communities

To contextualize my study, I explored what migrant presence in rural communities looks like in general. I include some research about migration in Pennsylvania and specifically in Adams County, PA where my study takes place. In his brief on rural demographic changes, Johnson (2012) found that minorities produced about 83% of the growth in rural populations between 2000 to 2010 and that “Hispanics accounted for more than half of the rural population
gain” (8). Migrant presence has been essential in offsetting ongoing population decline in rural areas and keeping communities growing and transforming. In 2018, there were about 922,585 migrants in PA, making up about 7% of the state’s population. Further, there are estimated to be 170,000 undocumented migrants in Pennsylvania and 5,000 DACA recipients. (Immigrants in Pennsylvania, n.d.) As a quickly growing population, making the Latinx migrant community’s presence clear and ensuring their successful settlement is crucial.

Adams County, PA

Between 2020-2021, the estimated population of 104,127 in Adams County was about 88.4% white (not hispanic), 7.4% Latinx, 2% Black, and less than 1% Asian or Native. (U.S. Census Bureau). Given these demographics, my thesis mainly focuses on the dynamics between white residents and Latinx residents who migrated and chose to settle in the area. These demographics also inform the dominant Republican voting patterns and values in the area. As represented in figures 1.1 and 1.2, Adams County is very conservative with voting rates of up to 66% Republican. (Politics and Voting) Despite the overwhelming majority of white and republican residents, Latinx migrants make up a significant and growing part of the population in Adams County.
The BestPlaces Liberal/Conservative Index

Adams County, PA is Very conservative

Gettysburg Metro Area is Very conservative.

Pennsylvania is Leaning liberal.

Figure 1.1

ADAMS COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA POLITICS VOTING

Figure 1.2
In Adams County, PA, Latinx migrants have settled in the places where they once came only for seasonal work in the apple orchards. Adams County has been nicknamed the Apple Capital of the U.S. and small towns including York Springs and Biglerville, where many of my research participants reside, have been nicknamed “Little Mexico” by locals. This can be attributed to Adams County’s place in the top five apple producing counties in the U.S. with about 13,160 acres dedicated to this crop. (Dwyer, 2020) In extension to apple-picking labor, Adams County is home to industries that support this agriculture, including Mott’s Inc., an extremely popular apple sauce and apple product producer, which “opened its largest U.S. manufacturing and distribution plant in Aspers, Pennsylvania” (Migrant Farm Work). Manufacturing and distribution plants established in rural PA, such as Mott’s Inc., gave way for migrants to settle and find semi permanent employment.

The thousands of acres of apple orchards illustrate the general landscape in Adams County. The short trees with bright red or green apples seem to stretch forever. They are reflective of the vast amount of green, vegetation-filled space in Adams County. This landscape leaves room for homes that are often spread far apart and include spacious back and front yard areas. Latinx migrant settlement in these areas can be attributed to this scenery and the complimentary description of rural towns as “tranquilo,” or “calm, quiet, peaceful, or laid back” by migrants themselves. (May et al., 2015) Yet, despite the increase in Latinx migration and their subsequent settlement in rural areas and their appreciation for a beautiful and seemingly peaceful place to live, migrants face various factors which complicate their lives here. I describe some of the systemic and personal barriers migrants face in the next few sections, which include economic and social structural violence that appears when they attempt to work, reside, and go to school or other public spaces in rural areas of the United States.
Economic Factors

I contextualize my research in a framework that acknowledges the harmful effects of neoliberalist policies which commodify migrants and their labor. Neoliberalism has been the U.S.’s dominant political, social, and economic ideology since the 1980’s. Neoliberalism is rooted in free market capitalism and applies “economic logic and market metrics to nearly every aspect of human life.” (Gonzales 2016, p.82). In this way, everything and everyone has a value. Therefore, people, including Latinx migrants, along with actions, such as migrant labor, are perceived as commodities and assigned a particular value. This perception of people can easily lead to exploitation: treating migrants and their labor like objects, which can be run down, discarded, and replaced. The ongoing neoliberal regime has led to the reproduction of social classes with a widening gap between the poor and the rich. This social reproduction maintains that the most vulnerable in society, including minority populations such as Latinx migrants, are continuously exploited and remain impoverished.

Alongside commodifying everything and leading to social class reproduction and ongoing exploitation, neoliberal ideologies inform the role of the government. Neoliberalist frameworks “reduce the role of the state to enforcing laws and justify severe inequality and class polarization under the idea of meritocracy” (Gonzales 2016, p.82). In the U.S., people are assigned value based on status and achievements; this value defines how they are treated. For example, U.S. born citizens qualify for federal resources, such as welfare or grants, across their lifetimes, simply because they were born here. In contrast, undocumented persons in the U.S. migrated here. They must prove their value in the U.S. via cheap labor or straight A’s in school. Regardless, Latinx migrants, and undocumented persons in particular, are still deemed outsiders
because they are racialized as “illegal.” This predisposes them to criminalization, which then leads to over policing, imprisonment, or removal. (Canizales and Vallejo 2021)

Many narratives of migration to rural areas, including my family’s and those of the migrant participants I interviewed, stem from the need to find stable and well-paying work. A 2015 study on immigrant integration in rural communities found that immigrants did not express “emotional attachment to the community…Rather, they characterized the area in terms of economic opportunities…” (May et al., 31). This theme is clear and consistent because every participant I interviewed discussed that the purpose of their initial migration was to find work here. Melissa, a migrant from Mexico and mother of three in York Springs, PA, discussed how she came to south central Pennsylvania with her husband and first child in search of reliable employment. She stated: “I found a job the very next day after I arrived. So it was wow. It was good in that way” (Melissa, age 44, August 28, 2022). Unlike her previous experiences living in Michoacan, Mexico and Los Angeles, California, Melissa was able to find a job immediately where she did not have to compete with many other migrant workers because the work was plentiful and the migrant population was small.

Migrants, such as Melissa and the other parents I interviewed, have contributed to rural economies through their work in manufacturing and agriculture. (Methema et al. 2018) This holds true in Adams County, PA as most of the participants I interviewed and most Latinx migrants in the area in general hold more or less permanent positions in warehouses or agricultural sites. Migrants I interviewed held positions in some of Adams County’s top 50 employers: Knouse Foods Cooperative Inc., Mott’s LLP, Utz Quality Foods Inc., Plainville Farms, and Rice Fruit Company. (Adams County 1st, 2022) They juxtapose these labor-intensive jobs in the U.S. to comparatively low-wage positions they previously had or aspired to have in
Mexico or other home countries in Latin America. For comparison purposes, the Mexican peso is currently trading at 20 pesos per 1 U.S. Dollar.

Through their positions in mass manufacturing and agriculture, migrants contribute to the economic development in rural areas such as Adams County, PA. However, these migrants are exploited for their labor. Despite finding reliable work in the States, immigrants had limited economic capital and still struggled to pay expenses. (May et al. 2015) Given that they still struggle to cover necessary expenses, it is clear that migrant wages are not enough. Further, these worksites may entail long hours in warehouses or fields and generate physical and emotional stress. Migrants may also feel hesitant to hold their employers accountable due to unbalanced power dynamics and history with even lower wage positions in worse conditions.

Systemic Barriers to Integration

Earlier in this chapter, I referenced the majority white demographics and dominantly Republican socio political climate in Adams County. This context alongside the economic factors and the exploitative working conditions migrants live under, which I expanded upon in the previous section, inform and exacerbate migrant integration in rural PA. In this section, I go in depth on major systemic barriers which pose challenges for migrant settlement and integration in rural areas. These systemic barriers include over policing, local and federal policies, and lack of accessible resources and services.

Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF, Bebbington, 1999; Valdivia & Gilles, 2001) based on economic, social, and cultural capital to measure integration levels, May et al. (2015) investigated how well or to what extent immigrant communities have integrated into rural areas in the Midwest. They compared the capital migrants have accumulated across 15 years to the capital of host community residents. Their data revealed consistent and large scale
inequalities, alongside a lack of infrastructure to support migrant communities. Barriers to immigrant integration in rural areas included “discrimination, language, documentation status, regional, state, and national immigration policies, and economic stresses” (24). These barriers are unsettling. Some, such as discrimination based on language, appearance, or documentation status, are present in individual interactions between white and Latinx residents, such as in face to face conversations or in public spaces where their paths cross such as grocery stores, parks, or hardware shops. However, in a more troubling and large-scale way, these barriers, including discrimination imbedded in local and national policies, are systematically present in the structures that make up social and community services in rural areas.

For example, systemic barriers and consequential impacts, including detention or punishment, arose through policing practices. Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) was created in 2003 through the Homeland Security Act in response to the terrorist attack that occurred on 9/11/2001. Their mission includes promoting “homeland security and public safety” by enforcing laws relating to “border control, customs, trade and immigration.” In order to enforce safety, ICE has more than “20,000 law enforcement and support personnel in more than 400 offices in the United States and around the world.” (History of ICE) In Adams County, ICE has been present via raids, cooperation with local police and sheriff departments, and knocking on doors in search of certain undocumented migrants. Contradictory to their mission of ensuring safety, participants in research studies discuss negative experiences with police and immigration officers. (May et al. 2015) Similarly, I have grown up with the understanding that police officers and “la migra” (ICE) are a threat to my family’s safety and presence in the rural town I grew up in.
A personal example of ICE harming the migrant community in Adams County occurred in May of 2018, when ICE targeted a chain of Latinx-owned businesses in the area. ICE performed a raid of Montezuma Restaurants in Franklin and Adams County which resulted in the arrest of 11 men who were working at the restaurants. (Metrick 2018) At the time, one of my interviewees, Flor, a resident in York Springs, PA and former student at Bermudian Springs High School, worked at the Gettysburg location which was a part of the raid. She had not been scheduled to work on that day, but six of her coworkers were detained. She discussed how this occurrence highlights how ICE poses a threat to her physical and emotional safety and that of the migrant community in general. Many of those men were separated from their families and put into detention centers.

Aside from policing, migrants also experience other systemic barriers in rural areas. For example, the Illegal Immigration Relief Act of 2006 in Hazelton, PA “levied a daily $1,000 fine against any landlord renting to an undocumented immigrant and imposed a five-year business license suspension on anyone who hired an undocumented worker.” (Methema et al. 2018, p.26) This is an example of a policy explicitly meant to push out and exclude migrants based on their legal status. In terms of housing and occupations, migrants in rural towns faced punitive threats through fines and forced removal that were implemented through policies such as this one. Further, anyone who helped them with the necessary support to live (housing and jobs) also faced these hefty fines.

Another major systemic barrier that migrants in rural areas face is a lack of resources in their native language or access to translation, English learning, or culturally relevant services. They then face discrimination on individual and macro levels based on the lack of these resources. Human capital includes language ability and educational attainment. Immigrant
participants in a study on migrant integration in rural areas described instances of discrimination in both areas. They described how host community residents had negative perceptions of migrants and many of them stemmed from stereotypes of Latinx people related to drugs, alcohol, and crime. Harmful perspectives also stemmed from the idea that they could not speak English and therefore did not belong here. (May et al.’s 2015) My interviews with migrant parents from rural PA reflected these patterns as they described discrimination in public spaces such as grocery stores or community events based on their appearance, accents, or limited English proficiency. Melissa, who I mentioned earlier, is a migrant mother of three and has been in the area for 24 years. She stated:

“I have this feeling that whenever I walk into, it could be anywhere, like Walmart or McDonalds, any place, the people just stare at you for whatever reason. I feel out of place, they stare at you a lot. I feel like they stare at you because of your skin color, because you’re Hispanic because this place was mostly white people and you don’t see that many Hispanics here. Sometimes they will make comments, that you didn’t talk the language or stuff like that. It didn’t matter that I did…” (Melissa, age 44, August 28, 2022).

Constant negativity and neglect from locals based on migrants’ perceived language abilities or skin color can lead to an impaired sense of belonging and stunt integration. Despite having been here for 24 years, Melissa describes the deep impact of these comments when she says it makes her feel out of place. Further, as a darker skinned woman, she also spoke about the racist comments people made towards her. Despite having learned English, she often did not confront these people. This is possibly because this treatment makes her feel like an outsider or she may feel guilt or fear because she is undocumented.
Based on the factors listed above regarding systematic barriers and discrimination in economic, social, political, and public spheres, it is clear that migrants, particularly undocumented families, in rural areas face barriers that white or natural born citizens do not face. Some researchers have found that there are separate social networks dividing immigrants and host community members in rural communities. (May et al., 2015, pg. 33) Considering the over policing, punitive circumstances, and rejection from white residents, the division between these communities is rooted in distrust and disconnect. White community members may not be able to empathize with the systemic barriers migrants experience. They are not impacted by ICE raids, structural exclusion, and discrimination on micro and macro levels. The narratives I included in this section highlight this and may be helpful for allies to begin to understand the extent of push out or fear tactics that migrants in their communities face.

**Latinx migrant experiences in schools**

Given the previous context on migrant integration into rural areas, I spend the rest of this chapter focusing on migrant experiences in schools, with specific attention to the systemic barriers migrants face in rural school districts. Based on the migrant population growth in rural areas, there is an increase in children from Latinx migrant backgrounds in these areas. Institutions that serve these children, such as public schools, quickly feel the impact of these changes. (Johnson 2012, p.8) Despite a visible and growing presence in schools, barriers that migrant parents face in the community and in their workspaces appear in different forms in school settings. Migrant Latinx students face systemic barriers such as punitive or exclusive policies, bullying and discrimination, and excessive surveillance. Migrant parent interviewees in study on immigrant integration in rural areas expressed hope about interactions and integration among youth, but found similar separation in social networks by adolescence. (May et al.’s
In the following sections, I explore varying aspects of school safety and their possible impact on migrant students’ sense of safety and belonging.

**Discipline and School Safety**

I investigated the history of nationwide discipline policies and how they are applied in current local contexts. In different areas of my thesis, I explore the relationship between student discipline and safety in schools. This is because discipline codes are often cited as necessary to promote safety. My critical analysis of discipline codes questions who and what discipline codes are meant to protect, given their history, which I dive into below. Despite heavy national influences and requirements, discipline policies are localized because school officials have the authority to discipline students. Further, “school boards have the discretion to institute more detailed discipline policies than those described by state law” (Eckes and Russo 2012, p.xvii). In the following sections, I explore national discipline policies instituted to keep students safe. I analyze how these policies play out in local contexts and the criminalizing effect they have on migrant Latinx students.

**Roots of Zero-Tolerance**

In this section, I expand on the relevant history of policies that lead to the criminalization of migrant students and their overrepresentation in detention, suspensions, expulsions, and other punitive, disciplinary measures. Zero tolerance was initially used in the 1980’s in connection with the War on Drugs. (Aimee Vergon Gibbs 2012, p.22) The impact of zero-tolerance tactics during the War on Drugs was the mass incarceration and mass deportation of Black and Latinx men. (Golash-Boza, 2015, p.143) The embodiment of these strict, punitive policies into schools is visible when examining the development of zero tolerance policies in schools, the increasing
links between schools and law enforcement officials, and the impact of these carceral policies in educational spaces on Black and Brown students.

To introduce how zero tolerance was embodied in educational spaces, I discuss some background on early policies that followed the rhetoric and repercussions outlined in federal zero tolerance initiatives. To start, the Drug-Free Schools and Campuses Act of 1989 “required all educational institutions receiving federal funding to establish disciplinary sanctions for violations or risk forfeiture of their federal funding” (Gibbs 2012, p.22). Considering the threat of losing federal funding, all public schools had to move quickly to implement these policies in their districts. Similarly, The Gun Free Schools Act (GFSA) of 1994 required the implementation of sanctions regarding weapon violations at schools. These policies reflect the structure and consequences of laws enacted during the War on Drugs. They were presented as quick solutions to a rise in school shootings and student drug use problems. They strictly and structurally addressed issues revolving around gun violence, substance abuse, and mental health through zero tolerance policies which were applied in all public schools across the U.S.

