

Schools' Respect for Identity-Based Differences and Student Outcomes: Examining the Relationship among Students with Varying Numbers of Marginalized Identities

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Abstract

When schools value diversity, students with marginalized identities exhibit better academic and well-being outcomes. However, most work focuses on one identity dimension (e.g., race, sexuality) at a time. Using data from the California Healthy Kids Survey ($N=205,064$ students in 6th–12th grade across 751 schools), we examined how the number of marginalized identities students held, schools' respect for identity-based differences, and the interaction between these factors were associated with multiple outcomes (e.g., belonging, grades, and reported suicidality). Looking across multiple dimensions of marginalization (i.e., race, income, gender identity, sexual orientation, and language spoken at home), we found that 1) more marginalized identities predicted worse outcomes, 2) greater school respect for differences predicted better outcomes, and 3) this association was stronger among students with fewer marginalized identities for some outcomes but equally strong across all students for others. These results highlight the importance of respect for identity-based differences for all students.

Keywords

diversity, identity, multiple marginalized identities, school, well-being

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Introduction

Many students of color, students with minoritized sexual and gender identities, students whose families have limited financial resources, and others with minoritized identities are marginalized in American schools (Benner & Wang,

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2014; Murphy & Zirkel, 2015; Scherr & Mayer, 2019). Increasingly, however, schools have recognized this problem and taken steps to address it with efforts such as teacher trainings, curricular changes to incorporate more diverse perspectives, and other initiatives aimed at making schools more inclusive (Lewis, 2023; Natanson et al., 2024). Though some of these efforts are more effective than others, students with marginalized identities generally benefit when schools recognize, value, and respect identity-based differences (Brannon & Lin, 2021; Browman & Destin, 2016; Good et al., 2020; Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013). However, most research on this topic focuses on one dimension of identity (e.g., race, sexual orientation) at a time, overlooking the facts that schools are often interested in supporting multiple groups that have been marginalized (Langstaff et al., 2021) and that students simultaneously hold multiple identities. The current study fills this gap by examining the academic success and well-being of middle and high school students with varying numbers of marginalized identities in schools that differ in how much they respect identity-based differences. In doing so, we aim to clarify how schools can support students who hold a range of marginalized identities alongside students who hold primarily privileged identities, in ways that enable all students to thrive.

Institutional Norms and Practices Privilege Some Identities and Marginalize Others

Public schools in the United States are not neutral spaces. Institutional norms and practices tend to reflect and privilege the experiences and needs of students and families with certain identities. For example, curricula often center European and/or White American perspectives, occasionally with superficial nods to other voices (e.g., celebrating diversity in cuisine or holidays) (Gay, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter & Grant, 2003). In addition, students are expected to work and communicate in ways that are more common in middle-class White families than in working-class families and families of color (e.g., to work

independently, share opinions) (Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2015; Lareau, 2011; Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). Students from families that speak languages other than English at home face additional barriers. Their ability to speak multiple languages is often seen as a deficit (García, 2009), and parents who do not speak English fluently can have difficulty communicating with teachers and administrators (Auerbach, 2007).

Students with minoritized gender and sexual identities face similar barriers, such as lack of representation in the curriculum (Antonelli & Sembiente, 2022; López-Orozco et al., 2022; McBride & Neary, 2021; Meyer, 2010). In addition, these students are at greater risk of experiencing bullying and other forms of social sanctioning by their peers (Meyer, 2010; Pascoe, 2012). Boys' and girls' sports teams, bathrooms, and other activities and spaces that are split along the gender binary further marginalize trans and gender non-conforming students (Ingrey, 2023; McBride & Neary, 2021).

These marginalizing norms and practices have negative consequences for academic performance and health and well-being. Students who do not see their groups' perspectives reflected in the curriculum, who are bullied because of their identities, or who otherwise do not feel supported by their teachers and peers tend to be less engaged and experience a weaker sense of belonging at school (Byrd, 2016; Paul Poteat et al., 2019; Wang & Eccles, 2012). They also have lower grades, have higher absence and truancy rates, and are more likely to attempt suicide (Hatzenbuehler, 2011; Paul Poteat et al., 2019).

Valuing and Respecting Identity-Based Differences in School

Recognizing this marginalization and its consequences, many schools have taken steps to value and respect identity-based differences. They do so in multiple ways. For instance, some schools acknowledge students' differences and prioritize support for diversity as a key educational goal (Bourne et al., 2026; Browman & Destin, 2016; Byrd, 2017; Coulter et al., 2016; Goldberg et al.,

2019; Good et al., 2020). Schools can also adopt policies that aim to protect students from marginalized backgrounds, such as those that explicitly prohibit bullying based on identity (Earnshaw et al., 2018; Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013). They may also offer classes that focus on marginalized groups (e.g., ethnic studies classes) and extracurricular clubs that support students with specific identities (e.g., gender and sexuality alliances) (Bonilla et al., 2021; Brannon & Lin, 2021; Byrd, 2017; Walls et al., 2010). Schools often incorporate more than one of these inclusive ideas, policies, and practices simultaneously (Kaufman et al., 2024; Levine et al., 2019), and, in fact, these efforts are most effective when they co-occur (Leer et al., 2025; Wilton et al., 2020). Therefore, we focus here on the extent to which students report that their schools broadly respect differences based on race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities.

