Scaling Education Pathways in Illinois:
Student Voices Evaluation

This study was conducted for Education Systems Center at Northern Illinois University

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Student Voices Evaluation
of Scaling Education Pathways in Illinois

Project Overview

This summary report was completed at the end of a 15 month evaluation of Scaling Education Pathways in Illinois (SEPI) which focused on the perspective of students participating in SEPI. This report details the overview of the evaluation project, the evaluation questions asked, the data and methods used, and the summary evaluative conclusions.

SEPI is an effort to build streamlined teacher career pathways that begin in high school, extend into postsecondary, and allow students to efficiently move along a path to a teaching license. SEPI has a special focus on helping students from diverse backgrounds become educators to create a workforce which reflects the diversity of the communities served. Support includes providing access to best practices, convening Communities of Practice which include annual summits, and guiding participants through the College and Career Pathway Endorsement process. SEPI has had three cohorts of participating high schools beginning in AY 2019-20.

Given that this evaluation took place during the third year of the program, the focus was placed on understanding the perspectives of high school students who were currently enrolled in the program. A particular focus was placed on student decisions to enroll in the pathway and their subsequent experiences during the pathway. This evaluation, where data allowed for it, explored issues of equity related to who chooses the pathway, the experience of supports offered, and who remains in or leaves the pathway. Other related projects focused on the recruitment efforts of districts into the Education Pathway and serve as a companion to this report (a summary report is available here). This report focused on why students enroll in an Education Pathway, what students identify as obstacles and supports to remaining in an Education Pathway, and how students' lived experiences impact their decisions to enter and remain in the field of education. As one goal of this evaluation report is to help improve the implementation of Education Pathways and inform practice, the report also includes recommendations, next steps, and other information for improving practice.

The evaluation found:

- **Over three quarters of the students who participated in the evaluation identified as female and nearly 60% identified as White.**
- **Students reported entering into an education pathway because of positive, personal experiences with influential teachers.**
- **Students also reported entering into an education pathway because they thought they could successfully complete the pathway, the pathway held value to them, and the costs were not a limiting barrier.**
- **Teacher and other adult supports were seen as influential in the decision to remain in the pathway.**
- **While most students reported wanting to pursue an education career, there were consistent and strong hesitations related to perceptions of low pay, lack of support, and long work hours as well as concerns about mental health and burnout.**

This evaluation has identified next steps for district leaders and policymakers in helping reach the goal of a diverse, stable, and effective educator pipeline in Illinois. Students have identified obstacles and challenges to continuing on into education careers which districts can focus on to better support the students in their programs. Districts can also work to recruit more diverse students into education pathways. This evaluation highlights the value of seeing the program's effectiveness from the students' perspective. Future work is needed to follow students who have participated in SEPI as they matriculate into postsecondary institutions and begin their careers in order to understand the true impacts the education pathways have on the educator pipeline in Illinois.

Section 1
Introduction

Research Questions

Three specific research questions guided the research.

Evaluation Question 1: Why do students enter the Education Pathway?

- What reasons do students have for joining the Education Pathway? What influences/informs this decision?

Evaluation Question 2: What influences students to remain in an Education Pathway?

- What do students identify as obstacles?
- What do students identify as supports?

Evaluation Question 3: In what ways do students' personal backgrounds/lived experiences impact their decision(s) to (or not to) enter into the field of education?

- What prior lived experiences, if any, have students in an Education Pathway had with diversity?
- In what ways have students' personal experiences (if any) influenced their consideration of obtaining a leadership role within the field of education

Data Collection

To answer these questions, the evaluators engaged in two novel data collection activities focused on understanding student perceptions, experiences and decisions: i) surveyed students in participating schools between 1-2 times (depending on participation) during the 2021-2022 academic year about their perceptions of education pathways, and ii) conducted focus groups consisting of at least 3-4 education pathway students within a representative sample of participating schools. The five minute survey was aligned with Expectancy Value Theory (EVT) and sought to understand how students think about their ability to complete the pathway, the value of completing the pathway, and the costs associated with participating in the pathway. A similar survey has been used to provide actionable information to schools on other similar projects (e.g. AP course taking). The 30-45 minute focus groups provided insight into how students perceive the education pathway and the available school supports to help identify influences, what could be refined, and bring nuanced insight to the student perspective.

With the data collected above and other local data sources as needed, researchers conducted three sets of analysis: i) described general student perceptions about education pathways and how these perceptions relate to pathway participation, ii) examined how lived experiences impact pathway perceptions for those who engage in the education pathway, and iii) explored focus group data to add qualitative insight about students within an education pathway. Within each of these analyses, researchers focused on identifying perceived and actual barriers for participation for students with a specific focus on underrepresented groups in the education sector.

Surveys

Surveys were developed in order to gain a better understanding of why students enrolled in an educational pathway, how likely students were to enter into a future career as an educator, what challenges or concerns they had about a future career in education, and background information about the students themselves (see Appendix A for sample survey). To understand why students enrolled in an educational pathway, the first section of the survey asked students 10 questions aligned with Expectancy Value Theory[a] – the first three questions asked students if they believed they could successfully complete the pathway courses, the following four questions asked students about how much they valued the pathway, and the final three questions asked about what students would have to give up to successfully complete the pathway. Students were then asked how likely they were to enter into an educational profession (6-point Likert scale), followed by an opportunity for students to share any concerns, hesitations, or reservations they may have about this path. Finally, students were asked a series of demographic questions as well as to share their educational aspirations.

These surveys were developed in two different platforms, Qualtrics and Google Forms, so districts and buildings could choose the format which their students would feel most comfortable using. Buildings were asked

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a   The survey was adapted from the instrument developed and validated by Kosovich et al. (2014).

to distribute the survey during the 2021-2022 academic year at least once - one district administered the survey a second time to observe any changes over time.

Focus groups

Focus groups were formed to gather additional qualitative data in an effort to gain a more complete picture of student participants in an educational pathway. Focus group data collected highlighted students' backgrounds, lived experiences, and identified both home and school supports and influences in choosing to participate in an ed pathway.