Because these policies were instituted in a neoliberal context in the U.S, they impacted surveillance practices and followed a model in which everything is marketed and privatized. For example, GFSA (1994) brought neoliberal practices into schools through providing “funds for public schools if they could demonstrate an existing crime problem, which compelled schools to implement data-collection systems and categorize crimes as broadly as possible” (Torres and Torin 2010, p.2). Ultimately, this increase in surveillance in connection with zero tolerance policies, strengthened the school-to-prison pipeline. The incentives in funds for schools led to the systematic criminalization of Black and brown students through frequent practices of referring students to the juvenile court system for any behavioral issues.
Another major zero tolerance policy enacted and still present in schools is the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act passed in 2001. NCLB required school districts receiving federal funds to “have a policy requiring that any student who brings a firearm or weapon to school to be referred to the criminal justice or juvenile delinquency system” (Torres and Torin 2010, p.4). This policy facilitated the connection between law enforcement officials and schools because regardless of the weapon or the scenario, the identities of students involved in these cases were put into a police system which would impact them in the future. Further, “in the aftermath of 9/11…the U.S. Department of Homeland Security made grants available for schools to implement crisis management plans, coordinate with police, and purchase security equipment” (Torres and Torin 2010, p.4). The involvement of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in connection with policing and surveillance practices emphasizes the punitive and negative impact on migrant students and in particular undocumented students. Overall, these policies enhance police presence in schools or police interaction with schools, putting migrants from mixed-status families at risk of displacement or family fragmentation.

Tyler Wall further points out that No Child Left Behind Act (2001) “mandates that public schools receiving federal funding provide military recruiters with personal information about each high school student, such as names, addresses and telephone numbers” (Torres and Torin, p.105). Providing military recruiters with student information is another form of connecting schools and students to a national institution that promotes surveillance and violence. Further, this practice points to a neoliberalist practice of selling student information to military recruiters. In terms of the impact on migrant students, this creates a record in a national server of their presence at a U.S. school.

Impacts of Zero Tolerance policies
Research has demonstrated the ineffectiveness of zero-tolerance policies in addressing harm within schools. As I mentioned above, these policies were implemented under a neoliberalist agenda which led to exacerbated surveillance and information exchange with police and the military. With this in mind, zero tolerance policies propel excessive punishment and disparities between students, including racial inequalities. Charles B. Vergon discusses the ineffectiveness of zero tolerance policies for school homicides:

“...although it is true that the number of school homicides has declined between 1992 and the present, the number did not change appreciably between 1992 and 1998...it is also important to note that one of the most publicized and deadly school shootings, the massacre in Columbine, Colorado, occurred in 1999, a full four years after the enactment and implementation of zero tolerance policies. Only since 2000 has a consistent and substantial drop in school-related homicides been recorded, negating the suggestion that the change can be attributable exclusively or even primarily to the adoption of a zero tolerance weapons policy 6 years earlier.” (29)

Aside from evidence against zero tolerance policies’ effectiveness, scholars also outline the negative and harmful effects of these policies. Zero tolerance policies have transformed “what scholars have described as “the welfare state,” predicated on ideals of rehabilitation and inclusion, into “the penal state,” enforcing maximum punishments and exclusion” (Torres and Torin 2010, p.2). What Torres and Torin (2010) call the penal state is relative to the carceral state in which I contextualize my work that I discussed earlier. Based on the impact of zero tolerance policies during the War on Drugs, the impact of these policies on Black and Brown Latinx students reflects the impact on Black and Latinx men. They experience over policing, surveillance, and punishment at levels higher than other populations. Mass incarceration and
deportation translates into overrepresentation of Black and Brown students in detention, suspensions, and expulsions: “African-American and Latino students are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than their white counterparts” (Eckes and Russo, 2012, p.41). These experiences with penal systems can lead to negative psychological impacts including lingering feelings of fear or not belonging. The punitive nature of zero tolerance policies perpetuates exclusion from schools, negative relationships with schools and “harms the future educational success” of students. (Torres and Torin 2010, p.31) This carceral geography, a concept coined by Ruth Gilmore that I discuss earlier in this chapter, penetrates the schools where Latinx migrant students are required to learn. This affects Latino migrant students in Adams County as they inhabit a criminalized position of the “other” and become the main targets of punitive policies.

The variation in surveillance practices across different schools for the purpose of punishment can “reinforce racial, gender, and socioeconomic disparities in arrests and suspensions, educational attainment, and school safety” (Torres and Torin 2010, p.39). With migrants already facing barriers based on language, status, socioeconomic, and other factors, the disproportionate surveillance tactics reinforce these exclusions and systematic barriers. Ultimately, this uneven distribution of surveillance and punishment, “functions to prepare such students for their rightful positions in the postindustrial order, whether as prisoners, soldiers, or service sector workers” (Torres and Torin 2010, p.40). I expand on the neoliberal practice of reproducing social classes and the role of carceral and/or militarized tactics in the following sections.

Surveillance in a Neoliberal context
Extending upon how disproportionate policing contributes to preparing Black and Brown migrant students for underprivileged positions in society, I explore how surveillance functions under neoliberalism and contributes to harmful neoliberal expansion. In their framework, Torres and Torin (2010) describe the neoliberal ideological climate which leads to the formation of cultures of control in public education. They describe spaces within these neoliberal policies which are “monitored by surveillance, [and] predicated upon logics of inclusion and exclusion that...normalize the exclusion and containment of the most threatening, needy, or least economically productive members of society (Davis 1990)” (8). Latinx migrants fall within these members of society once they are criminalized and labeled as “others.” In this way, their exclusion and containment is normalized and carried out structurally through methods such as zero-tolerance policies.

In terms of surveillance, corporations and institutions such as police departments and military representatives interact with schools within neoliberal frameworks. In their section on “Schools as Markets,” Torren and Torres (2010) describe the transactions that occur between schools and security companies: “safety has become a commodity that is sold by security professionals whose purpose...is to create profit for the security companies for which they work...However, the public school system, especially when we take into account rural [schools], is a relatively new market” (74). If we position schools as a market in which security corporations, law enforcement officials, and military recruiters interact and compete for school administrators and families as their consumers, principles of safety become dehumanized. Overall the safety and security situation becomes more about increasing profits and controlling flows of labor rather than protecting students and prioritizing their sense of belonging and safety in these educational spaces.
Surveillance then becomes a tactic of controlling and limiting movement, reflecting the practices and tactics police and military forces use against migrant populations. Torres and Torin (2010) state: “Surveillance is a mode of governance that controls access, opportunities, and life chances and even helps to channel choices, often using personal data to determine who gets what” (14). With this context in mind, students are affected by the structures of surveillance set in place to categorize and sort them based on behavioral differences. Torres and Torin (2010) discuss how there is limited research to understand the perspectives of students who are navigating these systems of surveillance and control. (15) My research seeks to contribute to understanding the perspectives of students with lived experiences under surveillance during neoliberalism. Maintaining an understanding of how racial capitalism affects these migrant students, I hope to incite conversations about the effects of these interactions/transactions between student data and security equipment. Further, I ask in what ways surveillance harms these students, in their view, and how can we transform the ways in which we use surveillance or affectively characterize safety.

**Discrimination**

In this section I will discuss how Latinx adolescents experience structural and relational discrimination in schools from peers or school officials. Hong et al. (2016) discuss how migrants have historically perceived schools in the U.S. as “an avenue for improving social and economic prospects...however, many immigrant youth face discrimination and hostility, hampering their educational success engendering psychosocial distress and school-related fears” (997). This section delves into literature that highlights how the discrimination that migrant adults experience in rural neighborhoods is duplicated and reflected in the rural areas’ public school system towards their children, migrant students.
To start, school climate is impacted by social beliefs and the ways the media presents different issues. Peguero and Bondy (2021) discuss social beliefs which have led to negative school environments for immigrant youth. First, the “immigrant criminal myth” in which migrants are associated with increases in crime has led to increasing anti-immigrant sentiments in schools. This myth in combination with racialization as “illegal,” leads to the perception of Black and brown students as threats. (12) The immigrant criminal myth, which has been present across different eras of minority immigration, was propelled under Trump’s presidential campaign as a white supremacy era took over rural towns. During his campaign and presidency, there were “startling levels of fear and increasing racial and ethnic tensions in classrooms” (15). Trump and other relative politicians’ public xenophobic comments against Latinx migrants contribute to the continuity of the “immigrant criminal myth” and the denial of a safe space for migrant students who face rejection and neglect from peers or school officials.

One way negative stereotypes and anti-immigrant sentiments can affect Latinx migrant students is through their interactions with teachers. Peguero and Bondy (2021) discuss instances in which “teachers and administrators punish, discipline, or publicly humiliate the children of immigrants when they speak their native language” (66). This discrimination against Spanish speaking individuals and the tensions of white supremacist ideologies expanding during the Trump era all came up in my interviews with migrant students who attended high school in rural PA. Further, Latinx students in Peguero and Bondy’s study, as well as in my research, reported low teacher expectations and encouragement to train for lower paying employment. (26) These discouraging and racist phenomenons are present in rural areas like Adams County, PA which have a high concentration of Republican supporters and a marginalized concentration of migrants of color.
Aside from student-teacher relationships, anti-immigrant sentiments can affect peer relationships in rural high schools, leading to negative school environments. Relational and structural barriers found in studies on migrant student’s school experiences include peer discrimination and the absence of supportive institutional agents. (Lee et al. 2018, p.556) These circumstances are exacerbated by an anti-immigrant sociopolitical context that took over in the last few years. These barriers lead to the perception of an unsafe school environment for migrant students and therefore their isolation or exclusion from the school community. Overall, the U.S. public school system is affected by the sociopolitical context in the U.S. and the conditions in rural areas that are dominantly republican have led to instances of bullying and discrimination being normalized in schools and other public spaces.

Addressing Systemic Violence Against Migrants

After examining the various systemic and individual barriers migrant Latinx students and their families face in rural PA, I use this part of my research to discuss some ways to address the systemic violence that migrants face in rural PA. I base my proposed solutions in an abolitionist vision, emphasizing that as long as current systems run under a neoliberal / racial capitalism framework, Latinx migrants will be harmed. Despite this reality, I focus on highlighting and contributing to models that oppose policing, surveillance, and punishment of Black and Brown people. These approaches are culturally-relevant and trauma-informed. Aside from my initial introduction of these methods here, I expand more concretely on the ways migrants themselves, alongside allies, navigate systemic violence in chapter 4.

Aligned with the part of abolition that draws attention to building new models (rather than trying to reform old ones), I ask Latinx migrants for their perspectives on education systems because historically, marginalized communities have not had a say in how systems in the U.S.
operate. This approach is also rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT). The origins of CRT lie in the late 1980's when scholars in the Critical Legal Studies movement pushed for a social transformation strategy that explicitly incorporated race and racism. In essence, CRT is a framework that “theorizes, examines, and challenges the ways race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact social structures, practices, and discourses.” (Yosso 2005, p.70) In the field of education, scholars laid out five CRT tenants: “(1) the intercentricity of race and racism; (2) the challenge to dominant ideology; (3) the commitment to social justice; (4) the centrality of experiential knowledge; and (5) the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches” (Yosso 2005, p.73) My work is attentive to CRT tenants as I recognize and address systemic racism in rural high schools. I center the experiences of Latinx migrants in these high schools and combine their narratives with interdisciplinary research to think about how to transform Latinx migrants' sense of safety in rural PA. Overall, I use CRT to push for addressing racial issues on a systemic level based on the experiences of Latinx migrants in rural PA.

Alongside CRT approaches, I show how cross-cultural solidarity, also referred to as allyship, can contribute to addressing the systemic barriers Latinx migrants face. Public school teachers are uniquely positioned to begin to address some of these barriers within schools. I highlight the role of educators and school officials in creating educational spaces where migrant students feel safe attending. In their daily interactions with students and in their positions of power to modify and enact school policies, educators and administrators are responsible for curating safe schools. In previous sections, I detailed instances of surveillance, punishment, and discrimination under which migrant students are required to learn. As shown in my earlier research, educators can assume the role of assisting in executing detrimental policies or participating in harmful discourse fueled by anti-immigrant sentiments. To illustrate how
educators can avoid perpetuating harm towards Latinx migrant students, I draw from critical race theorists and education scholars, such as Bettina Love, whose work details examples of support and solidarity that educators and those working within the education system can become involved in.

In chapter 4 of my thesis, I go in depth on the role of educators in addressing the systemic and interpersonal challenges Latinx migrants face in Adams County, PA. I extend on the brief discussion above regarding Critical Race Theory (CRT) approaches and abolitionist teaching. I discuss related frameworks and concrete approaches for educators becoming allies. These recommendations are based on my research of education scholars and on my interviews with migrant students, parents, and current educators in the Adams County rural high schools I studied. Aside from educators, other community members can become advocates and allies for the Latinx migrant community. This solidarity is essential for increasing migrants’ sense of belonging and safety in the area.

Conclusion

In this first chapter, I analyzed research relevant to migrant safety in rural Pennsylvania. I researched the presence of Latinx migrants in rural areas of the U.S. Migrant adults face economic, social, and political hardships and barriers when attempting to settle in rural areas and make these places their home. There is organized and informal policing towards Latinx migrants. They face policies set in place to push them out of these areas. They confront social exclusion and ridicule based on their racial / ethnic appearance and because they do not speak English. These systemic and social barriers do not only affect migrant adults, they affect their children in public schools. These barriers can be seen in schools through over disciplining and surveilling migrant students and through zero tolerance policies. There’s also discrimination and rejection
from peers and staff. This discrimination is exacerbated by the Republican-dominated rural context in which misconceptions and harmful discourse against immigrants occurs at high rates.

Towards the end of this chapter, I begin an initial discussion on how to address the systemic barriers that migrants face. I start to explain how educators are uniquely positioned to address these barriers within the schools they are a part of. Educators have the power to reject policies that lead to the overrepresentation of migrant students in school expulsions and detention. Further, I define Critical Race Theory (CRT) and discuss how CRT approaches inform my work and can contribute to addressing systemic barriers. I discuss how in chapter 4, I expand upon ways to address systemic barriers immigrants face including through allyship and structural solutions.

In the next chapter, I focus on the regulatory systems in place in the high schools in rural PA that I chose to focus on. These are four high schools located in Adams County, PA. I analyze the student-handbooks that the schools give to their students each school year. These handbooks are meant to outline policies that schools are legally obligated to notify their students of, but they are also a way in which local districts can individualize and describe more in depth how their districts will approach certain situations. In my analysis, I found patterns of indoctrination, policing, and surveillance. I also point to areas in the books where the schools want to emphasize the safety of all students, yet they facilitate the invisibility of migrant students or their overrepresentation in detentions, suspensions, and expulsions. The analysis of these handbooks inspired me to think about how bureaucratic protocols and systems that often reference “legality,” or “safety” can co-opt the meaning of safety into something tied to citizenship status or something that is conditional.
Chapter 2: Limits of Legality

Introduction

Student-parent handbooks are a resource provided for public high school students at the beginning of each school year physically and/or electronically. These handbooks provide up-to-date general information about school procedures and policies regarding expectations for students. School handbooks must contain legal notices to students and parents including: "notices relating to nondiscrimination, Section 504 [information for students with disabilities], Title IX, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act [FERPA ensures the privacy of student’s educational records], the Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment, free and reduced-price school meals, and those required by NCLB [No Child Left Behind]" (Dolphin and Littlefield 2013, p.36). Critical policies included in these handbooks include discipline codes, attendance policies, bullying prevention and school climate policies, dress code policies, and search and seizure policies, as well as information on the grievance processes for parents and students.

Overall, these handbooks serve as a community agreement and outline the expectations, mostly for students, under which the school community will function to ensure the safety of everyone in the community. Despite the school wide dispersal of these handbooks and the requirement at some schools that parents and students sign agreeing to the handbook's expectations and policies, the majority of students and parents I interviewed did not recall ever reading through the handbook. This could be related to the fact that these handbooks are only offered in English at these schools or that they are lengthy, repetitive, and dispersed at the beginning of each school year- the same time a multitude of other paperwork is handed out for signatures including extracurricular sign ups and emergency contact forms.
Although most parents and students are not taking the time to thoroughly read these handbooks, school districts ensure that they are meeting their legal requirements with the notices detailed in the handbooks. The legal nature of these handbooks via the language utilized and the way the discipline sections often describe exclusion, removal, and referrals to law enforcement could lead to discomfort and tensions for migrant students and their families. Given the complexity of “illegality,” in the migrant community and the barriers undocumented students already face daily, the legal language and policies regarding the relationship between schools and law enforcement outlined in these handbooks can lead to erasure or neglect of the undocumented or mixed-status migrant communities. I highlight themes which signal erasure, isolation, or exclusivity towards migrant students, in spite of the fact that the policies outlined in these handbooks are meant to promote safety and wellbeing for the entire school community and in particular for students.