Research on the effects of schools' efforts to respect identity-based differences has largely focused on one dimension of identity (e.g., race, sexual orientation) at a time but has consistently demonstrated benefits for students with marginalized identities. For example, students of color are more engaged, learn more, receive higher grades, and have better health and well-being when schools explicitly communicate that they value racial/ethnic diversity (Birnbaum et al., 2021; Good et al., 2020; Levine et al., 2019; Museus et al., 2018) or provide opportunities (e.g., in classes or extracurriculars) to learn about or connect with their racial group (Bonilla et al., 2021; Brannon & Lin, 2021; Dee & Penner, 2017; Del Toro & Wang, 2021a, 2021b; Kirby et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2022). Likewise, the gaps in belonging between immigrant and non-immigrant high school students are smaller when schools recognize, rather than deny, group differences (Celeste et al., 2019). Similar patterns emerge for social class. Students whose families have less income or lower levels of educational attainment feel more welcome and perform better academically in schools that explicitly acknowledge how social class shapes students' experiences (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014), express their commitment to serving those from lower

socioeconomic backgrounds (Browman & Destin, 2016), and minimize unfair comparisons between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Goudeau & Croizet, 2017). Finally, research on students with minoritized sexual and gender identities, which has focused primarily on health and well-being, also points to the benefits of schools' support for diversity. Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) students drink less alcohol and report fewer suicidal thoughts when they attend schools that have identity-affirming classes and extracurricular activities, policies that prevent harassment based on sexual orientation, and other LGB-affirming features (Coulter et al., 2016; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014). Similarly, transgender college students who are aware of trans-supportive policies and practices on campus feel a greater sense of belonging to and affirmation from their schools (Goldberg et al., 2019).

It is less clear how students with privileged identities—that is, those who are straight, cisgender, or White, or who have other identities advantaged by the norms and practices of many American schools—experience schools that respect differences. Some evidence shows that individuals with privileged identities feel threatened by pro-diversity efforts (Dover et al., 2016; Iyer, 2022; Plaut et al., 2011). Other work suggests that privileged students are not impacted by being in schools that recognize differences and support diversity (Birnbaum et al., 2021; Good et al., 2020). Still more work suggests that people with privileged identities, including students, experience better outcomes when they are in spaces that support people with marginalized identities or highlight traditionally marginalized perspectives (Coulter et al., 2016; Martin, 2014; Museus et al., 2018). For example, heterosexual adolescents binge-drink less frequently when they attend schools in more LGBTQ-affirming jurisdictions (Coulter et al., 2016). In addition, a recent meta-analysis found that attending a school with a multicultural climate (i.e., a school that recognizes and values differences) is associated with better academic and socioemotional outcomes in samples with both minority and majority group students (Bardach et al., 2024).

Multiple Marginalized Identities

In this paper, we examine academic and well-being outcomes among students who are marginalized or privileged across multiple identity dimensions, including race, socioeconomic status, language spoken at home, sexual orientation, and gender identity. We test how marginalization (vs. privilege) on these dimensions relates to academic and well-being outcomes and whether schools' respect for diversity buffers students at varying levels of marginalization (vs. privilege) from negative outcomes.

Scholars have identified different ways that identities can combine to shape people's experiences. In additive models, each marginalized identity independently affects individuals, and in multiplicative models, marginalized identities interact so that the combined effect differs from the sum of the individual identities' effects (Bauer, 2014; Hancock, 2007). Other scholars take an intersectional approach, emphasizing that combinations of identities reflect distinct analytic categories and cannot be reduced to their individual components (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005).

Many scholars suggest that the most appropriate framework depends on the context, including how systems of power operate in a specific setting (Bowleg, 2008; Crenshaw, 1989; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005). A substantial body of research examining multiply marginalized students in schools has produced findings consistent with additive models (Coffey & Tyner, 2023; Kosciw et al., 2020; Swann et al., 2020; Thoma & Huebner, 2013). These findings reflect the institutional systems of power outlined above that marginalize students in distinct ways—by race, class, language, sexual orientation, and gender identity—and suggest that students with multiple marginalized identities experience cumulative disadvantage. However, there is also some evidence of multiplicative effects, in which multiple sources of marginalization amplify negative outcomes, and of distinct identity combinations producing unique effects (Coulter et al., 2016; Duran, 2019; Mittleman, 2022). Therefore, in the present study,

we initially employed a count of marginalized identities as an indicator of cumulative marginalization and hypothesized that holding more marginalized identities would be associated with worse outcomes (see Albright & Hurd, 2020; Griffith et al., 2022; Prince et al., 2018, for a similar approach). We also conducted additional analyses to investigate whether this was a reasonable approach in our sample (i.e., whether the count of marginalized identities predicted the outcomes better than specific identity combinations).