Focus groups were organized and conducted in conjunction with partnering schools' lead teachers. Connections between the researcher and partnering schools' lead teachers were arranged through EdSystems leaders who have regular contact with partner schools. Students met with the researcher in small focus groups of 1-5 students via Zoom. Zoom meetings most often took place before school, after school, during the ed pathway class or during an ed pathway club meeting. Specific focus group questions can be found in the appendix.

Survey data analysis

Once the surveys were administered, the data was downloaded to a secure folder, cleaned, and prepared for analysis. The data was analyzed within individual buildings, at the district level for districts with more than one high school, and then across all participating buildings. Given the descriptive purpose of this evaluation project related to better understanding who participates in education pathways, what student beliefs were about education pathways, and how their beliefs relate to their future career goals related to education, the analysis conducted focused on basic descriptive statistics and pattern identification. Variation by gender and race/ethnicity were explored. This data was used to answer the question about who enrolls in education pathways, their perceptions of the pathways related to their own career goals and ability to successfully complete the pathway, and to identify possible supports for all students.

Focus group data analysis

Focus group meetings were downloaded to a password protected account. Collected focus group data was reviewed, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for emergent themes.

Participants

What do we know about the students enrolled in education pathways within SEPI districts?

A total of 169 students responded to the surveys across 10 schools. Table 1 presents their self-reported demographics. Students completing the survey predominantly identified as female (78.22%). Students identifying as male made up a much smaller percentage (15.38%). The majority of student respondents identified as White (58.33%). There were 12.82% of students who identified as Hispanic/Latinx while less than 1% of students that responded identified as Black/African American. Students identifying as Asian made up 8.33%. The remaining 26.28% either chose to respond as something else, didn't provide a response, or identified as multi-racial. The demographics of the students in education pathways courses included in this evaluation differed in at least two substantial ways from the school demographics where they attended. First, the respondents were nearly 80% female while the schools they came from were nearly 50% female. Second, the students in education pathways had a higher proportion of White students than the schools they came from. This suggests that simply having an education pathway available is not enough to have an education pathway which is reflective of the student body. The vast majority of respondents reported that the highest degree they wanted to earn was either a Bachelor's degree (42.00%) or a Master's degree (44.67%) with the remaining evenly split amongst earning a high school diploma (4.00%), an associates degree (4.67%), or a doctorate (4.67%).

The students participating in the focus groups appeared to be similar, demographically, to the survey respondents. This was expected as the focus group participants were in the same classrooms that received the survey. There were no discernable differences among focus group participants as most presented as white, female students. About 20% of participants presented as White male students and 0 male participants of color.

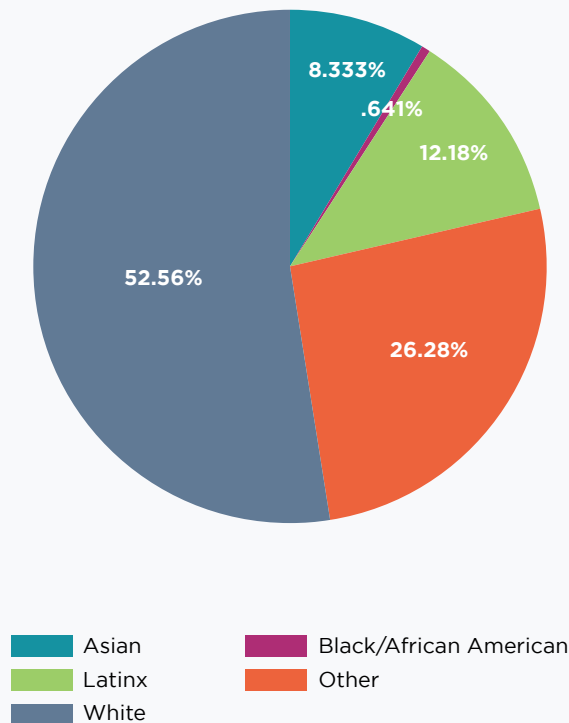In total, 39 students participated in 17 small focus groups across 8 Illinois high schools.

Table 1. *Demographics of student respondents and the schools they attended*

	Self-reported by survey respondents	Demographics of schools in sample
	Mean	Mean
Gender		
Female	0.79	0.49
Male	0.15	0.51
Non-binary	0.01	n/a
Preferred not to provide gender	0.03	n/a
Race/ethnicity		
Asian	0.08	0.18
Black/African American	0.01	0.05
Hispanic/Latinx	0.13	0.22
White	0.58	0.50
Other/non-response	0.20	0.04
Senior in High School	0.56	n/a
Junior in High School	0.31	n/a
Total observations[a]	**169**	**23,755**

a   Several students didn't respond to all questions about demographics. Only 156 students responded to the Race/Ethnicity prompt and 162 students responded about grade level.

Figure 1. *Self-reported demographics of survey respondents*

Legend:
- Asian
- Black/African American
- Latinx
- Other
- White

Values shown: 8.333%, .641%, 12.18%, 26.28%, 52.56%

Section 2
Findings

This section presents the findings for each of the evaluation questions. Each evaluation question is answered based on the focus group data and the survey data.

Evaluation Question 1

Why do students enter the Education Pathway?

Participants primarily cited wanting to help students and model teachers being the primary influences of joining an Ed Pathway.

What reasons do students have for joining the Education Pathway? What influences/informs this decision?

Student participants overwhelmingly reported they were significantly influenced by close friends, family members and/or teacher mentors and role models as the main reasons they chose to enter into an education pathway.