Nationalistic Language

One of the initial pieces of the handbooks that stood out to me was their mission statements and early acknowledgements by superintendents, principals, and assistant principals. The Bermudian Springs High School (BSHS) Handbook required a signature from students and parents and started off with stating that the failure to sign would result in disciplinary action. (2) This contract-like structure ties in well with the legal-like design that the handbooks are all formulated in. Two out of the four schools, BSHS and Biglerville High School (BHS), referenced citizens in their mission statements, possibly insinuating the idea that their handbooks are created for students and families who are citizens of the United States.

A further sign of nationalistic language is included in these two schools’ policies regarding the pledge of allegiance. BSHS’s handbook emphasized “proper respect for our
country and its flag” and requires students not participating in the pledge to “stand and remain respectfully silent” (7). Similarly, BHS students are required to “stand for the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance. Students who decide not to stand must submit a written excuse from a parent” (11). These policies may have been implemented in reference to the controversy after NFL player Colin Kaepernick did not stand up for the national anthem in 2016 in protest to ongoing, racist police violence. Payne (2016) cites his interview: “I am not going to stand up to show pride in a flag for a country that oppresses black people and people of color…” (n.p.) Despite familiarity with the reasoning behind this action, which was to protest systemic racism in the United States, these schools do not allow students to participate in similar action, instead prioritizing national pride and respect.

A student interviewee I spoke with, Flor, pointed out another instance in BSHS’s handbook in which nationalistic language erased the presence of undocumented students. As I mentioned earlier, student handbooks are structured around legal notices and abiding by legal entities. An explicit rule in all of the handbooks is to abide by U.S. and PA laws at all times. In her interview, Flor pointed out this policy in the discipline code. She stated: “Being undocumented means you’re in the USA unlawfully. So since I am not supposed to be in the USA, am I not supposed to be in the school learning, getting an education? Like everybody else.” Flor highlights the contradictory nature of being undocumented in spaces which legitimize illegality. Flor also makes a comparison between undocumented students and “everybody else,” acknowledging that k-12 public schooling is available to everyone regardless of migration status. This serves as a reminder that there are student populations in k-12 schools that are invisibilized or erased by bureaucratic aspects. Another set of policies in the student handbooks relevant to Latin migrant students revolved around school climate.
School Climate, Bullying, and Discrimination

School climate is often referenced when discussing student wellbeing and safety in relation to teacher-student relationships and the overall emotions and behaviors that are present within learning environments. Maintaining a positive school climate and environment was mentioned in all of the handbooks as a priority and as a shared responsibility between students, parents, and school staff. Each plays an important role towards creating a space in which students feel safe and are able to learn. The two sections where these roles were described more in depth were within bullying and discrimination policies. As I navigated the policies and expectations in the bullying and discrimination sections, I thought about what a positive, safe school climate would entail for migrant students and their families in rural areas. I also considered how the processes for reporting bullying or discrimination have a bureaucratic nature and therefore may not be accessible to migrant families.

Each of the four school handbooks had a section regarding bullying and cyber-bullying policies and the process for reporting such behavior. BHS’s handbook describes the effects of bullying as creating a “threatening environment” and, similar to each of the other schools, addresses the different types of bullying including verbal, physical, and psychological. (16) Given this context, migrant students can be subject to bullying from peers or staff when it comes to racial or ethnic slurs or the integration of anti-immigrant material in classes. Further, these students might feel unsafe or threatened in a setting where these slurs are said openly and their status is seen as criminal. Further, Peguero and Bondy (2021) describe the “immigrant criminal myth” in which migrants are associated with increases in crime. This myth in combination with the aftereffect of the Trump era on rural areas: a conservative socio-political landscape, has led to increasing anti-immigrant sentiments in areas such as Adams County, PA. The concentration
of these anti-immigrant sentiments in their high schools and neighborhoods can lead to the ongoing, widespread discrimination and social isolation of migrant students.

Each of the 4 student handbooks encourages students and parents to report any bullying incidents to school administration and outline response plans. BSHS’s handbook has a 4 step action plan that emphasizes the connection between parents and the school. This action plan also describes the profound levels of investigation and action that the school district takes in these circumstances. GAHS’s student handbook states the disciplinary actions for students found bullying including reference to “the School Resource Officer (SRO) or other law enforcement authorities” (14). The discipline process, penalties, and connection between school and law enforcement are clearly stated for students who engage in bullying behaviors but not as clear for teachers and staff as their position of authority is perceived as a neutral and encouraging one. In this regard, discrimination policy comes in.

Three out of the four handbooks mentioned the discrimination policy, but the processes for reporting discrimination that they described were vague and all similar to one another. BSHS’s handbook stated the process for filing grievances related to discrimination and that this process is spearheaded by the counselors, principals, and superintendent. (30) Further, it is states, “Inquiries regarding affirmative action /equal opportunity should be addressed to,” and lists the contact information for the district’s superintendent. NOHS and GAHS’s handbooks also give the contact information for their superintendents for students or parents to file complaints regarding discrimination. (49, 3) Relying on superintendents to undertake process regarding discrimination maintains the privacy of these matters but also keeps these processes isolated and bureaucratic. Further, the intake and action relating to discrimination cases are reliant on superintendents who do not share identities with migrant students who face discrimination. This
clash between identity, accessibility, and privacy may inform how and if students approach this process.

My analysis that the processes for reporting bullying and discrimination may be inaccessible or pose discomfort for migrant students was confirmed by Cielo, one of the migrant mothers I interviewed. When I asked Cielo about internal threats at her childrens’ high school, she shared: “Bullying lo pueden reportar o decir a la maestra, pero muchas veces no lo reportan, los chiquillos se quedan callados” (Cielo, age 41, June 26, 2022) Cielo spoke about how relationships between teachers and students like her sons, who faced disciplinary action often, are strained. Students who have strained relationships within schools may associate staff as being in opposition to them and therefore not confide in them when they are facing difficult situations at school, as Cielo puts it, “los chiquillos se quedan callados.” I analyzed another prevalent theme that affected Latinx migrant students and their relationship they had to their high schools. In the handbooks, the connection between schools and law enforcement institutions and officials was heavily reinforced.

**Connection between Schools and Law Enforcement**

When I interviewed Mr. Path, a government and sociology teacher at Bermudian Springs High School (BSHS), he shared a few stories of long-term interactions he’s had with Latinx migrant students. One of the stories he shared with me involved a migrant Latina student who confided in Mr. Path. She shared with him the abuse that she faced at home and at work. Mr. Path detailed his response to the situation:

“That was the first time I felt unsure about how to help in my life. We contacted the police eventually, even though she didn’t want to. She was afraid because she was born in Mexico and she was undocumented. I’m going to just be straight up and tell you what
happened. The police declined to press charges because they claimed it was he-said versus she-said.”

In this situation, Mr. Path starts by sharing the fear and distrust that undocumented Latinx migrants have of police. Despite the abusive situation she was in, this student was hesitant to involve the authorities due to her status. Her fear is valid. As I discussed in chapter one, migrants face over policing and interactions with law enforcement can lead to deportation (removal) and family separation. Further, despite Mr. Path reaching out to law enforcement for support, this request was denied and neglected. Mr. Path did explain some of the complexities of the situation and what ended up happening. This student turned 18 and moved into a different home with a family Mr. Path connected her to. She is now attending community college. He continued:

“This girl has gone through hell and back...she received no help from law enforcement...she fears and feared for things that were going on a daily basis...That is a student who is going to be real successful one day, but she needs support to make that happen”

Mr. Path reiterated that law enforcement did not help this undocumented student and that fear is a daily part of her life. Despite the failure of police stations, he highlighted that students in these situations are in need of support. This points to the possibility of having other support systems in place for Latinx migrants students who are not comfortable reaching out to police for various reasons, including those who reach out to no avail.

I use this conversation from one of my teacher interviews to introduce this section because I wanted to start by highlighting that for Latinx migrant students, contacting the police is often not the best or most helpful option. In the rest of this chapter, I analyze the connection between schools and law enforcement. This connection is reinforced in various parts of the
student handbooks, with a general sense that schools will not hesitate to contact law enforcement institutions when deemed necessary. I discuss some of these instances below.

Controlled Movement and Surveillance

Across the board, each of the schools handbooks had strict policies regarding attendance and truancy. All four of the schools handbooks—BSHS, BHS, Gettysburg Area High School (GAHS), and New Oxford High School (NOHS), described certain absences and tardiness as “unlawful” or “illegal,” these words at times appearing capitalized, italicized, or bolded. This language of legality references the connection between schools, laws, and law enforcement. The consequences of accruing a certain number of these “unlawful absences,” are also listed in each handbook. BSHS cites reference to the “Adams County Courts and fines at the local magistrate” (16). BHS, GAHS, and NOHS each describe references to “Children and Youth Services and the local magistrate which could result in a fine” (15, 9, 72). Further, 3 out of the 4 schools, BHS, GAHS, NOHS, mention a process of “credit denial” for students with “illegal absences” (BHS 15). Overall, attendance policy in each of these handbooks emphasizes the connection between the school and the court system. Consequences for students and parents include fines and suspension or expulsion. Mixed status migrant families may already live with the perpetual fear of court systems due to the traumas of having had family members incarcerated or removed from the country via these court systems. Therefore, these connections between schools and the courts as well as the constant use of “illegal” and reference to punishments may pose traumatic and anxiety-ridden concerns for these families.

Beyond regular attendance policies, student movement and actions are also closely surveilled according to policies in all four handbooks. BHS’s handbook states: “Students are expected to be where they are assigned at all times” (16). The strict designation of space is in
regards to the safety concern of having all students accounted for, but does not represent realistic expectations given free movement around a building or campus. Further, it places students in a position of inferiority in which their movement is limited and controlled. BSHS’s handbook states: “Leaving school without permission will be classified as UNLAWFUL and will result in disciplinary action” (17). The mention and capitalization of “UNLAWFUL,” reaffirms the connection between schools and law enforcement and references student criminalization processes. Similarly, students at GAHS and NOHS cannot leave school without “appropriate permission,” such as that of their “parents/guardians and administration” (GAHS 7). These limitations and surveillance of students’ movement can be detrimental and criminalizing to older students and migrant students as it places them in positions of children, rather than young adults, and deems them untrustworthy persons who must be controlled and monitored. Exceptions to this rule include early release programs for seniors, however this is often a privilege easily revoked as a disciplinary measure.

Other aspects of student life which are also closely monitored and controlled include driving and internet use. In terms of cars and parking on school grounds, parking permits are required at all 4 schools. However in order to get a permit, proof of a drivers license must be presented and undocumented people in PA cannot obtain a license. Disciplinary measures for people who break these rules include fines, towing, and detention. The inability to get a driver’s license would likely not stop most students who know how to drive and have access to a car from driving to school and therefore these types of procedures put them at risk for facing legal consequences despite the legal systems in the U.S. being the only barrier stopping them from obtaining a valid license. Activities around technology use at these schools are also described in the handbooks as closely surveilled. BSHS states that incidents regarding technology misuse
“may be referred to appropriate authorities when laws are broken...under Pennsylvania law, computer crimes are serious matters and are classified as felonies with serious penalties” (see Cyber Bullying)” (22). Similarly, BHS’s handbook states that the school can investigate “All e-mails and messages sent through the school’s network” and this “activity cannot violate law or compromise safety” (7). These practices send the message that there is no privacy in terms of internet use and communication at the schools as any information shared online can be used in the court. This can be threatening to undocumented students as they may feel the need to limit what they share about their identity or background in these spaces. Further, the mention of “Pennsylvania law,” “crimes,” and “felonies” exacerbates the message of criminalization and collaboration between schools and law enforcement.

Another aspect of the handbooks that points to surveillance of movement is the incorporation of video cameras within school buildings. BHS’s handbook prioritizes cameras to protect individuals and their property from harm,” with the limitation that privacy should also be protected, “therefore, the use of video surveillance must be strictly monitored” (32). Surveillance at this school is used to prioritize the protection of property which fits into Torres and Torin’s (2010) analysis of safety as a commodity. In GAHS’s handbook they state that the district “may utilize information gathered from video surveillance and audio surveillance as evidence in disciplinary action and/or criminal prosecution” (22). In this way, video surveillance can be weaponized as a tool for criminalization rather than safety and protection.

Discipline Code and Zero Tolerance Policies

A final section of the student handbooks that may affect migrant students in terms of their perceived safety and criminalization is the discipline codes and the consequences for breaking any of the expectations outlined in the handbooks. Each of these handbooks describes discipline
as paramount to ensuring “safety, school climate, and laws” (BSHS 23) or promoting a “safe and orderly school environment” (BHS, GHS). The relationship between teachers, students, and parents is also emphasized in the discipline codes as all are expected to adhere to these policies and consequences. However, power dynamics in terms of authority are also made clear in the codes. The extensive connection between schools and the law is clear in the discipline codes. BSHS’s handbook states the expectations of students: “To follow and respect all PA and Federal Laws at all times as they represent themselves and our community” (24). The reference to laws is frequent. Two of the handbooks also mention student records which are maintained for the lifetime of most students. (GAHS 20, BHS 32) In this section, I analyze power dynamics, connection between schools and juvenile courts/ law enforcement, and the punitive nature of zero tolerance policies present in the handbooks despite BSHS’s claim that “The term discipline or discipline code is not meant to be used synonymously with the word “punishment.”” (23)

In terms of power dynamics, the discipline code policies use terms such as authority and obedience to enforce power structures which require students to obey those authorized to discipline them. GAHS’s handbook states that the “school principal has the authority to discipline students.” (11) This theme is common among the handbooks as the principals or assistant principals are often referenced as the ones making the ultimate decisions on consequences for misbehavior. The role of teachers is also highlighted in these codes as they “reserve the right to assign detention” or refer students to the principal (GAHS 12). Further, BSHS’s handbook states: “It is also expected that parents will cooperate with school authorities in helping students and pupils to maintain such conduct” (23). In this way, the connection between schools, teachers, and parents is viewed as one where authority is exchanged and maintained over students.
Although differing slightly in names, the forms of discipline are similar in the 4 school handbooks. These forms of discipline are broken down in the NOHS handbook including: classroom detention, lunch detention, after-school detention, in-school suspension (ISS), saturday school, out-of-school suspension, and alternative school placements. (66-7) During my interviews with Latinx migrant students, I asked some students about their experiences with discipline in high school. One student who recently graduated from NOHS in 2021, Kimberly, shared:

“I was disciplined a lot...They expected me to do an excessive amount of saturday schools and in school suspension...they put me in the booth, it's like a small room, like the size of a really small closet. And all it has is one light and a desk and a chair. And it's really like, it's tiny. So if you're claustrophobic, it's gonna feel really tight.” (Kimberly, age 18, September 7, 2022)

Kimberly’s description of being over-disciplined was a common theme in my interviews with migrant students and parents that I discuss in later chapters. Kimberly’s detailed description of the in school suspension she faced illustrates the punitive nature of these forms of discipline. The space is as small as a “closet.” Given Kimberly’s thin build and short height, her description of a space so small, it’s claustrophobic is significant.

Further aspects of discipline, listed in NOHS’s handbook include a “loss of privileges,” such as prohibiting students from attending prom or other school functions as a result of the violations described in the sections below (Drug/ alcohol/ weapons), repeated referrals, attendance or truancy violations, and debts. (65) These consequences are punitive in nature because they involve removal from academic and social spaces and rejection of students who cannot measure up to expectations. Further, students are referred to as “offenders” when they
break rules and the consequences increase in levels due to repeated misconduct or an accumulation of different misbehaviors. The punitive nature behind these consequences and language reflects carceral terms and mass incarceration/deportation practices. GAHS’s handbook even discusses how “unserved suspension time will carry into next year” (13). The language around disciplinary measures is extremely punitive and criminalizing and this can affect migrant students specifically as their demographic is also overrepresented in federal and state carceral measures.

Drugs and Alcohol

All of the school handbooks included a policy on drugs and alcohol, specifically on their commitments to being drug and alcohol-free campuses. Overall, all of the high schools’ policies reflect zero tolerance for possession and distribution. However, there are also some “guidelines for assisting those students who admit to dependence on drugs and/or alcohol” (BSHS 25). Though this is stated in most of the handbooks, it conflicts with the zero tolerance protocols and it is not clear if the punitive consequences come alongside the assistance for these types of students or not. In this section, I explore the tensions between criminalizing practices and possibly restorative practices, with zero tolerance being the seemingly dominant policy in most of the handbooks as it is listed first and is more developed in the handbooks by meticulously outlining the consequences for offenses in contrast to the vague references to student assistance programs.

In general, the policy for drugs and alcohol in most of the handbooks is divided into first, second, and third level offenses for possession/use and distribution. The mutual consequences between the 4 school handbooks include “expulsion and referral to law enforcement/local police department” (BSHS 29, GAHS 12). Further, students can face a “fine through the District Justice
Office” (BSHS 37, GHS 16). These consequences outline the connection between schools, courts, and law enforcement which can be detrimental to undocumented students by leading to criminal records and deportation. Further evidence of the school-prison nexus is clear in their approval for use of police methods to find the presence of drugs at schools. GAHS’s student handbook states: “School officials must possess a reasonable suspicion...The [police] dogs will be limited to locker areas, the parking lot, and other areas where the administration has reason to believe drugs may be hidden” (21). NOHS also references the possible use of drug detection dogs on school grounds. A last punitive approach to drug and alcohol use is that offenses are cumulative and “All information and/or evidence secured in connection with violations...shall be submitted to the proper local or state law enforcement agencies for possible criminal investigation and prosecution” (GAHS 26). This reference to “criminal investigation and prosecution,” shows the possible criminalization of students and how easily they can become juvenile offenders. These tactics incite fear rather than providing protection. Further, the punitive consequences and constant reference to law enforcement might prevent students from accessing the help resources listed thereafter.

Despite the extremely punitive and harsh measures listed above in terms of drugs and alcohol, most of the schools also had statements on providing assistance for students dealing with drug and alcohol dependency issues. BSHS’s handbook states: “...the school district shall assist those seeking help” which can be through the “Student Assistant Team, A peer counseling program sponsored by the district, The district’s counseling program, or A counseling program established or recognized by the local Drug and Alcohol Abuse council” (26). This was the most in depth description of help in any of the handbooks. However, NOHS and GAHS’s handbooks also mention Student Assistance Programs for students dealing with dependency. (81, 18) With
similar efforts, GAHS and BHS each discussed that they have naloxone on site to address possible overdoses. (12, 28) In particular GAHS’s handbook states: “To encourage overdose-reporting, students who report possible overdoses in the school setting and qualify for immunity from criminal prosecution will not be subject to school discipline procedures” (12). This information is helpful in maintaining safety and is the only time immunity from criminality and discipline is addressed, despite the “if,” insinuating that not all students who report these cases would qualify for criminal immunity. This caveat would stand out for migrant students who may be undocumented or on temporary/pending visas.

**Fighting & Weapons**

Two other sections of the student handbooks that are affected by strict discipline policies and zero-tolerance federal policies are fights and weapons or weapon look-alikes at schools. In terms of fights at school, BSHS’s student handbook specifies that the assistant principal or principal have the authority to decide what discipline students will undergo (likely 10 day suspension) based on “motivation, environment and physical injury,” further, “School Administration reserves the right to contact law enforcement officials and/or social agencies when individuals engage in fighting” (BSHS 30-1). Similarly, GAHS’s handbook mentions “possible police referral for profane language and physical violence” (14). These approaches to fights emphasize the connection between schools and law enforcement officials and how involvement in a physical altercation can lead to legal charges. This discourages migrant students from defending themselves or engaging in fights.

In terms of weapons, the four handbooks followed the zero-tolerance policy process. BSHS’s handbook states that the authorities would be involved for “cases involving arson, false alarms, terrorist threats, fireworks” and “criminal charges filed” (42). Aside from notifying law
enforcement, BHS and GAHS similarly stated “permanent expulsion” for terroristic threats (22, 13). The promised removal from schools and referral to police emphasizes the strict enforcement of zero tolerance in collaboration with law enforcement. However, BHS’s handbook pointed to a unique exception in which students can request approval from the “building principal to bring a weapon onto school property for classroom purposes or a school function,” Arrangements would be made for “the safe storage and transportation of the weapon” to and from school (23). This policy may be in place for students in rural areas who hunt with gun licenses or have connections to law enforcement officials. Regardless, this exception when it comes to a typically zero-tolerance policy is evidence that there can be exceptions and transformations to federally based policies based on local population needs and interests.

Search and Seizure

A final aspect of the discipline code enforcement that reflects criminalization and connections between school and law enforcement is the integration of search and seizure policies. These policies were present in all four of the school handbooks, particularly with respect to student lockers and vehicles. Each school used the language that “school authorities retain the right to search all lockers without warning and without the consent of the student or his/her parents or guardian, and to seize any illegal materials found therein.” Further, materials found “may be used as evidence against the student in disciplinary or legal proceedings” (GAHS 15). This excerpt reflects the policies in place at all of the schools and shows the exchange in authority between parents and administrators as the administrators are able to act on their own accord. Further, BSHS’s handbook states: “Searches conducted by the administration may include, but not be limited to, utilization of certified drug dogs, metal detection units, or any device used to protect the health, safety and welfare of the school population” (39). This excerpt
solidifies the connection between criminalization, law enforcement, and surveillance. Further, the reference to police technology and devices reaffirms Torin and Torres’s (2010) statement that safety has become a commodity sold to schools in the form of technology in the name of security and protection. The presence of cops, drug dogs, metal detection devices and other police technology can seem threatening and generate fear in migrant students who may have had traumatic experiences with border patrol technology.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I analyzed some of the policies outlined in student handbooks from the four high schools included in my research. These handbooks are written with legal language and often reference terms and practices related to illegality and criminalization. They use nationalistic language and describe policies that are U.S.-centric. The handbooks also describe the policies for maintaining safe and positive school climates, though they are bureaucratic and vague when it comes to the processes for reporting discrimination cases. Narratives from migrant student and parent perspectives reinforce how the legal language and bureaucratic process for reporting bullying and discrimination discourage migrant students from feeling fully safe and supported in these spaces.

The handbooks make clear the strong, ongoing connection between schools and law enforcement agencies and officials. They outline the limited and controlled movement of students at these schools. Language in the handbooks and Kimberly’s student narrative I included outline how these high schools have institutionalized zero tolerance practices. I highlighted practices which contribute to the erasure, isolation, and exclusivity of migrant students and their families. If these handbooks are truly meant to outline the practices and policies that will keep their students safe, they should consider the population of migrant
students present in their schools and recognize the ways in which their safety and wellbeing has 
been compromised or neglected in the language and layout of these handbooks. In the next 
chapter, I go in depth on student experiences under these policies and I analyze how they’ve 
experienced a place which at times does not acknowledge their existence, and how despite this, 
you have been able to flourish and grow within and beyond those places.

Chapter 3: Facing Barriers in High School

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze the experiences and stories from my former peers who attended 
rural high schools in south central Pennsylvania relating to their sense of safety in Adams 
County, PA. These students all identify as immigrants, whether they are undocumented, have 
Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status, or are documented students from mixed-
status families. They attended high school in Adams County, PA. Their former high schools 
were Bermudian Springs High School, Biglerville High School, New Oxford High School, or 
Gettysburg Area High School. All graduated from high school between 2017 and 2022. I had 
previously built connections with most of the interviewees which helped facilitate a space in 
which they could be vulnerable and share personal, at times emotional experiences. 
Incorporating their stories and voices into my work has been a rollercoaster which stirred up 
nostalgia for being part of the Latinx migrant community in Adams County and simultaneously 
activated a desire for change and growth to promote the migrant community’s safety and 
wellbeing.

Although each participant’s experience is unique, the Latinx migrant community in 
Adams County is so small and interconnected that many of the participants’ shared experiences 
and themes. These included a shared sense of home. These participants’ parents migrated to rural
PA with them when they were very young. These children grew up, attended, and graduated from high school here. They consider this home, consider themselves locals, and yet, they have all felt resistance to their presence in this rural area. They faced structural violence, oppression and individual discrimination inside and outside of the high schools they attended. They dealt with the restrictions of “illegality” before, during, and after the Trump era. Despite these inhospitable circumstances, they managed to create a community here. This is a theme that I explore in the next section. They found joy during their high school years. They shared these joyful experiences with me and highlighted how when they felt invisible or excluded from certain spaces or narratives, they were able to find other spaces they felt seen and safe in.

**Home is Here**

In the Fall of 2019, plaintiffs involved in a lawsuit against former President Trump’s attempt to terminate Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) organized and led a 230-mile march from New York City to Washington D.C. to draw national attention to the Supreme proceedings around DACA and TPS. (Home is Here, 2019) This march and campaign, Home is Here, made stops in Philadelphia, Media, and Kennett Square, PA where Pennsylvania migrants, including myself and other Swarthmore students, joined them. At the time I served as a community organizer for ENLACE, the Latinx student group at Swarthmore. I helped to
organize a trip for a group of Swarthmore students who identified as migrants to travel to D.C. on November 12th and join the marchers in front of the Supreme Court. (figures 4 and 5 below)

Figure 3.1
I share this story because the students I interviewed shared the same sense of “Home is Here,” that motivated this campaign. All these student’s families migrated to rural Pennsylvania between 2001-2009, at which point the students were between 6 months to 9 years old, most of them under 4 years of age. There was a shared sense of this area being home because they had been here since they were babies or very young. Flor, a graduate from Bermudian Springs High School who lives in York Springs, PA sums up these feelings: “They brought me when I was a baby, so I’ve grown up in Pennsylvania, spent all my life in Pennsylvania, this is home.” (Flor, age 24, August 18, 2022) Given this sense of home, most of the students felt empowered to defend themselves against resistance to their presence or their family’s presence in this area of Pennsylvania. I expand on the resistance they faced and how they navigated it below.

A theme around home that multiple students mentioned was the sense of being acostumbrado or “used to” rejection from white people in the area. Jonathon, a former student at
Biglerville High School, stated: “There were some racial comments every now and then. Which is kind of common around here, sadly” (Jonathon, age 22, August 2, 2022) Nayeli, a student who also attended Biglerville High School added to this narrative, stating: “I feel like I’ve just been so used to it [racial comments] being a normal thing that it’s like, you know, what’s new? I’m used to this.” (Nayeli, age 22, August 3, 2022) These participants communicated that white people in Adams County making negative remarks about the Latinx community was something that they got used to while growing up in rural Pennsylvania. This place has always been their permanent home, yet they experienced negative discourse about their community so often, they got used to it. These young people are fully aware of the racial remarks and resistance to their families’ presence here. However, they refuse to make every confrontation a big deal. As migrants who are already facing a plethora of systemic barriers, discussed in the previous chapter, they are calculated in their interactions and thoughtful about where they put their energy.

Whether they are DACA, undocumented, or from mixed status families, each student shared that they don’t remember how it felt to move or migrate because to them, it’s as if they’ve always been here. They grew up here and learned to navigate the systemic and social barriers that they faced. This is their home, they should feel physically and emotionally safe here. In the rest of this chapter, I analyze how participants felt relative to their physical and socioemotional safety in the rural high schools they attended in Adams County, PA. Below, I discuss external and internal threats to their safety and analyze the thoughts and experiences participants shared with me regarding school safety.

School Safety Structures and Systems

In this section, I discuss to what degree migrant students felt safe in their high schools in Adams County, PA. I asked them questions about their school’s structures and response systems
for external and internal threats. In terms of school structure and systems, there were mixed emotions about safety, security, and wellbeing. I begin by analyzing the responses relating to external threats and physical safety because participants generally felt safe from these types of threats. The rest of the subsections under school safety structures and systems focus on socioemotional and physical safety relating to internal threats at school or threats based on systemic barriers and individual conflicts that stemmed from these barriers, including conflict due to the white, Republican dominant socio-political climate.

External Threats

Regarding emergency response plans for external threats, the participants and parents from three of the four schools, Bermudian Springs, New Oxford, and Gettysburg Area high schools, felt safe and that their school staff were well-prepared to respond to these types of threats, including intruders. Luz, Flor, and Nayeli all attended Bermudian Springs High School and pointed out that this district was well-prepared for external emergencies. Melissa, the mother of two Bermudian Springs’ graduates, commended the school’s quick response systems. Nayeli shared an example of a false intruder alarm that illustrates this quickness. She shared, “within like an hour, they knew who it was, and they knew it was a false alarm…even the parents at home knew, like the parents that were like aware of that stuff, obviously mine weren’t, but you know what I mean?” (Nayeli, age 22, August 3, 2022) One notable piece of Nayeli’s comment is that despite parents being notified immediately, her parents were not aware. This could be due to their working situation. At warehouse or agricultural job sites, laborers are not allowed to have cell phones on them due to safety concerns. This poses the possibility that they would not be aware of emergency situations occurring at their children’s schools.
Kimberly, a recent graduate of New Oxford High School (NOHS), also shared a sense of trust in her high schools' response systems to external threats. She shared: “I remember there was a shooting threat and they kept everybody from coming to school that day...they showed a video [The Alice Drill] with instructions...The teacher would basically protect us. We would put desks up against the doors and all hide” (Kimberly, age 18, September 7, 2022). Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate (ALICE) training was created in 2000 after the Columbine High School shooting. ALICE aims to prepare individuals to respond to active shooter situations. (Active Shooter Training) Kimberly appreciates the communication and action that the NOHS admin took when facing a possible shooting threat. She also relays that she trusts the staff to be effectively protective based on the ALICE training drills NOHS incorporates in its external emergency response plans.

With regards to ALICE training, two participants established that this training did not make them feel safe. Jonathan shared: “I feel like if there was an intruder, getting locked inside of the classroom is not the best idea” (Jonathon, age 22, August 2, 2022) Jonathan’s reasoning was a critique towards active shooter drills, such as ALICE, which involve locking and barricading classroom doors and staying inside the building. In a similar thought process, Mr. Path shared: “I think [ALICE Training] does more harm than it does good...we're practicing a drill with the people most likely to bring the gun into the school in the first place...the problem is the guns...the people in my community are saying arm the teachers” (Mr. Path, BSHS Government and Sociology Teacher, September 30, 2022). Mr. Path and Jonathon point out the possible harm that the ALICE training can do by highlighting the flaws and limits of these drills. Mr. Path emphasizes that this type of training and approach neglects to address the “gun problem.” Rather than setting up systems that prevent gun distribution and misuse, we are
training for when these situations will occur. Further, he highlights the conservative nature in Adams County by mentioning how the people in his area want to “arm the teachers,” a process that disregards how weapons in schools are dangerous. Mr. Path points out the extreme pressure on teachers to protect children in these situations and how policies that prevent weapon abuse could be more effective for keeping schools safe.

Another student who attended Biglerville high school did not feel as safe from external threats. When asked if the school’s emergency response plans made her feel safe, Nayeli stated: “The school wasn’t strict when it came to security… anyone can open the door for anyone and they can walk in and they can walk out, and sometimes the administration is not even in the office… I wouldn’t be surprised if something were to happen and they’d get away with it because of that layout” (Nayeli, age 22, August 3, 2022). Nayeli compared Biglerville’s approach to external threats to Bermudian’s approach and ultimately did not feel as physically safe at Biglerville due to their layout combined with a lack of strictness towards security. One mother I interviewed, Julia, initially suggested that building a fence around the school would make it safer. However, she immediately stated: “Pero pues así cuando? No se puede… Yo me imagino que ya todos modos nadie se detiene de hacer algo, estén cerradas o como estén hacen las cosas” (Julia, age 57, August 17, 2022). By highlighting that external threats could happen whether school were fenced up or with an open layout, Nayeli and Julia illustrate a need for solutions that are preventative and based on human connection.