"In 8th grade I went to an [highschool] openhouse …and was introduced to the Ed Pathway, so I joined as a freshman. I knew I wanted to be a teacher after that."
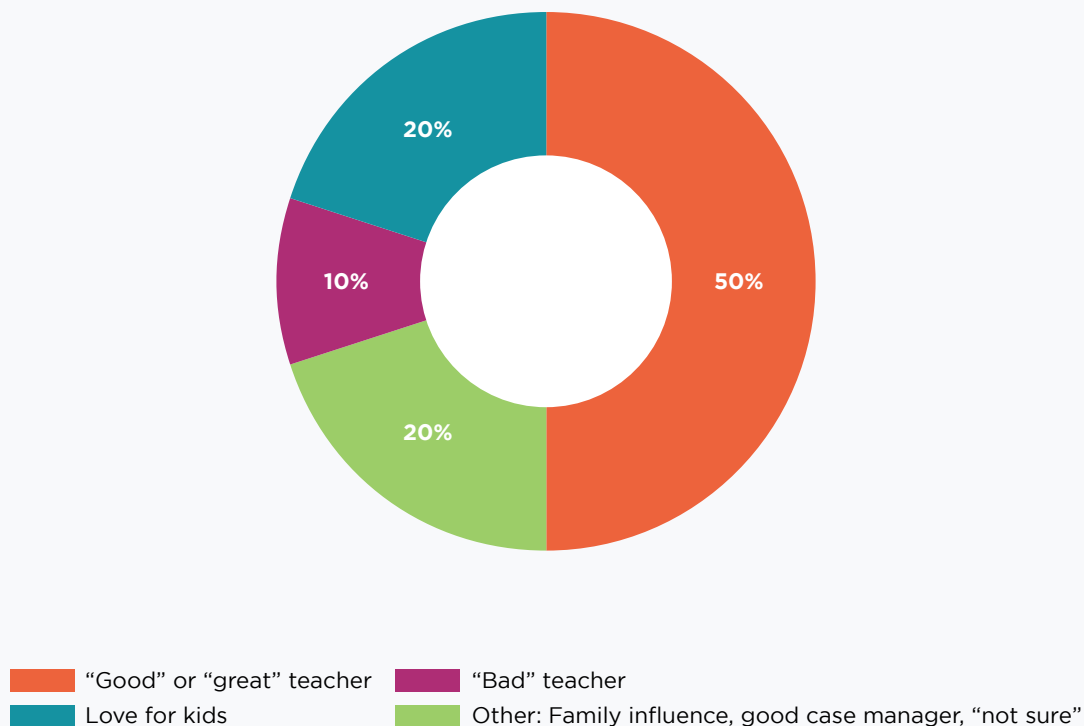
Participants also primarily cited a desire to give back and to help other students like themselves to be successful in school.

"My mom would take me and my brother [Spanish speaking ELL students] to a [neighborhood] group and a lady would teach us English. I feel like looking at her she would help not only us but a bunch of neighborhood kids…There really are people who want to help and I want to do that too."

Additionally, some students identified negative experiences (i.e. impatient, unengaging, biased teachers) with teachers as a reason why they joined Ed Pathways.

"At the beginning of my school career I never had a good experience. It was not what I could say was a safe space until recently…"

Figure 2. *Focus group participant responses to why they chose the education pathway*

Legend:
- "Good" or "great" teacher
- Love for kids
- "Bad" teacher
- Other: Family influence, good case manager, "not sure"

In addition to the focus group conversations, students completed a survey aligned with EVT about their beliefs when they enrolled in the education pathway. Students responded to questions about whether they thought they could successfully complete the pathway, the value the pathway held for them, and the costs they perceived related to participating in the pathway. In conjunction with the focus group responses, the survey data demonstrates that students generally believed they could successfully complete the pathway, saw value in the pathway, and, while there were perceived costs, they could overcome any costs associated with successfully completing the pathway. Below the responses are presented at the scale level (i.e. expectancy, value, cost). Each item making up the average scale score was examined by group presented but only those items where differences existed on particular items between groups are discussed.
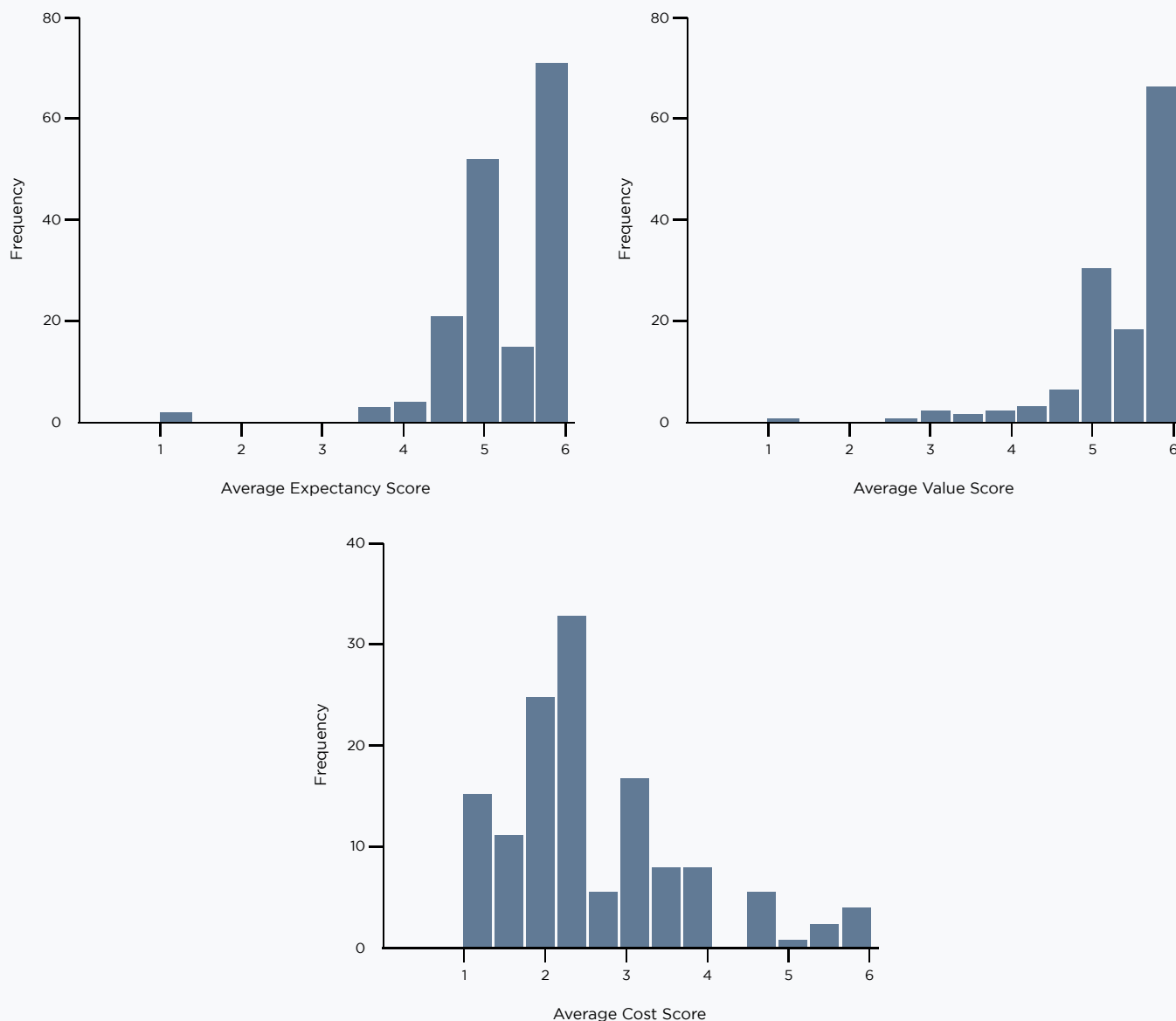
Overall, students reported high average values on the three questions related to their expected ability to successfully complete the education pathway (Table 2). The average response across these three items was 5.26 which would place it between strongly agree and agree that they believed they could successfully complete the pathway. A similar story was found for student's perceptions of the value in completing the pathway with an average response of 5.36 on a 6-point Likert scale. The average response related to costs was a 2.61 which suggests that while costs were not perceived as a major hindrance, some students did see costs of completing the pathway to be impactful. On the cost questions, students were asked whether the pathway took up too much time, conflicted with other opportunities, if they were unable to put in the time to do well in the pathway, and if they would have had to sacrifice too much to do well. Students responded that the biggest cost to participating was that the pathway took too much time.