Overall, in terms of external threats, there was a general sense of feeling safe and trusting their former high schools’ emergency response plans to these types of situations. However, there were multiple participants including students, parents, and teachers who were critical of current systems and approaches to external threats. These interviewees sparked the idea that safety is not
necessarily about security measures such as barricades and excessive training. They pointed to safety being about human interaction and attentiveness. Participants did not mention their status as migrants in this part of the interview. This was significant because their migrant status not differentiating their sense of safety relative to external threats shows that their safety can be prioritized at the same level as other students. These students felt that they would be protected by school staff and felt that they were trained to be aware of how to react in emergency situations. Perhaps this level of protection and training could be applied when migrant students face internal threats. In the rest of this chapter, I analyze what the bulk of my interviews ended up being about: migrant students’ socioemotional safety and wellbeing.

Internal Threats

In the rest of this chapter, I discuss internal threats to student safety and the distinct issues migrant students face in Adams County rural high schools. When it came to internal threats such as bullying, discriminatory practices, or staff-student conflict within the schools, participants from all of the high schools felt that the school staff did not respond well to these cases and were not fully prepared to respond to internal threats. Despite praising Bermudian Springs High School’s (BSHS) response to external threats, when I asked Luz, a graduate from BSHS, about the school’s response to internal threats to student safety, she immediately said: “I feel like schools are not doing as much as they should be.” (Luz, age 21, August 2, 2022) All six of the participants who formerly attended these high schools shared this sentiment and opened up about personal experiences where they felt physically or emotionally unsafe due to threats inside their schools. I share and analyze these experiences in the following sections.
White Supremacy and the Trump Era

White supremacy, which was exacerbated during the Trump campaign and presidency, heavily impacts migrant student experiences in Adams County high schools. When white supremacist belief systems are exercised, there are consequential impacts on communities of color who are portrayed and treated as inferior, such as the Latinx migrant community. In his 2016 and 2020 presidential campaigns, Trump used the slogan “Make America Great Again,” appealing to white nationalists. His campaign strategies included anti-immigrant and anti-Latinx rhetoric, including a push to “build the wall,” along the U.S.-Mexico border and the assertion that Mexico is “not sending their best.” This xenophobic rhetoric can be linked to an increase in “demographobia,” the feeling that “whites are under siege by growing racial/ethnic diversity.” (Canizales and Vallejo 2021, p.151) The growth in Latinx migration and migrant settlement in Adams County has the potential to become the target of increased anti-immigrant attacks. Melissa discussed how White supremacist ascendency at the national level combined with discriminatory face to face confrontations informed the daily realities of the migrant community in Adams County, PA.

As shown in chapter 1, Adams County is a heavily republican and conservative area. Anti-immigrant discourse has had a significant influence on the context which has heavily affected migrant families who settle here. Further data that showcases how white supremacy informs this context is visible in the county’s voting results from 2020 depicted in figures 6 and 7 below.
There were over 12,000 votes each for Republican candidates Trump and Mastriano. (2020 Presidential Primary) Senator Doug Mastriano serves as the current senator for the 33rd district of PA, which includes Adams County. Similar to Trump’s campaign, Mastriano’s campaign strategies have targeted extremist, right-wing audiences. Many media platforms have called him out on his ties to white nationalism. Democratic Governor’s Associate, Deputy Communications Director Sam Newton stated: “Mastriano’s campaigning for the support of violent extremists, antisemites, and white supremacists, not everyday Pennsylvanians” (DGA 2022). As the current senator for Adams County, Mastriano disregards the migrant population in the area, instead further amplifying anti-immigrant rhetoric.

During my conversations with migrant interviewees, they illustrated what it was like to live in Adams County under the Trump Era. Melissa shared: “you could hear more comments regarding Hispanics…in a way, he encouraged people to, to say stuff like that.” She discussed how this made her upset, but what made her more upset was her kids’ experiences at Bermudian Springs high school. Melissa detailed: “I remember my kids saying that many of the students
were making comments towards them about, build the wall, build the wall...I remember telling them to just ignore them.” Melissa discussed how she did not want her kids to spend their energy trying to prove their humanity or belonging. She maintained: “I think it’s up to the parents the way you educate your kids and you show them values...you have to show your kids that no matter what color your skin is, or, or where you were born. I mean, you're not different” (Melissa, age 43, August 28, 2022). Melissa’s approach to the increase in anti-immigrant sentiments was to assert that the adults in the area needed to teach equality as a value. She explicitly references skin color and nationality as categories that should not define people, the same categories that fuel white supremacy and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

A further pattern in regard to high school experiences during this time period in rural Pennsylvania was the pressure to conform to whiteness or fit in with white peers. This process involved hiding or minimizing their Latinx identity due to a desire to be more approximate to whiteness. Nayeli explained: “In Bermudian I felt like I had to be a certain way, I had to dress a certain way or I had to like, you know, be ‘up here’ and then in Biglerville I already felt up here” (Nayeli, age 22, August 3, 2022). Nayeli’s feelings regarding conformity can be related back to the demographics at Bermudian versus those at Biglerville. Bermudian Springs HS’s student body of 610 is about 82.6% white and 15.2% Hispanic. Meanwhile, Biglerville HS’s student body of 522 is 68.2% white and 27.6% Hispanic. (PA US News) As showcased, the dominant population at Bermudian was white, which meant they drove the social scene. There may have been a stronger push to hide Hispanic qualities or ties. Nayeli’s comment about fitting in better at Biglerville highlights how the pressure to conform to whiteness can be disrupted through a stronger, and more visible connection to the Latinx community.
This pressure was intensified during the Trump Era. Trump’s campaign and presidency occurred when all of the participants I interviewed were in junior high or high school. One of the students I spoke to, Flor, described this as a time when white students “went loose” because the “Trump era made them feel comfortable” making racist comments. (Flor, age 24, August 18, 2022) Flor’s description of this time resonates with the “trump effect” which is the phenomenon that “Trump’s racially inflammatory speech emboldened individuals to express their prejudice.” (Canizales and Vallejo 2021, 156) The trump effect impacted Adams County in a way that white individuals in the area verbally and physically expressed xenophobia and felt comfortable doing so inside their high schools and in public spaces.

A clear example of the Trump effect was shared by Jonathon, who discussed how the Trump era was harmful during his high school years. Jonathon was a junior at Biglerville High School (BHS) when Trump was elected to the presidency in 2016. Jonathan described the morning after the election: “some of the students hung a Trump sign on the staircase where you enter, and it felt dark…[staff] took it down shortly after, [but] everyone saw it.” (Jonathon, age 22, August 2, 2022) The “dark” feeling Jonathon describes was a sentiment shared by Latinx migrants across the country. I remember the dread and fear in my community in those first days. Further, the location of the Trump banner at the entrance of the high school and Jonathon’s certainty that everyone saw it showcases how visible and permeating the anti-migrant, anti-Latinx sentiments were in his high school and our community in general.

Another impactful insight that Flor describes was the widespread realization in the Latinx community of white peers’ internal racism during the Trump era. Flor states: “These other Hispanics, the ones that would be good friends with the white people…they woke up and realized who they were friends with, that these people weren’t their friends, cuz they were racist
and they were rude all of a sudden.” The Trump Era was a time when Latinx people in Adams County experienced racism in interactions “not just in school, in public spaces.” Flor expands on this idea of “waking up,” by describing how “we obviously would defend ourselves. We wouldn’t let them get to us.” (Flor, age 24, August 18, 2022) The Latinx migrant community’s reaction to the overwhelming racism and harmful discourse about them was to resist and persevere. Below, I present narratives of racism and racial conflict in Adams County high schools from the perspectives of migrant students who attended these rural schools. I analyze and juxtapose these narratives to gain an understanding of how racism operates in Adams County high schools and how migrant students navigated and confronted systemic and individual racism.

**School Staff and Racism in Rural High Schools**

Aside from intensified dynamics with their white peers, migrant students were attentive to the ways school staff, including administrators and educators, responded, or failed to respond, to racist circumstances. To go more in depth on how the impacts of white supremacy and the Trump era are pronounced in Adams County high schools, I analyze three narratives of racism or racial conflict that participants shared with me. An integral theme in these narratives is admin/teacher-student relationships. I analyze the experiences migrants share by examining how they physically and emotionally felt in these situations and what they felt the schools’ response or neglect was in these cases. Migrant students navigated each of these situations in their former high schools, spaces meant for education, alongside school staff, individuals meant to teach them and protect them from harm.

*Bermudian Springs High School - Flor*

Bermudian Springs High School (BSHS) is the school with the lowest Latinx population in this study, with about 15% of the students identifying as Hispanic. (PA US News) This was
also the high school I attended. As a Latinx student on the honors track, I was the only non-white student in the vast majority of my classes. I share the experience of attending BSHS with Flor, who graduated from Bermudian Springs High School in 2017. Flor shared a narrative around racialized conflict that had to do with an academic assignment. I can relate to the general sentiment of having had problematic assignments in high school and having had educators who were all white. Flor’s narrative intrigued me because the situation was not intentional or malicious; it showcased how unintentional exclusion, systemic racism, affects migrant students.

When I asked Flor if there was anything else she wanted to share with me regarding her sense of safety in high school, Flor told me about a situation with a writing assignment that made her feel uneasy. Flor discussed how an English assignment she had her junior year of high school included entering her essay into a contest at the local veteran’s center. After submitting her piece, she was notified that her essay had been selected as a winner in the contest. The organization asked for her social security number, because a requirement to win the award recognition and money was to be a U.S. citizen. Flor could not meet this requirement and had to withdraw her essay from the contest. Flor shared how she felt and how her English teacher reacted:

“It was scary because nobody knew I was undocumented and to have to just put it out there was scary... then the teacher was in more panic than me... she was really upset. She was just a white American teacher that couldn't do anything and she felt completely useless. She pulled out that award winning essay, it was really upsetting.” (Flor, age 24, August 18, 2022)

In this situation, Flor described the fear associated with being undocumented and having to share her status with a white teacher. Flor was a high school student denied an award due to her status
and had to go through the anxiety and frustration of explaining why she could not accept this award, and yet she describes that her white teacher was visibly more upset and panicked than her. This teacher realized she “didn’t know the concerns of her students or what makes them feel insecure and unsafe in school,” because she had required all of her students to submit an essay to this competition, unaware or inattentive to the criteria of being a U.S. citizen to win. (Flor, age 24, August 18, 2022)

**New Oxford High School - Kimberly**

New Oxford High School (NOHS) is one of the bigger schools in my study with a population of 1,154 students. The racial demographic breakdown is 77.9% White and 17.4% Hispanic. (PA US News) Kimberly is the youngest interviewee in my thesis. She graduated from NOHS in 2021. Due to her high school experiences being the most recent in my study, I was shocked by her detailed descriptions of racial conflict at New Oxford. She shared multiple stories across her four years at NOHS. Below, I share some of Kimberly’s experiences at NOHS, which involved school staff, and I analyze how these experiences led to Kimberly feeling targeted and unsafe in her high school.

When I asked Kimberly to tell me about her experience in high school, she started by stating that she was close to dropping out her senior year. As I listened to her experiences of exclusion and discrimination, I understood. Kimberly spent 4 years trying to fit in and navigating the regular pressures of young adulthood. On top of that, she faced continuous conflict with school staff. By her senior year, Kimberly was exhausted from defending herself. Early on in our conversation, Kimberly highlighted the discrepancies between white and non-white students at NOHS: “most of the kids that were racist were well-acknowledged...the teachers and principals would uphold them more.” (Kimberly, age 18, September 7, 2022) Kimberly’s perspective as a
dark-skinned student at NOHS was that her peers, who she recognized as racist, were prioritized and treated better than students like her. Kimberly shared examples with me that illustrate these discrepancies. I analyze these in the next paragraph.

On a personal level, Kimberly talked about a teacher that dress coded her constantly. She stated that after two violations, she would wear hoodies and sweatpants to school; her mother made sure of this. The teacher continued to refer her to the principal for dress code violations or tardies, while overlooking these things for her white peers. Kimberly stated: “I felt targeted and I tried to tell one of the principals and they turned me away...they were like she wouldn't do that...they said they would address the situation after I kept going to them. But they never really did.” (Kimberly, age 18, September 7, 2022) After building up the courage to address the discrimination Kimberly felt she was facing, the school admin failed to take her concern seriously. By failing to consider power dynamics and appropriately address her concerns, this led to a hostile learning environment for Kimberly. Another experience Kimberly shared with me illustrates the disregard for students of color on a larger scale: “I remember we tried to make a Hispanic club and the principals, they didn't like it, they weren't okay with it. So we could never form that club.” (Kimberly, age 18, September 7, 2022) When Latinx students attempted to create an affinity space, the school blocked those efforts. Kimberly’s narratives outline the lack of a safe environment for Latinx migrant students at NOHS. Affinity groups serve as safety nets for students in dominantly white spaces, and the students at NOHS were denied this.

Biglerville High School - Nayeli and Jonathan

Biglerville high school has the highest Latinx migrant population in my study with a student body of 522 that is 68.2% white and 27.6% Hispanic. (PA US News) A student-led anti-racism movement occurred in Biglerville High School (BHS) in 2021. This student movement
showcased how Latinx migrants, alongside other POC students, navigated racism in an Adams County high school. Nayeli and Jonathon, who attended BHS at the time, spoke about how the school was not responsive to internal threats, and in particular to situations dealing with racism. Both participants referenced the anti-racism movement and the Instagram page that served as the movement’s main platform. Accounts on the Instagram page included concerning experience from the perspectives of various BIPOC. Black students experienced extreme levels of racism from staff and peers across generations; these experiences were exacerbated by the national protests following George Floyd’s murder and the continuous police brutality/murder cases in the U.S. While acknowledging the severity and ongoing nature of this racism towards all BIPOC at Biglerville, for the purposes of this project, I focus on the accounts from migrant Latinx students.

On January 21, 2021, students at Biglerville High School created an anonymous Instagram account called racismatbhs. The account’s first post called out BHS students, staff, and administration for perpetuating racism and called for people to join them in standing against this racism. The Instagram page, Racismatbhs, was the start of an anti-racism movement at BHS. The account accumulated 1,273 followers and their bio includes a link to their formal petition called “Hold Biglerville High School responsible for allowing students of colors to be abused for decades” which received 2,743 signatures. (CITE INSTA PAGE) On the page, which is now inactive, there are 110 posts. The majority of these are anonymous accounts from alumni and students who attended BHS (some who still do), detailing their experiences with racism at BHS. These accounts were posted in English and translated into Spanish within the same post. Many of these posts name dropped peers, teachers, staff, and admin who had made racist comments for years or enforced racist policies at the school for decades. Aside from white on poc racism, the
page also held poc students accountable for racism within their own communities or against
other poc. There were also multiple announcements on the account that this movement was not
an attack on white people, because white counterparts felt threatened; they reported the page and
contacted the police about it. As a movement led by high school students of color, they navigated
backlash including threats and criminalization for trying to stand up against the mistreatment of
their communities.

Nayeli described a sense of belonging at BHS due to the stronger Latinx presence there.
Complicating this was the racism she experienced at this school. Nayeli stated: “I witnessed a
lot of bullying and racism there.” She expanded through a personal experience: “the first day I
was there, a teacher made a comment to me that honestly, I felt it was unnecessary…I was
literally about to walk out of that class the very first day. I was like, no, that's not okay.” (Nayeli,
age 22, August 3, 2022) Her first day at BHS, Nayeli had an uncomfortable experience with a
teacher who made a racial comment towards her. Various posts on the racismatbhs instagram
account echoed Nayeli’s experience.
"The lunch lady called our table the brown table because we're Mexican. She asked me if I picked the grapes I was eating"

-Anonymous Student At Biglerville High School
"Our teacher told us we couldn't speak Spanish because it wasn't proper. If she heard us speak Spanish, we got written up. It still hurts my soul to this day. I will remember forever."