Table 2. *EVT Survey results for all respondents (scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree)*

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
All Respondents			
Average response on questions related to expected successful completion (expectancy)	168	5.26	0.76
Average response on questions related to value for completing program (value)	169	5.36	0.75
Average response on questions related to costs to successfully complete the program (costs)	169	2.61	1.12

Figure 3 shows the histograms for student average responses to expectancy, value, and cost related questions. The majority of students had high average values on each of these three factors. In examining the demographic information of those whose average response was more than 1 standard deviation below the mean for the expectancy and value factors, there are no meaningful patterns which emerged. Similarly for cost, there were no systematic patterns based on gender or race/ethnicity for those who reported higher costs.

Figure 3. *Distribution of average scores in the three factors of Expectancy, Value, and Cost*

Given the small group samples, comparisons were restricted to just those which had large enough sample sizes amongst the respondents. Table 3 shows overall responses broken out by reported gender. Female students reported higher value scores than did their male counterparts; male students saw the *costs* to participate in and complete the education pathway as higher than female students. Both of these were statistically significant. While *expectancy* for completing the education pathway was higher for female students, it was not statistically significant. As the respondents are only those students who ended up enrolling in an education pathway, these differences in scale scores is somewhat surprising. Male students reported higher levels of agreement with all four cost related questions (see appendix), with the concern for the amount of time and what would need to be given up both being statistically significantly higher than their female peers (see Table 4).

Table 3. *EVT Survey results results by component, reported gender*

Survey items related to cost	Female respondents			Male respondents			T-test	
	N	Mean	Std. dev.	N	Mean	Std. dev.	Diff.	Value
Average response on questions related to expected successful completion (expectancy)	133	5.34	0.57	25	5.27	0.66	-0.08	0.270
Average response on questions related to value for completing program (value)	133	5.44	0.60	26	5.26	0.79	-0.18	0.095
Average response on questions related to costs to successfully complete the program (costs)	133	2.53	1.07	26	2.92	1.17	0.39	0.046

Note: EVT survey results are on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. T-tests are one-tailed.

Table 4. *Comparing responses between male and female respondents*

Survey items related to cost	Female respondents			Male respondents			T-test	
	N	Mean	Std. dev.	N	Mean	Std. dev.	Diff.	Value
The education pathway coursework and activities would have required too much time	133	3.04	1.37	26	3.54	1.61	0.5	0.05
Because of other things I do, I did not have the time to put into the pathway	132	2.53	1.21	26	2.92	1.41	0.39	0.071
I was unable to put in the time needed to do well in the pathway	132	2.45	1.36	26	2.65	1.32	0.19	0.247
I would have had to give up too much to do well in the pathway	132	2.08	1.11	26	2.64	1.47	0.56	0.014

Looking between identified racial groupings (Table 5), the only statistically different reponses was for the expectancy scale where White respondents reported a higher average expectancy score than non-White respondents (p < .009). Looking within the expectancy average score, all three items were higher for White students than for non-White peers (Table 6). This means that among students enrolled in an education pathway, White students reported on average that they could learn the necessary information, could be successful in the pathway, and could understand the material in the pathway when compared with non-White peers.

Table 5. *EVT Survey results by race (scale of 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree)*

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
White Respondents			
Average response on questions related to expected successful completion (expectancy)	90	5.42	0.57
Average response on questions related to value for completing program (value)	91	5.41	0.64
Average response on questions related to costs to successfully complete the program (costs)	91	2.61	1.21
Hispanic/Latinx Respondents			
Average response on questions related to expected successful completion (expectancy)	20	5.28	0.51
Average response on questions related to value for completing program (value)	20	5.45	0.45
Average response on questions related to costs to successfully complete the program (costs)	20	2.71	0.97
Non-White, Non-Hispanic/Latinx Respondents			
Average response on questions related to expected successful completion (expectancy)	45	5.06	1.05
Average response on questions related to value for completing program (value)	45	5.23	1.03
Average response on questions related to costs to successfully complete the program (costs)	45	2.50	1.06

Table 6. *Comparing responses related to expectancy for White and non-White respondents*

Survey items related to cost	White respondents			Non-white respondents			T-test	
	N	Mean	Std. dev.	N	Mean	Std. dev.	Diff.	Value
I thought I could learn the material in the pathway	90	5.42	0.60	65	5.12	0.96	-0.3	0.009
I thought I could be successful in the pathway	90	5.40	0.70	65	5.14	0.97	-0.26	0.026
I was confident I could understand the material in the pathway	90	5.44	0.64	65	5.12	0.98	-0.32	0.008

Evaluation Question 2

What influences students to remain in an Education Pathway?

Participants primarily identified lived experiences with supportive, positive mentor teachers as the primary reason to choose and remain in an education pathway. Students flagged influential teachers from various times in their education. Some examples of this came from early in a student's education experiences, stating "*I want to be that teacher that my 4th grade teacher was for me.*" Another identified having a parent teacher as impacting their drive to complete the pathway: *"My mom is a teacher and I have grown up around teachers...I want to be what my mom is to her students."* Beyond the desire to provide for others what students had provided for them, mentor teachers served as a reminder that others had succeeded before them as an influence to remain. One stated having *"teachers that have already overcome all the challenges that you'll face"* was a positive influence.

What do students identify as obstacles?

Participants were asked to identify the obstacles they saw which may contribute to not completing the pathway or pursuing an educational career. Students identified anxiousness about what it takes to be a teacher. For example one student (White female, middle-class suburb) said **"***I worry most about the obstacles that will happen when I get into teaching...I watch on TikTok all these teachers that talk about people who don't realize how hard it is.*" Another student was concerned about the unknown aspects of teaching, stating *"I see teachers leave jobs because they didn't realize what was coming and that kinda terrifies me"* (White female middle-class suburb). Relatedly, students were worried if they would have enough time when they were teachers to take care of themselves. One student responded that she was concerned about if she would have the time to focus on herself, stating, *"having free time to take care of my own mental health...Being able to make sure I'm good. I think that that will be my biggest obstacle, the free time to focus on me"* (White female affluent suburb).

Another common factor students mentioned as being a barrier or worry point towards completing the education pathway and entering the education profession was the salary. As one participant stated, *"the salary of teachers could be an obstacle"* (White female rural community). Another respondent (White male affluent suburb) connected the salary with the ability to have a stable life, saying *"[from a] financial standpoint, you know. Will I be able to financially support myself if I do become a teacher?"* This was also connected to issues related to being able to pay off student loans.

A third bucket of worries was about whether or not respondents thought they would be able to succeed in classrooms or schools with diverse students. Students flagged that most of their personal experiences, both in their classrooms and in their education pathways experiences, were in settings that did not help them feel prepared for teaching students from different racial/ethnic backgrounds. A White female student from a rural community said one of the obstacles she's worried about is how to apply what she's learned to teach all students.

> *"Different social classes, different diversity numbers. To undergo that transition to different locations. I'd have to get use to the culture there of the students. We have been prepared by this class about how diversity learning experiences are important, but we haven't really had too many experiences where we can apply that and we can go to classrooms that have high diversity numbers."*

A similar perspective was flagged by other students, even when diversity was experienced there was a sense that it would still be a challenge to work with students from diverse backgrounds. As one student put it,

> *"I feel like I lack experiences with diversity, and I feel like you want to go into teaching with a full understanding as much as you can. Just having a White and Hispanic look on things , just isn't going to be enough. I do wish I could see and experience [more]."* (White male rural community)

Figure 4. *Obstacles identified by focus group respondents*

Legend:
- Anxiety, feelings of failure, lack of self-confidence
- Other: Pressure from family not to teach due to low pay and high debt
- Self mental health concerns
- Questioning "Is teaching really for me?"
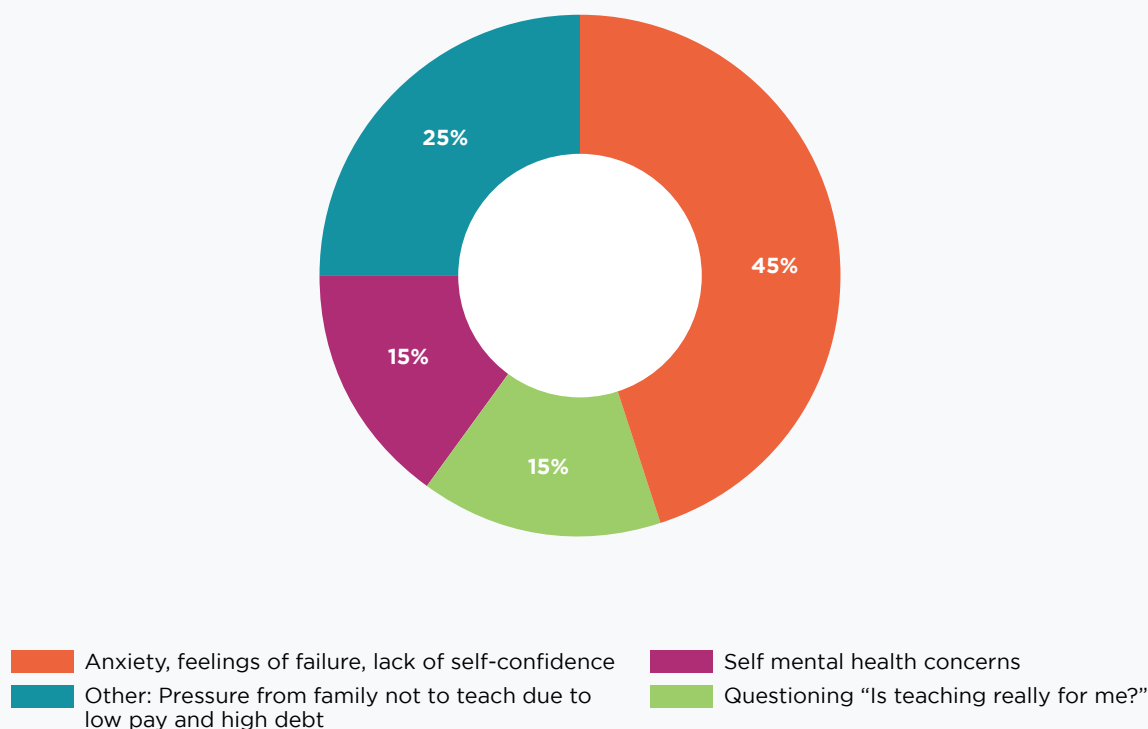
What do students identify as supports?

Participants were asked to identify the supports which have helped them during the pathway and would likely to continue to help as they pursued an educational career. Four main topics emerged from the conversations. The support of teachers was identified almost universally by participants. As one student put it, *"Definitely my teacher. She definitely helps to inform us"* (Biracial female rural community). Participants also identified teachers beyond their education pathway classroom teacher as providing meaningful supports. Sometimes other teachers in the building offered opportunities to students to learn from their experiences, one respondent said, *"Other teachers.. Talking to them and hearing their experiences…"* (White female affluent suburb). Other students found support in past teachers. *"My old third grade teacher…She lets me and the other students come down and talk to her about the teaching career…She's given us really good information"* (White female rural community). Students mentioned that it went beyond just having a teacher as a mentor, but also the ways teachers provided space for sharing and learning to occur. For example, one student mentioned the value of teachers creating space for students to talk to one another as an important support. *"When teachers take time to ask us about what we think about things changes the whole atmosphere of the class"* (White male affluent suburb).