-Anonymous Student At Biglerville High School
"We ate at a table where we were the only two Mexican girls. When Trump was elected, they "deported" us from their lunch table. They said Trump would send us back home."

-Anonymous Student At Biglerville High School

Figure 3.5
“They got my phone number and kept calling me, saying things like “Go pick me some apples”. They said “Mexicans have no dads”. It really hurt me inside, because I don’t have a dad around. I used to think I didn’t have a dad because I was Mexican.”

-Anonymous Student At Biglerville High School

Figure 3.6

Figures 3.3 to 3.6 are accounts from alumni or students at BHS that describe the racism migrant Latinx students experienced. BHS staff and peers made ongoing xenophobic comments towards
Latinx migrants students about agricultural labor, language, deportation, and family separation. In regards to the school’s response to these kinds of occurrences, Nayeli stated: “I think it just kind of disappears...no one really pays attention to it. And I feel like that’s why the Instagram page became a big thing” (Nayeli age 22, August 3, 2022). The accounts, including Nayeli’s, portray complex narratives of invisibility and scapegoating often experienced in migrant communities. Nayeli cites the school’s unresponsiveness to this type of behavior as a propeller of the anti racism movement.

Illustrating this unresponsiveness, Nayeli and Jonathon both discussed how teachers who were called out for being racist for decades, accused by multiple generations of students, were not held accountable for this behavior by the school. At one point in our conversation, Nayeli pointed out a policy from the student handbook about “sharing responsibility with administration and faculty” to create a safe learning environment. (BHS 2021) She said this policy stood out to her because placemaking decisions often seemed one-sided. Nayeli stated: “I don't think of Biglerville when I read that..the teachers there are just, I don't know. it's not what I'm reading. they're not held up to those standards, a hundred percent not” (Nayeli age 22, August 3, 2022). Nayeli did not feel that as a student, a Latinx migrant student, she had a say in how to cultivate a safe and positive learning space. A large part of this was because of the power dynamics with teachers. In alignment with Nayeli, Jonathan shared: “there was nothing to help the students, but more to cover the teachers, at least in my opinion. They didn’t investigate the teachers that were getting accused. I did know that some [teachers] left the school because of it” (Jonathon, age 22, August 2, 2022) Jonathon outlines how teachers were not investigated despite hundreds of detailed narratives of their racism. He also points out how teachers fled due to the accusations, rather than being accountable to their behavior. Student accounts emphasized how they would
get in deeper trouble for defending themselves than the students who they reported for this type of behavior would. By allowing this type of behavior to occur across decades, BHS’s unresponsiveness enabled systemic racism.

Upon hundreds of reports posted on the Instagram account and thousands of signatures on the petition pertaining to racism at BHS, the media got involved. Fox43’s article “Help us feel safe at school’: Biglerville High School Students call for social justice after racism concerns” and the Pennsylvania Capital-Star’s piece “Backyard white Supremacy: Central Pa. high school students take to social media to fight racism in the classroom,” are examples of the headlines the student-led antiracism movement was making. Further, the ACLU of Pennsylvania published a support statement, iterating that “When students are subjected to racist and xenophobic harassment and bullying by students and staff, their ability to learn in a safe environment is compromised” (ACLU PA Statement 2021). The student leaders continued to share and publicize the demands of the anti-racism movement: more strict and transparent policies on racism and for the school to issue a statement and apology to impacted students.

Student leaders created 3 backup accounts because community members were reporting their main platform and the police were heavily involved. When they were forced to address the situation due to pressure from the student protestors, community members standing with and against the students, and the media involvement, BHS engaged a public relations firm to assist.

Alongside engaging a public relations firm, BHS Admin also involved the police in their approach to addressing the ongoing, peaceful anti-racism movement. Admin worked with the police to search phones to try to find out who was running the Instagram page. Students posted about this, advising their POC peers to refuse illegal searches. With regards to how BHS handled the situation, Jonathon stated: “They were trying to shut down these uprisings...I do know the
students were mad, they said they were trying to get shut up and be quieted down about it. I feel like they could’ve done differently, hear the students out.” (Jonathon, age 22, August 2, 2022)

Jonathon points out how BHS’s approach was based on trying to “shutdown these uprisings.” By involving the police, they criminalized the POC students who were leading the movement.

Jonathon participates in envisioning and placemaking by suggesting that BHS admin could have used a more communicative and engaging approach by just listening to student grievances and taking their demands seriously. A different approach would have shown them that their voices and the harm done to them mattered more than trying to maintain order and protect the white people who had committed this harm. As shown by the above narratives, migrant students’ high school experiences were negatively impacted by having to navigate discrimination from peers and staff. Another period of anxiety and uncertainty during high school that migrant students highlighted occurred towards the end of their high school years, when they were thinking about their futures.

College: We Can’t Help You

A topic multiple interviewees brought up during the educational journey mapping aspect of my interviews is college access and support. After many student interviewees mentioned college, I asked parents and teachers to comment on this topic and I expand on their comments in chapter four. Due to their status, most interviewees did not feel that college was accessible or feasible. Two interviewees mentioned that they found it difficult to picture their future after high school. Luz and Flor both mentioned that at the time, the only future they could picture was one like their parents, working in the “campo,” (agricultural fields) or in warehouse positions. Luz mentioned how her ability to speak English might help her get a better position, but still one
within the agricultural or manufacturing industries. These beliefs can be traced back to the lack of college access and support for undocumented students.

Migrant students in my study who raised college access concerns are contributing to a large-scale issue. In her book on how undocumented Latinx parents support their children as they transition from high school to college, Cuevas (2021) discusses the “Latinx educational crisis,” in which a combination of inequities lead to alarming high school drop out rates and low college enrollment rates for Latinx students. This data is in conflict with the ongoing growth of Latinx students in public schools, which I discussed in chapter 1. Barriers to college access for migrant students are financial and social. These include the lack of access to scholarships due to high levels of meritocracy required to receive scholarships and low levels of scholarships available to undocumented students. Further, a disconnect between high school counselors and migrant families can lead to a lack of knowledge about the college application process. (Cuevas 2021)

Migrant students in my interviews generally did not feel supported by their high school counselors in terms of college access. This could be attributed to counselors’ being swamped with work. In all of the schools, there were one or two counselors assigned to hundreds of students. Teachers and students alike pointed out how overwhelmed counselors were so they were unable to dedicate time to migrant student college access.

Narratives from students in my interviews reinforced the reality of the barriers I discussed above. When I asked Flor to tell me about her educational journey map, she explained what she drew and why.

“Over here there’s a pathway to college and its unreachable for undocumented me because I didn’t get FAFSA, I didn’t get DACA, I didn’t get scholarships. It was just like no after no after no. I applied literally to 50 colleges…and [all of them] said no aid, no
money, we can’t help you. And it was really hard. I did end up going to college for two years, it was difficult to graduate, and I haven’t gone back because of financial reasons.” (Flor, age 24, August 18, 2022)

Flor’s repetition of “I didn’t,” and “no,” testify to the rejection and barriers Latinx migrants face in general, and specifically in educational pursuits. Flor managed to temporarily push through these barriers, but ultimately the financial and emotional strain was too much.

Jonathon’s educational journey map shared a similar story. I asked him to tell me about his drawings and he shared: “Towards the end of junior year, college was looking like it wasn’t gonna be part of my future because I could not apply for financial aid since I am not a citizen. The only one I could apply to was HACC, which I did attend for a semester.” (Jonathon, age 22, August 2, 2022) Similar to Flor, Jonathan’s main barrier to college access was financial. These students both narrated stories of persisting beyond these barriers initially, but eventually dropping out of college. Their narratives lead to critical questions regarding college access for Latinx migrant students.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I analyzed data from my interviews with migrant students who attended Adams County high schools. In these interviews, I asked them about their sense of safety relating to external threats in their former high schools. I also included some excerpts from interviews with parents and teachers to put their perspectives in conversation with each other. This allowed me to analyze the mixed feelings regarding external threats, such as active shooters. Highlights from these conversations included an overwhelming sense of protecting all students, emphasizing that their migration status should not differentiate their level of protection in these situations. Further, data portrayed that physical barricades and training can help make students
feel safer. However, there is also a sense that schools must incorporate preventative approaches that emphasize attentiveness to student behavior and social connections.

The second aspect of school safety I analyze in this chapter is internal threats students face such as bullying and discrimination. I start by recapping the sociopolitical context in Adams County, PA. This area is influenced by white supremacy and Trump era politics. I present examples that migrant young adults shared from their high school experiences under Trump’s presidency. These examples portray intensified classroom dynamics and ongoing discrimination that migrant students faced from white peers and staff. Participants from all of the high schools felt that their schools did not respond well to internal threats. They illustrated this through personal experiences where they felt physically or emotionally unsafe in high school.

The final systemic barrier I analyze in this chapter is college access for migrant students. Jonathan and Luz describe in detail their sense of the systemic barriers that blocked them from attending college. Overall, I analyze the narratives Latinx migrant students shared with me regarding their senses of safety in school. I analyze how they felt their high schools responded to or neglected their needs. These narratives and analysis allowed me to gain an understanding of how racism operates in Adams County high schools and how migrant students navigated and confronted this. The data and analysis accumulated up to this point inform the sustenance of chapter 4. All of the barriers and challenges I examined relate to Latinx migrant students’ physical and socioemotional safety and wellbeing in Adams County High Schools. In the next chapter, I combine student, parent, and educator interviewee perspectives with general research to propose approaches to making migrant families consistently feel safe and welcome in Adams County educational settings.
Ch. 4: Knocking Down Barriers through Placemaking

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on sharing and analyzing the voices of migrant parents and educators in Adams County, PA. I also include some pieces of my interviews with migrant students. Each person I interviewed shared knowledge about the ways the Latinx migrant community resists the barriers discussed in the previous chapters: over policing, surveillance, criminalization, anti-immigrant sentiments, and discrimination. Further, interviewees discussed how Latinx migrants in Adams County engage in joy-seeking and community building activities. I combine the input from these conversations with research to discuss some ways to address systemic violence in rural PA. In these dialogues, there was an overarching sense of knocking down barriers through action and envisionment, both critical aspects of placemaking. Latinx migrants found ways to navigate the barriers discussed in the previous chapter, and they will continue to do so, even more successfully when they have support and allies.

Migrant Parents Envisioning a Safe School

During my interviews with parents, they generally spoke positively about the high schools their children attended. However, many of the parents also emphasized that their relationship to the school was distant. When they shared issues or concerns with me, they were hesitant to expand or started with affirming that they were not racist (against white people) and that they appreciated how the high schools in the U.S. were better than the ones in their home countries. In her study on how undocumented Latinx parents support their children as they transition from high school to college, Cuevas (2021) discusses the relationship between migrant parents and the high schools their children attend, from the perspectives of the parents. Undocumented Latinx parents perceived high schools as representing the “American
government.” Since they had “navigated the United States as undocumented immigrants, the mothers distrusted public institutions.” (Cuevas 2021, p.40) It is possible that the mothers I interviewed associated the high schools with the government and therefore felt inclined to maintain a distant and polite relationship with the schools, even when they were frustrated or harmed by these institutions. Disrupting or critiquing these institutions too harshly could lead to investigation and they could not risk this due to their status.

Aware of the surface level relationship many migrant Latinx parents have with their children’s high schools, I wanted to make space in my interviews to discuss their concerns about their children’s schools without pressuring them to explicitly criticize the institutions. When I conducted interviews with educators and migrant parents, the final question I asked them was: What would a safe learning space for your child/student look like? I asked them to elaborate on the physical and abstract qualities of the place. I crafted this question with an abolitionist vision, attentive to placemaking through abolition and creation. I intentionally used the word “space” instead of “school” to emphasize that interviewees could envision learning spaces outside of traditional schools and classrooms. I hoped participants would not feel limited to imagining solutions within current structures or thinking about how to reform schools; instead, I wanted to hear about transformations they longed for.

When I asked parents to imagine and describe a safe learning space for their children, I asked them what their relationship with this space looked like. Three mothers, Melissa, Alicia, and Cielo, all responded that in such a space, they would be more involved. Melissa discussed her desire in contrast to the reality of her involvement with the school: “if it was ideal, [parents] would be more involved...right now, for me, I don’t have a lot of free time...I work a lot so I don’t really have a lot of time to volunteer in school” (Melissa, age 43, August 28, 2022)
Melissa’s experience is shared by many of the mothers I spoke with. These mothers worked full time, often adding overtime, at physically intensive jobs. Alicia and Cielo emphasized that in a safe school, they would feel more comfortable being in the space and have more frequent communication with school staff. Describing what an ideal school would have, Alicia states: “hay más comunicación de la escuela de eventos o de cualquier cosa que hagan, para todos estar unidos en comunidad” (Alicia, Age 59, August 24, 2022) Similarly, Cielo stated: “teniendo más comunicación, entre a mi hijo, yo, mi hija o la escuela… Teniendo más tiempo y espacio para ellos” (Cielo, Age 41, June 26, 2022). Cielo emphasizes that she would appreciate the opportunity to connect with her children within the school community more. Having more time and a welcoming space would facilitate this.

The mothers I interviewed treaded carefully when it came to discussing the high schools their children attend(ed). They emphasized their appreciation for these institutions. Eventually, they did discuss what the schools lacked or could incorporate. They wanted more involvement, communication, and community with the high schools in Adams County. A major component of these conversations was that their work hours did not offer the opportunity to be present at the schools. Further, as migrant Latinx mothers, they did not feel that the communication between the schools and them, regarding events or community building, was strong. In the following sections, I discuss more of the aspects that arose in these conversations, including discussions about discipline, diversity, and college. All of these conversations revolved around what would make migrant families feel more welcome and safe in rural areas and within high schools.

Reimagining Discipline

When I interviewed Julia, a mother of 4 who has lived in York Springs, PA for over 30 years, she was recovering from a leg surgery and stressing about her oldest son’s upcoming immigration court date. She spent the first part of the interview discussing the details of those
two situations with me. I have known Julia since I was in middle school because I attended school with her second son. As long as I can remember, Julia has always found a way to navigate hardships, ensuring her family and others around her that *las cosas van a mejorar* (things will get better). She shared with me that her relationship with her children’s high school, Bermudian Springs, was frustrating at times due to her son’s constant run-ins with trouble. To address this, she often used interpreters and always answered the phone when the school called. Julia told me about her family’s experiences with BSHS’s disciplinary system:

“Como que castigan más a los Mexicanos que a los que los Americanos, aunque son ellos son los que atacan más a los Mexicanos, pero en las escuelas no ven eso...[A mi hijo] siempre me lo tenían castigado...me daba mucho coraje porque a los demás no, y nomás al mío. Pues no. Se siente feo. Me lo querían ya casi expulsar de la escuela al chiquillo. Pero pues yo les decía que no porque era muy chiquillo. Qué iba a ser él? En ninguna escuela lo iban a querer.” (Julia, age 57, August 17, 2022)

Julia discusses a pattern which every parent I interviewed brought up: punishment is not equally distributed between Latinx and white students. Julia points to how schools neglect to address when white (American) students “attack” Latinx students. She stresses that her son was constantly in trouble and close to expulsion in early high school, but she intervened, arguing to the school that he was too young to be expelled. Julia’s responsiveness and presence at the school, despite the language barrier, improved her son’s disciplinary situation. Julia’s narrative points to a discipline system in which parents are involved and their opinions are taken into consideration. This contrasts leaving discipline completely in the hands of school officials. It also shows how parent intervention and advocacy can benefit Latinx migrant students.
The other parents I interviewed, Melissa, Alicia, Cielo, and Aurora all shared similar experiences where they felt that Latinx migrant students, boys in particular, were targeted in the school’s discipline systems. However, these mothers did not feel as comfortable intervening and ultimately felt that there were times when their children were punished unfairly or too harshly. They all suggested that disciplinary actions should be distributed equally. Alicia, a parent and grandmother of students who attend(ed) BSHS stated that this type of harsh and unequal punishment harms Latinx migrant boys. Instead, she suggests “Un método que fuera diferente de disciplina, enfocarse en todos, no nomás en uno...Llamarles la atención, pero no con reglas severas o hablarles tan fuerte. Si les hablan bien, los niños entienden” (Alicia, Age 59, August 24, 2022). Alicia is reimagining the discipline system. Instead of punishments such as detention, suspension, and expulsion which are based in removal and isolation, she suggests using conversations to address misbehavior. As a parent and grandparent, Alicia has extensive experience addressing behavioral issues and she affirms that children listen when you speak clearly with them and communicate why their actions are harmful and how they can change them. The migrant mothers I spoke with all had a lot to share regarding how schools can be more responsive to their children. In addition to discipline, diversity in terms of staff and curriculum came up in these conversations.