As alluded to in the above quote, peers were seen as an important and positive support. As one student put it, *"Honestly having each other is the best resource"* (White female middle class suburb). The experiences, insights, and perspectives that other students could share was seen as supportive. One student mentioned that *"Communicating ideas and lesson plans, having people experience the same thing is important"* (White female middle class suburb). Other students were important because they shared similar lived experiences, this is summed up by one student: *"The classmates here because were going through the same thing"* (White female middle class suburb).

Participants identified the hands-on experiences and opportunities to observe classrooms as being supports. One student mentioned the value of observing teachers was supportive: *"Observing teachers and seeing what they really do all day"* (White male affluent suburb). Others focused on the hands-on experiences as being instrumental in helping them understand what an educator does, one example of this was when a respondent mentioned this as a support, *"The opportunity to go out and teach in the classrooms"* (White female middle class suburb). These types of experiences were helpful in developing confidence in becoming a teacher, as one student put it, *"We go to actual preschools and help. I think that's a resource…Getting used to being around kids and teaching kids"* (White female rural community).

Technology and peer networks were also identified as useful supports. One student identified Pintrest as being a support that they use, stating *"…but even like things like Pinterest and my students will help me to keep me going"* (White female affluent suburb). One group of students mentioned that they use technology to stay connected and share information. *"We [peers] all have a group chat that we use…"* (White female middle class suburb). One group of students identified a particular third-party resource they found helpful in supporting their development and troubleshooting. *"Educator Rising. That allows you to connect with other and get teacher friends. You have someone to go through the same problems with and it makes it easier to go through it"* (White female rural community).

What additional resources do students think would be helpful?

When asked, students identified several areas where further or additional resources or supports would help them successfully complete the pathway and remain in the field of education. Despite all programs having some classroom experiences, students identified wanting additional hands-on experiences including experience *"talking with a diverse array of teachers"* (White male, suburban community). While the relationships pathway students flagged their relationships with their current teacher and peers as a source of support, some students reported that improving these supports would be beneficial. For example, one student said, *"I wish I had more peers in here and that this was a bigger class. Then we could talk about stuff and compare and contrast."* (Biracial female, rural community).

Students also identified mental health supports as a possible way to help them be successful in the pathway and beyond. Access to "therapy" (multiple students) and a focus on "overall students well being" (White male, suburban community) were specifically called out as ways to better support education pathways students.

Evaluation Question 3

In what ways do students' personal backgrounds/lived experiences impact their decision(s) to (or not to) enter into the field of education? What prior lived experiences, if any, have students in an Education Pathway had with diversity?

Personal experiences seem to somewhat impact decisions. If participants did not have many diverse experiences, they seemed to be eager to work with diverse populations.

In what ways have students' personal experiences (if any) influenced their consideration of obtaining a leadership role within the field of education?

During the survey, students were asked to respond to the question "How likely are you to enter into the educational profession?" using a six-point Likert scale (1 = very unlikely; 6 = very likely). Results are presented in Figure 5 and Table 7. Based on those responding to this question (n=64), the average response was 4.52. However, there were a number of students who responded that they were somewhat to very unlikely (n=15, 23.44%) to enter the educational profession. Latinx students reported a higher average likelihood for entering the educational profession (4.77, n=13) than White students (4.45, n=33). Male students reported a lower likelihood on average (3.83, n=12) than female students (4.67, n=52).

Table 7. *Summary of responses to likelihood of students entering the educational profession, by demographics*

Likelihood to enter educational profession	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.
All Respondents	64	4.52	1.65
Female	52	4.67	1.63
Male	12	3.83	1.64
Latinx	13	4.77	1.74
White	33	4.45	1.60

Figure 5. *Histogram of student responses to their likelihood to enter the educational profession (1 = very unlikely; 6 = very likely)*

Likely to enter the educational profession
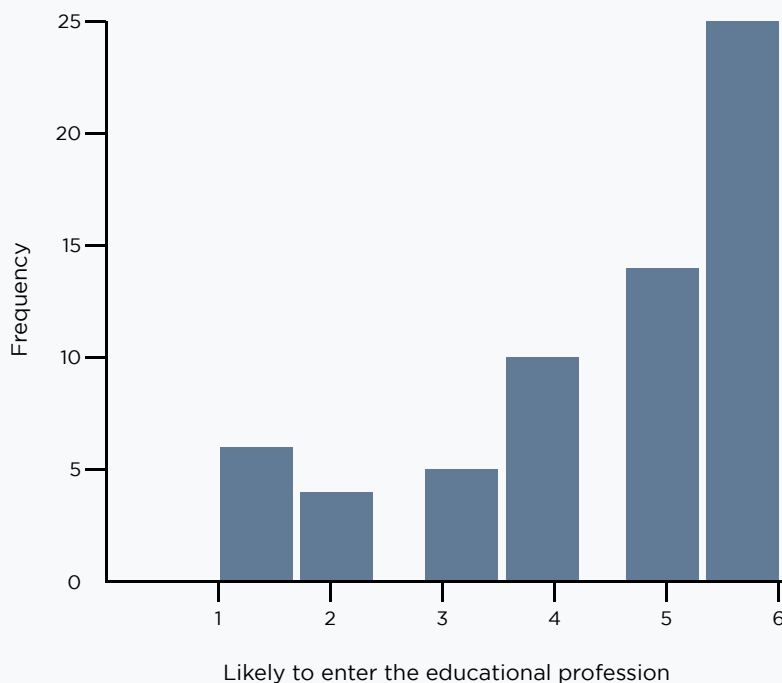
The focus group responses help nuance the above patterns. The majority of focus group participants were white, female, and reported growing up in middle to middle-upper class communities. The overwhelming majority of student participants within the focus group shared they did not have many opportunities in diverse settings. Additionally pointing out that diversity increased somewhat as they progressed into higher grade levels, but very little to no diversity during their elementary school experiences.

> *"I definitely feel like I lack that diversity…I feel like only having a White and Hispanic look on things just won't be enough."* – White HS Male

> *"I really didn't even think about diversity, our population is mostly White."* – White HS Male

> *"In Southern Illinois there's not a whole lot of diversity and I hate that because I feel like I haven't gotten the experience I need going into teaching because I will be dealing with such diverse populations… I guess that[s] the downside [be]cause everyone's culture was kinda the same around me when growing up."* – White HS Female

> *"Experiences I am getting now are way more diverse…The class now is very diverse and I am glad…but when I was growing up it wasn't that way."* – Black HS Female

> *"I didn't have that diversity growing up…It was kinda like you're different from everyone else around you."* – Biracial HS Female

When responding to being asked if they would consider a leadership role if they continued in education, a significant number of participants declined and reasoned that accepting a leadership position would impact their ability to form meaningful relationships with their students.

However students who have had previous roles in leadership at school or in the community commonly reported they would consider leadership roles in the field of education.

Figure 6. *Student perceptions about the neighborhood/community they grew up in*

Legend:
- "Mostly or predominately White"
- "Mostly or predominately Black and/or Hispanic/Latinx"
- "Diverse" neighborhood
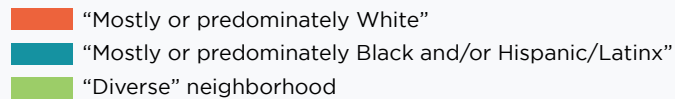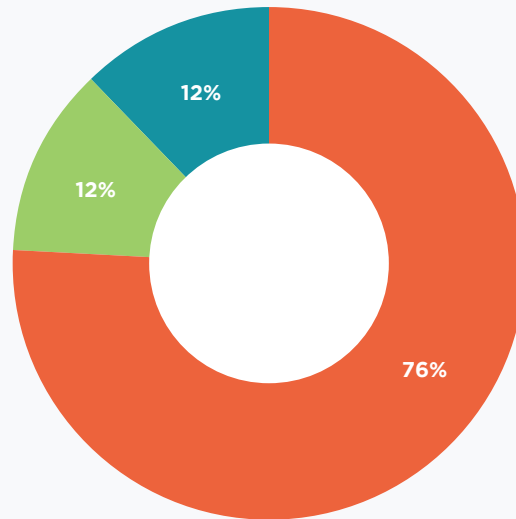
In the survey, students were prompted to share any hesitations, concerns, or reservations about a career in education Of the 169 students who responded to the survey, 77 shared hesitations, concerns, or reservations they had of entering the educational profession. The most common of these concerns was their perception that teachers' salary and benefits were lower than what they would need to live on (n=28). This was further nuanced by the addition of not just a concern about a low salary but also the perceived long hours and heavy workload of being a teacher. The second most common type of worry was around whether they would be able to successfully teach (n=24). Respondents reported concerns in their ability to teach generally, master the necessary content, and reach the students they were teaching. Related to both of these worries, several students (n=8) reported a concern about their ability to manage their time as a teacher.

Section 3
Summary of Findings

This section summarizes the above findings from both the survey and focus group data collections related to the evaluation questions. The demographics of respondents and key findings related to each question are presented.

- **Demographics of SEPI student participant respondents**
  - Over three-quarters of the respondents identified as female and nearly 60% identified as White.
  - Respondents within these districts were primarily seniors in high school (56%).
  - Most participants reported they grew up in communities and neighborhoods that are/were predominantly White, and native English speakers.

- **Evaluation Question 1 - Why do students enter the Education Pathway?**
  - A significant majority of students who were a part of the Ed Pathways initiatives attribute the decision to participate in the program to positive, personal lived experiences with influential teachers.
  - Students also recognize former (and current) teachers as their most significant influence in choosing an Ed Pathway.
  - Students reported high perceptions that they could successfully complete the pathway and that they saw value in the pathway to their future plans.
  - Costs to complete the pathway were identified as being moderate with a number of respondents seeing the costs as high.

- **Evaluation Question 2 - What influences students to remain in Education Pathways?**
  - Remaining within the field of education heavily relies on the students' feelings of support, encouragement, quality mentorship, and multiple pre-services opportunities with experienced, dedicated classroom teachers.
  - Students identified obstacles: A lack of support, a lack of sufficient pay (specifically when compared to the amount of resulting student debt), lack of preparedness for challenges teachers face, and mental health concerns (e.g. participants' anxiety and attention disorders).
  - Students identified supports: Supportive teachers, supportive family members, influential and supportive coaches, and supportive peers, friends, and other Ed Pathways participants.

- **Evaluation Question 3 - In what ways do students' personal backgrounds/lived experiences impact their decision(s) to (or not to) enter into the field of education?**
  - The majority of students interested in leadership roles were White, non-ELL students with prior leadership experiences.
  - On average, students reported they were somewhat likely to very likely to enter the education profession (76%). However, there were nearly a quarter of students who reported they were somewhat to very unlikely to enter. On average, male students were less likely than female students to report they were planning on entering the educational profession. Latinx students reported higher average levels of likelihood to enter the educational profession than their White counterparts.
  - When asked for their key hesitations or concerns about pursuing a career in the educational profession, perceived low salary and benefits as well as the long hours and heavy workload were the most common.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In sum, the pathways in schools supported by SEPI appear to be working for the students participating in the education pathway programs. The students overwhelmingly report positive feelings regarding the hands-on experiences with younger students provided to students in the Education Pathway.

"[Discussing EdPathway experience]I can confidently say I want to be an elementary school teacher because I have been in the classroom...I know what I want to do...And it saves me time and money in the long run."

"I get to do a lot of hands-on stuff and able to ask questions to real teachers."

"Scholarships motivate you...you say to yourself, if I can have college paid for..It makes you want to be set on teaching."

Having over 75% of respondents stating that they are at least somewhat likely to pursue a career in education is evidence of the pathway working in identifying students who are interested in an education career and support that interest. The 25% of students who reported not wanting to pursue a career in education should not be seen as a negative - students having a clearer understanding that they do not want to be an educator is also a merit good to the students. That there were no substantial differences amongst student demographic groupings suggests that the program itself is working similarly well for all enrolled students.