Alguien como yo - Someone like me

After struggling to find a time to schedule an interview, Aurora and I settled on a phone interview while she was driving home from work one morning at around 6:00 a.m. Aurora is the mother of 7 children ranging from ages 3 to 24. She works the night shift on weekends to ensure that she has time during the week to prepare her younger ones for school and be there when they
get on and off the school bus. When I asked Aurora to envision a safe and ideal school for her children, she mentioned the need to see someone like them:

“Considero que ocupan como una diversidad en los maestros porque la escuela a donde van mis hijos solo hay maestros Americanos, no es que uno sea racista pero yo me imagino que si hubiera más maestras Hispanas o de otras culturas en las escuelas, habría mejor educación. Falta ese ejemplo y ese liderazgo Hispano, para que los niños vean que no nomas son Americanos, que ellos pueden estudiar y estar bien.” (Aurora, age 41, August 28, 2022)

Aurora affirms that having teachers from different cultures would greatly benefit her childrens’ education. She emphasizes that they are missing an example of someone that looks like them, or just in general, an example of a teacher of color. She asserts that this representation would benefit their wellbeing and simultaneously inspire them to continue their education.

In addition to contributing to visions of what discipline in schools without punishment could look like, Latinx migrant parents advanced a collective vision of what an ideal, safe school would look like by stressing the need for diversity in Adams County high schools. A shared experience between these high schools is that the majority, if not all, of the teachers are white. Students and parents alike pointed out the lack of diversity in the schools. Migrants did not feel as if this was necessarily a problem, but they did yearn to see themselves reflected in teachers and if not, in the curriculum. Below, I connect parents’ request of culturally-relevant material to research on Ethnic Studies.

Along with wanting to see themselves reflected in teachers, migrant parents and students raised how meaningful and motivating it would be to be represented in the curriculum. Alicia, a mother and grandmother of students who attended Bermudian Springs HS, noted that a
welcoming school would “enseñar culturas, también de dónde vienen los hispanos” (Age 59, August 24, 2022). Alicia’s push for schools to teach cultures and histories of marginalized communities is supported by research in Ethnic Studies. Sleeter and Zavala (2020) define ethnic studies as “a set of political projects and emergent movements, rooted in place-based struggles over the curriculum, as communities fight for an education that is culturally relevant and responsive to their needs, interests, aspirations, and dreams” (4). Rural PA is dominantly white and homogenous. This context shapes the barriers Latinx migrants face and affects the educational curriculum in the area. Ethnic Studies offers curricular material that visibilizes and empowers underrepresented communities, such as the Latinx migrant community.

In line with the abolitionist vision that inspired my thesis, Ethnic Studies forms a part of placemaking. Aurora, Alicia, and more of the migrant parents I spoke with wanted to see material that is “responsive to their [children’s] needs, interests, aspirations, and dreams.” (Sleeter and Zavala, 2020) They acknowledge the socioemotional benefits of seeing themselves reflected in educational material. Ethnic Studies encompasses radical, humanizing pedagogies which center BIPOC students and communities as knowledge keepers. This in itself is abolitionist because it presents a model of pedagogy that refuses to center whiteness. Further, radical material can encourage students, including Latinx migrants, to question exploitative forces under racial capitalism / neoliberalism. Ethnic Studies projects, grounded in critical race theory, critique power relations and disparities and empower students to resist these structural inequalities. BIPOC students are encouraged to reclaim all aspects of their identities and engage in envisioning and taking action towards a future without such imbalances.

*Precious Knowledge*, a 2011 documentary based in Tucson, Arizona, discusses a sequence of events relevant for examining the benefits of Ethnic Studies to the Latinx migrant
population. Ethnic Studies advocate, Dr. Duncan Andrade, shared that these programs were created to “change the narrative about the deficiency of our children,” and to address that Latinx students had a “dysfunctional relationship to school, not to learning.” (Palos, & McGinnis, E. 2011) Dr. Andrade’s description of this program reflects Aurora’s assertion that diverse staff and material would benefit her children. The Mexican-American Studies (MAS) program at the Tucson Unified School District, was a systemic solution to address extremely high dropout rates, of about 50%, amongst Mexican-American students. The graduation rate for students enrolled in the MAS program was 93%, demonstrating that Ethnic Studies courses boost student achievement. (Palos, & McGinnis, E. 2011) Aside from quantitative evidence, migrant families in the film highlighted how the MAS program made them feel included in the school community because their children were excited to learn about these topics and share what they learned with them.

Despite the MAS programs’ success, Arizona’s superintendent of schools, Tom Horne, introduced a bill and campaign to ban Ethnic Studies courses. Horne claimed that these courses “were teaching Tucson students to hate America.” (Palos, & McGinnis, E. 2011) Horne’s rhetoric describing these courses as ‘anti-American,’ foreshadows the current conservative, national attack on ethnic studies courses under the hysteria around Critical Race Theory. At least 7 states have current bans on teaching CRT and representatives from another 16 states, including Pennsylvania, have spoken against or initiated bills in the legislature against CRT and ethnic studies courses. (States that banned, n.d) This pushback against Ethnic Studies and CRT demonstrates what I discussed when I expanded on white supremacy in chapter three: “demographobia,” the feeling that “whites are under siege by growing racial/ethnic diversity.” (Canizales and Vallejo 2021, p.151) In Arizona, a version of Horne’s bill passed, despite
growing community protests to protect the program. Community organizing led to a judge overturning the ban and being able to keep the programs in place. Reiterating how students in the MAS program felt about these classes, Scholar Betina Love (2020) states: “Ethnic studies classes can be students’ homeplace” (105). Precious Knowledge amplifies the need to incorporate knowledge from different cultures into the American education system in order to make the diverse student populations in this school system feel a sense of belonging and safety in their schools. In a rural area with an increasing migrant and Latinx population, such as Adam County, ethnic studies curricula can create a sense of home for these students. In addition to representation in staff and curriculum, migrant families discussed how critical support from school agents is to their success. I expand on this below by sharing the data around college access I collected from my interviews.

College Access and Support

College access and how to pay for it was another topic that many of the migrant students and parents I interviewed brought. In chapter 3, I shared narratives from Jonathan and Flor that demonstrate how migrant students face hardships in late high school or after graduating when attempting to matriculate to college. After realizing college access and support was a common concern between migrant students and parents, I asked some of the teachers about this topic. Because there were mixed narratives about whether there was enough support for migrant students who wanted to pursue higher education, I also include more resources and proposals for new support systems here and in the appendix. Below, I review some of the existing and suggested resources for college access that surfaced from my interviews.

One significant resource for college access that various interviewees mentioned was “the after-school program.” This program was funded through a Migrant Education grant at the local
Lincoln Intermediate Unit (LIU) 12 in New Oxford, PA and served migrant and English as a Second Language (ESL) students in Adams County. The program was called the 21st Century PASOS program and included afterschool and summer school components. Two of the three educators I interviewed had previously worked for this LIU program. As a former program attendee, this was how I maintained a connection with these educators and invited them to be interviewed. Ms. Arbor, a former 21st Century staff member and current Spanish teacher at Biglerville HS, describes some of the objectives of the program:

“to provide enrichment opportunities for these kids both after school and on weekends, like college visits for those older students. It was a chance for these kids who didn’t necessarily have the help at home to get their work done with other students... at Gettysburg College we would have a set group of tutors to help with homework. [The program also provided a space to] build social skills outside of school itself and to see what being on a college campus was like. It really gave a wide array of opportunities and options.” (Ms. Arbor, BHS Spanish teacher, August 31, 2022)

Jonathan confirmed that the afterschool program helped him to get his grades up. Jonathan and Flor cited the program as a place where their families were welcome and a place where they made long-term friendships. Flor mentioned that “it was inclusive of different cultures.” Further, she stated that the college trips made her “dream [and] see that there’s more opportunities because usually in high school [she thought] I’m just gonna end up working where my mom works or in el campo, the fields” (Age 24, August 18, 2022). The afterschool program provided a safe and welcoming environment for migrants in Adams County. As Flor mentioned, this space inspired her to think of a future beyond work in “el campo” (the fields). This is significant because it points to resisting repeating cycles of harsh labor. Further, there was a sense of
community and acceptance in the program. Attending an afterschool program in which migrant students were in community with each other improved their mental and emotional wellbeing and boosted their academic performance.

In contrast to the positive perspectives on the migrant afterschool program for college access, migrant students generally did not feel supported by their high school counselors. Despite this being the general sense of high school counselors, one interviewee, Nayeli, did mention and praise the support that Biglerville High School’s counselors provided her in terms of college access. Nayeli stated:

“In Biglerville they gave me a sense of direction in the fact that I was able to go to school. Bermudian didn't pay attention to me through [college guidance]. The second I walked into Biglerville, the first thing I saw on the TV was kids that applied to school. They actually want you to go to school, they strive for you to apply. They'll sit with you and tell you, Hey, this is school. Even if you can't afford it, they don't care. They'll make you apply for it. Biglerville does a really good job on that. I felt like they helped me a lot with my career path” (Nayeli, age 22, August 3, 2022)

Taking into account Nayeli’s experience in two of the high schools I studied, she said that her first high school was not attentive to her in terms of college guidance, but highly praised the second school, Biglerville’s college guidance. Nayeli pointed out how BHS displayed alumni who attended college and how they took the time to explain higher education and financial aid. In agreement that Biglerville has college support readily available, Ms. Arbor, the Spanish teacher at BHS, discussed how many migrant students at BHS who are seeking college opportunities are involved with the nearby Migrant Education program. Overall, Nayeli and Ms.
Arbor discuss a successful college access model in which migrant students receive the kind of attention and support they need to successfully matriculate into college.

Aside from academic and verbal guidance for college access, one parent I interviewed suggested a supplementary, financial form of college access support that high schools could provide. Melissa works 50+ hour weeks to help pay for her son's college education. She cares greatly about her son being successful in college. When it came time for her son to apply to college, Melissa reached out to me to help him fill out his applications and FAFSA because she knew I had gone through the process as a current college student. In our interview, she discussed the financial burden sending her son to college has been. In relation she shared:

"Sometimes [migrant students] will not go [to college] because it's very expensive and they cannot afford it...[high schools] should help more with that problem. They should at least try to help with half of the payment for college if you can prove that you can't afford it so that more students will be able to go to school... [Or, there should be] more affordable colleges so people will be able to go to school." (Melissa, age 43, August 28, 2022)

Melissa offers a possible solution for migrant college access based on the reality that migrants already face financial hardship and adding debt to attend college is often not an option. Further, as Flor mentioned in chapter three, in Pennsylvania, undocumented students are not eligible for federal or state aid and tuition. Recognizing these systemic barriers, Melissa suggests that high schools could offer financial support to their low income students. On a larger scale, Melissa suggests that there should be affordable colleges. This is an abolitionist vision because it would require creating a model for college access that is based on mutual aid and not run like a business. Throughout my conversation with Melissa and other migrant parents, they were all
cognizant of the issues their children face when it comes to college access. As Melissa’s suggestion shows, they envisioned solutions to these issues, regardless of the current circumstances. Aside from migrant student and parent perspectives on safe schools and solutions for the challenges migrant students face, I incorporate educator perspectives, interlaced with research on frameworks and practices that emphasize BIPOC student wellbeing.

**Solidarity With Migrant Families**

The rest of this chapter focuses on how to build solidarity with migrant families, with particular attention to school safety related issues and their impacts. These issues include systemic barriers such as criminalization, over policing, discrimination, and lack of support and resources. I incorporate the perspectives of educators who have experience working with migrant families in education. I also discuss research relative to migrant safety and wellbeing. This includes data on existing efforts for migrant empowerment and safety in rural areas or other areas of Pennsylvania. The ideas I describe below are not all inclusive or perfect solutions to migrant safety in rural areas but they contribute to a larger picture of what migrants need to feel safe and to succeed in the U.S. Policies to integrate incoming migrant populations in rural America should be localized and attentive to geographic circumstances. Further, “The most critical services for immigrant families often revolve around language learning, educational access, and social inclusion” (Methema et. al 2018, p.29). In the rest of this chapter, I discuss educational approaches, mental health resources, and political organizing connected to migrant justice. I want to highlight that these are only a few of the many resources we can create and expand for migrants in rural areas.

**Educators as Allies**

I spoke to three educators from different schools in Adams County about school safety
for migrant students. Two of the teachers I interviewed previously worked for the LIU 21st Century PASOS program for migrant students. One of them, Ms. Arbor, served as a coordinator for the afterschool program when I was an attendee. The second teacher, Ms. Cole, was a teacher for the migrant summer school program while I worked as a teacher’s aide for the program the summer after I graduated from high school. The third teacher I interviewed, Mr. Path, is a government and sociology teacher at Bermudian Springs HS. As his former student at BSHS, I knew Mr. Path had often served as a resource for migrant students. I maintained a connection with these teachers and reached out to them because I knew they had experience working with the Latinx migrant population in Adams County and were familiar with the resources and needs of this community.

As I discussed in earlier chapters, migrants are exploited, surveilled, and over policed and punished within a neoliberal framework and the carceral state. This extends into educational spaces that are US-centered and merit-based. Education and Abolition scholar Bettina Love (2020) offers methods, alternative to neoliberal reforms, for creating safe and welcoming educational spaces for all students and specifically for Black and Brown students. An initial piece of this is for educators to become allies in solidarity with Latinx migrants. To be allies, they must be familiar with the history of the U.S. education system and acknowledge how this affects their students. This history is rooted in maintaining White supremacy and emphasizing the assimilation of minority students, including immigrant students. Educators must “understand why [this violent history] matters in the present-day context of education, white rage, and dark suffering” (Love 2020, p.23). In order to provide migrant students an accessible and fulfilling educational experience, their teachers must have an understanding of how the education system along with other systems such as the legal and prison systems have harmed migrant students or
any person who can be categorized as an “other” in the United States. Peguero and Bondy (2021) remind educators of the perils and lengths of migration journeys for children and their families. Educators should be aware of the trauma and barriers migrant students have experienced to get to and survive in the U.S.

Somewhat in line with this initial aspect of solidarity and awareness, all three of the teachers I spoke with discussed similar initial information about the Latinx migrant community in Adams County, from their perspectives as teachers who actively work with this community. They were all aware of the presence the community has and how it has grown. Mr. Path discussed how in his 27 years of teaching, at first Latinx migrant students would follow the harvest and only come to Adams County for a couple of months during apple season. Slowly, the presence of Latinx migrant students became more permanent as some chose to settle in the area. Ms. Cole, the orchestra director and music teacher at New Oxford HS discussed the social and financial barriers these families face: “I’m aware that there are migrant families in the district… those families might not be as settled… They might not come out and say that they can’t afford a violin or a school lunch or a field trip but it’s just being aware that that they might need that opportunity to get a little bit of help with those kind of things” (Ms. Cole, NOHS Music Teacher, September 1, 2022). Another major aspect of migrant families in Adams County that all three teachers discussed at different times in our conversations is language barriers. Ms. Arbor pointed out how although some students picked up English and use it fluently, their families may dominantly use Spanish to communicate and the nuances of these dynamics inform their relationships with the schools.