This evaluation has identified next steps for district leaders and policymakers in helping reach the goal of a diverse, stable, and effective educator pipeline in Illinois. Students have identified obstacles and challenges to continuing on into education careers which districts can focus on to better support the students in their programs. Districts can also work to recruit more diverse students into education pathways. This evaluation highlights the value of seeing the program's effectiveness from the students' perspective. Future work is needed to follow students who have participated in SEPI as they matriculate into postsecondary institutions and begin their careers in order to understand the true impacts the education pathways have on the educator pipeline in Illinois. Future work investigating the decisions of students prior to enrolling in an education pathway, investigating the decisions students make when deciding amongst pathways, can identify opportunities to get more students interested in an education pathway. Policymakers and funders can focus on supporting this work through providing resources and support for the work. Establishing better data systems and data tools to enable districts to follow their graduates into postsecondary institutions and careers can help districts identify the longer term impacts of their programs.

Appendix

Appendix A - Survey Protocol

The following survey was administered using Qualtrics.

We would like to receive your informed consent to participate in this data collection effort.

Key Information

This is part of a voluntary evaluation project which is attempting to howprincipal preparation programs support leadership development. You are invited to participate in a confidential survey asking you about the perceptions you have about your leadership development. This survey should take approximately 5 - 10 minutes to complete. The benefits include improvement of your program, of future cohorts, and improved leadership development; there are no foreseeable risks.

Description of the Study

The study is exploring the perspectives of Education Pathway students about their experiences within this pathway. In particular, we want to learn about why students choose to enroll in an Education Pathway, why students choose to stay in the pathway (or not), and how students perceive the impact of school and district supports on both decision points. We hope to be able to better support you, the students, by learning how to better support students to make decisions related to participation in these pathways.

Risks and Benefits

- There are no reasonably foreseeable (or expected) risks for participation in this study.
- The benefits of participation are primarily for the improvement of the program.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept strictly confidential. All electronic information will be secured using a secure online platform. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

Your Rights

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. Your decision will not result in any loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You have the right to skip any question or research activity, as well as to withdraw completely from participation at any point during the process.

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered before, during, or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, please feel free to contact the researcher, Dr. Benjamin Creed, at bcreed@niu.edu or by telephone at 630-890-5135.

Your response to the following statement represents your consent to participate in this data collection effort.

Q1: I agree to participate in this survey.

- Yes
- No

Q2: What's your school ID? *We plan to ask you similar questions later this semester and want to be able to link your responses together. This is the only way we will use your student ID - to link your data together.*

Q3: What is the name of the pathway you are currently participating in?

Q4: For each of the statements below think about your decision to enroll in the [Q3 Value] pathway. Please indicate the degree to which you would agree or disagree with each statement when you made that decision.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I thought I could learn the material in the pathway.						
I thought I could be successful in the pathway.						
I was confident I could understand the material in the pathway.						
I thought the pathway was important.						
I valued the pathway.						
I thought the pathway would be useful.						
The pathway coursework and activities would have required too much time.						
Because of othering things I do, I did not have the time to put into the pathway.						
I was unable to put in the time needed to do well in the pathway.						
I would have had to give up too much to do well in the pathway.						

Q5: How likely are you to enter into the educational profession?

Very likely   Very unlikely

Q6: As you think about entering the educational profession, we'd like to understand the concerns, hesitations, and/or reservations you have. Please use the space below to share these with us.

The following questions are about you and how you identify yourself. As a reminder, these are optional.

Q7: Which of the following categories describe your race? Please check all that apply.

- American Indian or Alaskan Native
- Asian
- Black or African American
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander White (non-Hispanic)
- Hispanic, Latinx
- Other:

Q8: What gender do you consider yourself to be?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Other:
- Prefer not to say

Q9: What grade are you currently in?

Q10: What is the highest level of education you currently plan on completing?

- High School Diploma or GED
- Two-year college, Community College, Associates Degree
- Four-year college/university, Bachelors Degree
- Master's Degree
- Doctorate (for example, PhD, MD, JD)

Thank you for your feedback.

Appendix B - Focus Group Protocol

1. Personal experiences influence a lot of our decision making, how would you describe your background; how you grew up or were raised?

2. What were your thoughts about college early in life? Now?

3. What or who would you say influenced your early decisions about college and your beliefs about college now and how?

4. What or who would you say influenced your decision to choose this teaching pathway?

5. What would you consider your most influential reason in choosing this pathway? Why?

6. Were there other pathways you considered? If so, please share with me why.

7. Please tell me what you think are some of the benefits of choosing this pathway. Any drawbacks?

8. Do you have, or have previously had, any positive long-term relationships with teachers you consider influential? Please describe.

   a. Teachers you may consider as "not-so influential"?

9. Again, thinking of your personal experiences, describe some of your experiences within the classroom that you clearly remember; either positive, negative and/or challenging.

   a. In what ways do you think the positive experiences influenced you?

   b. How did you deal with the negative and or challenging experiences?

10. You have not yet entered a college level teaching program; please describe what you think your workload and responsibilities will look like.

11. Research has shown that the classroom is becoming increasingly diverse. How do you see yourself operating in a classroom with a wide variety of experiences, backgrounds, and cultures?

12. Do you think your own personal experiences have prepared you for the diversity of today's classroom? Why or why not?

13. In what was, if any, do you feel supported by your school in your decision to become a future educator?

14. Thank you very much for answering my questions today. Do you have any questions for me?

1. Tell us a bit about why you chose the education pathway. *RQ1*

2. What would you consider your biggest influence was when choosing this pathway and why? *RQ1*

3. Thinking of your own personal background, what did the neighborhood, community, culture(s) look like growing up? *Background Information*

4. In what ways, if any, did your personal background influence your decision to choose this pathway. *RQ1; Background Information*

5. Identify some obstacles you think may get in your way while pursuing this pathway (interviewer ask for elaboration if not provided). *RQ2; Student Perceptions*

6. Name some additional resources you would consider useful in helping you complete this pathway and remain in the field of education for the long haul. *RQ3*

7. Would you ever consider a leadership role in education; why or why not? *Student Perceptions*

8. Thank you for meeting with me, does anyone have any questions for me?