After emphasizing the need for educators to understand the violence of a white supremacist school context and stand in allyship with communities affected by these contexts,
Love goes deeper into what methods for educators curating safe schools, alternate to neoliberal reforms, look like. These methods align with the abolitionist vision I discussed in chapter 1: abolishing practices that perpetuate systemic violence and creating new models that emphasize alternatives to punishment and collective healing. Love (2020) coins and defines the term “abolitionist teaching:”

“...the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools.” (5)

Through this definition, we see an emphasis on solidarity between different racial and ethnic groups. This is important to my work because I assert that white allies, educators specifically, serve a critical role in addressing the barriers Latinx migrants face in Adams County, PA. Further, it is clear that there are different methods and approaches to achieve this style of teaching and that these methods can include parents or communities because they are conscious of injustice “in and outside of schools.” In alignment with this, I include the perspectives of migrant parents regarding how schools can be safe spaces for them and their children. Some aspects of abolitionist teaching relative to my thesis include protecting immigrant students and their families and refusing to participate in zero tolerance policy culture. (Love 2020, p. 11) These are steps teachers who have daily and long-term interactions with migrant students can take in order to make them feel space in their learning spaces.

In addition to abolitionist teaching, I researched other frameworks that were relevant to making Latinx migrant students feel safe in schools, while also working towards systemic changes. Compa Love is a framework and critical pedagogy for educators and others involved in
the education field to approach students in a trauma-informed way. Hannegan-Martinez’s (2019) framework addresses the question of what love looks like in teaching practice. She describes the types of love that can be harmful to Black and Brown students: “Colonial Love, Tough Love, and Conditional Love” (663). These revolve around white saviorship, disregard and ignorance of oppressive structures, and commitment only to students who participate and succeed within schools’ oppressive structures. In contrast, Compa Love reconceptualizes “how we approach both schools and relationships” (Hannegan-Martinez 2019, p.665). This includes emotional love—which is the ability to be vulnerable and to create spaces which focus on healing. Further, tangible love encompasses the provision of resources to students in need. Last, intellectual love considers cultural context and asset-based approaches. Compa love encourages students to “make sense of the systems and structures that are causing them harm.” (Hannegan-Martinez 2019, p.668) This framework can be used to acknowledge the harmful and violent structures migrant students have had to live with their whole lives and to empower them and collaborate with them so they can be successful within and beyond these structures.

To discuss Love’s concept “abolitionist teaching,” and Hannegan-Martinez’s Compa Love framework more concretely, I intertwine narratives from my interviews with teachers in Adams County. Ms. Cole mentioned how “some students need access to free lunch or to free school instruments or to school supplies.” This acknowledgement epitomizes tangible love, an aspect of Compa Love, that points to providing students in need with physical resources. Further, Ms. Cole discussed how she has a student who wants to learn to play violin, but she does not speak English. To accommodate her, she shared: “one student always sits by her side and that student is her main translator.” In connection, she discussed how the Latinx migrant community is present in her orchestra and she tries to make this a welcoming space for them. She shared:
"I hear Spanish being spoken almost every day in my Orchestra and these are students who can speak English, but I'm not going to tell them that they have to. If they want to speak Spanish with each other and that's their language that they speak at home, then why not speak it here with each other too?" (Ms. Cole, NOHS Music Teacher, September 1, 2022)

Ms. Cole, the orchestra teacher at New Oxford HS, embodies abolitionist teaching by collaborating with Latinx migrant students in her teaching and allowing them to show up as themselves in class. Ms. Cole facilitates a safe and welcoming space for Latinx migrant students by ensuring they have the materials they need and encouraging community building through bilingual collaboration without ostracization or punishment.

In a similar way, Mr. Path’s version of abolitionist teaching and Compa Love includes informing himself about how to support the migrant community in his teaching. Mr. Path shared:

“I took a course this summer to try to get to know these things better on immigration. I went to a professor at Columbia and I signed up to take this course because I want to be a better teacher for the students that I have. It was a fascinating course...I think the key is we, as individuals, can make a difference in individual lives, and that can't be overlooked. But there's only so much we can do. There needs to be systematic and fundamental change.” (Mr. Path, BSHS Government and Sociology Teacher, September 30, 2022)

By highlighting how taking a course on immigration would make him a better teacher to his Latinx migrant students, Mr. Path is engaging in abolitionist teaching. Further, he discusses how individual efforts, such as his, are critical, but they are only a piece of the large-scale, systemic change that needs to take place for Latinx migrant students to feel safe and welcome in schools.
This idea aligned with abolitionist visions that seek new models because reforming the current ones is not working.

Ms. Arbor, a Spanish teacher at Biglerville HS, embodies abolitionist teaching and a *Compa Love* framework by serving as the staff member who coordinates with the Latinx student club. Further, Ms. Arbor shared: “a lot of teachers have a difficult time knowing how to teach [Latinx migrant students]...there’s only so much help to go around...if the positive learning culture isn’t created...their world is just different” (Ms. Arbor, BHS Spanish teacher, August 31, 2022) Ms. Arbor uses her experience and connections with Latinx migrant students to advocate for these students and collaborate with them. Serving as the point staff person for the Latinx affinity club is a concrete way of showing she cares about and supports these students, as affinity spaces are often safe spaces for BIPOC. Given her understanding of the barriers Latinx migrant students navigate, Ms. Arbor calls for the creation of a positive learning culture that is attentive to migrant students’ experiences, or as she terms it, their “world.” She acknowledges the need for educators to be aware of migrant Latinx student’s needs and asserts that there are ways this can be achieved but that it takes effort and collaboration with these students and their families.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, I chose to interview educators who I knew had direct experience working with the Latinx migrant community in Adams County. Given this experience, they are familiar with some of the best ways to welcome these students and make them feel safe. In regards to making Latinx migrant students feel safe, Mr. Path, my high school government and sociology teacher, emphasized his efforts to create safe learning spaces for Latinx migrant students:

“This school I try to make a safe place because these kids deserve to be safe, they deserve to be here...That was and is always my goal as a teacher....It's what you do with that
space as a human being, that makes people feel safe. That's the key to making a safe place. It's how you treat others, it's what your expectations are. It's how you allow kids to talk to one another. It's what you create, and I hope that in my room, every single one of my students feels appreciated and understood, that they feel safe to learn everyday...I really believe that if you want a safe place that's going to be created by the people in those rooms and those people are going to be teachers, that's the effect a teacher can have.”

By emphasizing that Latinx migrant students deserve to “be safe” and “to be here,” Mr. Path establishes his allyship to the migrant community in Adams County, PA. He also emphasizes how collaborative placemaking is critical to cultivating safe learning environments. Mr. Path’s, Ms. Arbor, and Ms. Cole’s understanding of their impactful roles as educators is a major factor in increasing migrant families’ sense of belonging and safety in Adams County. In connection with individual efforts that accumulate to larger-scale change, I discuss some systemic needs for the migrant community, including mental health.

Migrant Mental Health

Mental health resources and access is a structural need for migrant communities. Finding ways to help improve migrants adolescents’ sense of safety via mental health resources arose in my interviews and research. The significant physical, mental, and socioemotional traumas related to migration contributed to why I chose to highlight mental health as an area of need. Further, after migrating, “social toxins such as racism, sexism, poverty, other forms of oppression and subsequent microaggressions constitute forms of trauma” (Hannegan-Martinez 2019, p.660). To counter this trauma, having a close network of friends and family contributes towards immigrant students feeling safer in school. However, as I expanded upon in chapter one, migrants
experience a sharp division in social networks. This may lead to some students rejecting parts of their identity to fit in with white people or rejecting connections with white people to feel fully a part of their Latinx community. Below, I expand on the relationship between Latinx migrant students experiencing ongoing traumas, including discrimination, and internalizing mental health related symptoms.

Some mental health-related stressors specific to Latinx students in rural areas are geographic and social isolation. Research conducted through a social-ecological framework intending to explore immigrant student’s perceptions of school safety, showed that “[facing] discrimination and hostility, hampers educational success [and] engenders psychosocial distress and school-related fears” (Hong et al. 2016, p.997). The framework considered how participants’ wellbeing was shaped “in multiple contexts, such as family, friend/peer group, school, and neighborhood” (997). In connection, harmful experiences in one ecological context, such as face-to-face discriminatory experiences, can impact interactions in other ecological contexts, such as family dynamics. This can “lead to psychological distress.” (Ramos et al. 2021, p.6) The systemic barriers or discrimination migrants face in social and legal spheres can “spillover” and impact their education or relationships and vice versa.

One mother I interviewed, Cielo, gave some insight into mental health concerns in her family. When I asked Cielo to describe what a safe school would look like, she spoke to me about how her sons have experienced bullying and discrimination in high school and how she felt that they were over-disciplined. She believed that they did not always tell her the full story of their experiences. She suggested that a safe school would prioritize mental health: “Tendría como un centro de ayuda, con más psicólogos o más gente que te ayuda... tú vas y hablas...vas con ellos para que te ayuden para que te den terapia” (Cielo, Age 41, June 26, 2022) In Cielo’s
vision of a safe learning environment, there is a center with specialists, trained in mental health
treatment, such as therapy. In a similar vein, Ms. Arbor spoke about the connection between
mental health and discipline:

“I wish we could do more as far as helping with physical and emotional wellbeing.
Because we’re a rural School District along with that comes, like lack of funding for
things. For example, a student who’s acting out and has behavior issues every single day,
you eventually come to find out they have so much going on at home, they have a lot of
past trauma that they’ve never worked through or realized that they can work through it.
So then they get recommended for therapy and seeing a counselor, but then they end up
getting put on a waiting list and the list is so long because you can only afford one in-
school counselor dedicated to doing sessions with students.” (Ms. Arbor, BHS Spanish
teacher, August 31, 2022)

By describing the reality of a lack of mental health resources in schools, Ms. Arbor demonstrates
that aspects of Cielo’s vision are necessary. Ms. Arbor also highlights how part of the reason for
a lack of resources is the geographic location of Adams County. It is a rural and isolated area.
Overall, Cielo and Ms. Arbor’s input point to the need to increase mental health resources in
Adams County high schools, this can be something to think about when allocating funding or
discussing new initiatives.

Contributing to another way of addressing mental health concerns in migrant
communities, I investigated mental health help-seeking processes for Latinx youth. According to
studies, rurally-based adolescents are less likely to know of mental health resources available to
them. Further, contributors to mental health issues include “acculturation, documentation status
for those who lack legal immigration documentation, and familial separation and reunification
immigration patterns.” (García et al. 2010, p.501). As described in earlier sections, there are various harmful structural barriers to integration present in rural PA. Familism- the commitment to family over individuality- in Latinx culture can lead to cultural stigmas against individual mental health problems. (García et al. 2010) There are also barriers to accessing mental health services. In rural areas there is less availability of culturally appropriate mental health services for youth and their families. (García et al. 2010, p.501) These findings highlight the critical need for mental health services that are culturally aligned and accessible to migrants in rural areas. As I discussed in Cielo and Ms. Arbor’s statements, various migrant parents are already aware of this lack in Adams County, PA and pointed to the need for accessible, culturally appropriate mental health and psychological distress services in the area or within the high schools.

Whether migrant youth have spent the majority of their lives in rural PA or arrived later in their childhood, they all call this place home and should not feel isolated or excluded from the community. One step towards navigating the psychological and social distress that migrants face in rural areas is to acknowledge the divisions in the community. Further, we must be attentive to how mentally taxing it is to face exploitation and rejection based on identities. Migrant youth navigate two worlds as adolescents. Work on minimizing hostility can include focusing on cross-community interactions. Further, allyship can include participation in solidarity based movements or projects that make migrants feel at home in the various spaces they inhabit. These projects can include incorporating ethnic or cultural material in public and private spaces. Another form of addressing the fear in the migrant community is to reduce the amount of policing and surveillance tactics in spaces, such as schools. The movement I share below was led by migrants and had the goal of making schools a safe space for their families.

Sanctuary Schools in Philadelphia
The Sanctuary Schools movement in Philadelphia is an example of migrants inciting change in the educational system. In 2020, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained an immigrant mother who was on school grounds at Kirkbride elementary school dropping off her child. The migrant community in the area, with the support of Juntos, a Latinx-led migrant rights organization in Philadelphia started the Sanctuary Schools campaign in response to this ICE arrest. This movement was possible due to the local organizing of Latinx migrants and the city’s Sanctuary City status in which they declare themselves a safe city for migrants to live in. Despite the difference between urban and rural areas, this case study shows what is possible in Pennsylvania in terms of providing safe schools for migrants and their families.

The Sanctuary Schools campaign team developed and proposed a 5 point platform (see figure 12) emphasizing the need for schools to be free of criminalization and policing as well as the need for schools to invest in teaching their students culturally aligned material. (Juntos Sanctuary schools, n.d.) These demands are reflective of the needs I discussed earlier in this
chapter that migrant parents brought up during our conversations.

Figure 4.1: Sanctuary Schools campaign 5 point platform

Stemming from their platform, the Sanctuary Schools campaign proposed the Welcoming Sanctuary Schools Resolution (2021) to the Philadelphia Schools Districts board of education. This resolution (2021) outlines a community agreement in which all employees, police, and ICE cannot inquire about documentation status without a judicial warrant. Further, it prohibits ICE from arresting people on school grounds. Lastly, the resolution provides a toolkit and response plan for district staff in the event that ICE does come to school grounds. On June 24, 2021 the Philadelphia Board of Education approved this resolution. The Sanctuary Schools movement and their wins are evidence of structural changes which limit and reject the over-policing of the migrant community. They replace that punitive nature of policing and surveillance with
restorative actions that bring in culturally aligned curriculum and trauma-informed resources for migrant communities.

Conclusion

When it came to discussing resistance and moving beyond the barriers I discussed in previous chapters, students, parents, and teachers all contributed to this conversation. A concern all of the parents I spoke with shared was excessive punishment and surveillance of their children. I connected their input to demonstrate how these mothers reimagined what discipline could look like in their children's high schools. They emphasized clear communication and equal distribution of disciplinary action. Another area migrant parents collaborated in envisioning was a need for diversity in Adams County high schools. Latinx migrant parents wanted their children to see themselves reflected in school staff and curriculum, alongside a variety of cultures. 

*Precious Knowledge* is a case study that highlights the benefits of incorporating Ethnic Studies courses to improve the attendance, engagement, and graduation rates of underrepresented students.

In terms of addressing the college access barriers, many of my interviewees mentioned the 21st Century PASOS afterschool and summer school program and spoke highly of this resource. This input demonstrated the significance of having spaces specifically for migrant students to be in community. Further, it showcases how essential it is for migrants to have access to support that is uniquely attentive to their families’ circumstances. Unfortunately this was not as common in their high schools. However, as Nayeli shared, it is possible if counselors have the space, time, and commitment to learning what the college application process looks like for migrant students. Based on the reality of financial hardship that migrants face when accessing college, Melissa proposed a new avenue of financial assistance for low income students. These
conversations form part of a placemaking and envisioning pattern because they are contributing to the creation of an environment in which migrants are supported and safe.

Towards the end of this chapter, I discuss some different facets for standing in solidarity with migrant families and approaching the barriers these families face in rural PA, with particular attention to school safety. I start by discussing how educators are uniquely positioned to address these barriers within the high schools they are a part of. Educators have the power to reject policies that lead to the overrepresentation of migrant students in school expulsions and detention. They can perform solidarity through abolitionist teaching and Compa Love. These approaches acknowledge the harmful effects of punitive policies and instead focus on trauma-informed, culturally-responsive action in classrooms. Aside from teachers, people in rural areas can also support initiatives that open up access to mental health and wellbeing resources for migrants. At the end of this chapter, I discuss the Sanctuary Schools Campaign that occurred in Philadelphia between 2020 to 2021. This campaign and their demands are reflective of what migrants in Pennsylvania need to feel safe in schools. The structural changes that this movement incited may seem impossible in rural PA, but the ideas and points in their platform speak to a statewide need for resisting criminalization of migrants and incorporating culturally responsive teaching into PA schools.

Overall, this chapter spoke to how learning spaces should foster a sense of community and belonging. For migrant families, this means a space free from harmful practices of policing, surveillance and structural / individual discrimination. I address both individual-level and structural-level needs, with an emphasis on how systemic change is essential to fully address the safety concerns migrant students face.
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An abolitionist vision means that to live in the future.


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