Multiple Marginalized Identities and Schools' Respect for Diversity

We also examined whether schools' respect for diversity buffers individuals with multiple marginalized identities against negative outcomes. Given that people with multiple marginalized identities are especially excluded in mainstream educational settings (Coffey & Tyner, 2023; Duran, 2019; Kosciw et al., 2020), we propose that they may be especially protected in settings that respect differences to a greater extent. However, we also acknowledge that there is another possibility. Specifically, schools' respect for differences may be less protective for students with more marginalized identities due to intersectional invisibility, namely, the tendency for people with multiple marginalized identities to be less visible than those with single marginalized identities because they are not prototypical members of any one marginalized group (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). If schools' efforts to respect differences focus primarily on prototypical members of marginalized groups, they might not help individuals with multiple marginalized identities to the same extent that they help students with fewer marginalized identities (Wong et al., 2022).

Current Research

We tested the following primary research questions:¹

Primary Research Question 1: *What is the relationship between the number of marginalized identities*

that a student holds and the student's academic and well-being outcomes? We preregistered the hypothesis that students with more marginalized identities would exhibit worse outcomes.

Primary Research Question 2: *What is the relationship between the extent to which a student's school respects differences and a student's academic and well-being outcomes?* Here, there were at least two possible hypotheses, given the conflicting findings about how people with privileged identities experience support for diversity. One possibility builds on findings showing that, unlike people with marginalized identities, people with privileged identities are either unaffected or negatively affected by support for diversity (Birnbaum et al., 2021; Dover et al., 2016; Good et al., 2020; Iyer, 2022; Plaut et al., 2011). This work leads to the prediction that, when looking across all students, there would be no relationship between the degree to which one's school respects differences and academic and well-being outcomes because that relationship would depend on a student's identities (see Research Question 3). Another possibility builds on other findings that people with privileged and marginalized identities both experience better outcomes in spaces that support diversity (Bardach et al., 2024; Coulter et al., 2016; Martin, 2014). This work leads to the prediction that a school's respect for differences would be correlated with better academic and well-being outcomes among all students.

Primary Research Question 3: *Does the relationship between the number of marginalized identities a student holds and their academic and well-being outcomes depend on the extent to which their school respects differences?* To some extent, this is an open question that depends on how privileged students respond to schools' respect for diversity and to what extent schools' efforts to respect diversity take an intersectional approach. However, we preregistered the hypothesis that the extent to which a school respected differences would moderate the relationship between the number of marginalized identities students held and

their academic and well-being outcomes. Specifically, we expected being in a school where there was greater respect for differences to buffer students with more marginalized identities against negative academic and well-being outcomes.

We also investigated a number of supplementary research questions in exploratory analyses that were not preregistered. These were:

Supplementary Research Question 1: *If a school's respect for differences is related to the outcomes as hypothesized (see Primary Research Questions 2 and 3), does a school's respect for differences play a role above and beyond the role of general respect in a school (i.e., the extent to which people respect each other, without reference to identity-based differences)?*

Supplementary Research Question 2: In the primary analyses, we used a count of marginalized identities to index cumulative disadvantage. However, we recognize that this is an imperfect approach that does not detect other ways that multiple identities combine to shape individuals' experiences and confer advantages or disadvantages (Bauer, 2014; Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005). Therefore, we also conducted secondary analyses in which we asked whether this assumption was reasonable. *Specifically, we tested whether the differences across intersectional identity groups were largely explained by the cumulative disadvantage of holding multiple marginalized identities (i.e., the count of marginalized identities), rather than the specific combinations of identities.*

Supplementary Research Question 3: Given the recent political attention on how students with privileged identities experience schools that support diversity and some contradictory findings in the literature on this topic, *we conducted some additional analyses solely with students who held no marginalized identities. Specifically, we asked whether a school's respect for differences was linked to better outcomes in this group specifically.* These analyses were motivated in part by findings in our analyses testing the primary

research questions. Therefore, we discuss this supplementary research question and our motivation for exploring it in more detail after reporting the results of the primary analyses (see the “Supplementary Research Question 3” subsection of the Results).

To test these questions, we used data from the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS), which asks California public secondary school students (grades 6–12) to respond to questions about resiliency, risk behaviors, school climate, and their experiences in school. This dataset allowed us to examine our research questions during adolescence, a key developmental period for identity formation and self-concept development (Côté, 2009; Crocetti, 2017; Marcia, 1966) and a stage when racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities take on greater meaning (Hall et al., 2021; Mistry et al., 2021; Restar et al., 2019; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

The preregistration is here: https://osf.io/ma5j4/?view_only=334e89216c034c76a140576e14a2fd5b, and the materials (surveys and code) are here: https://osf.io/bkqwm/?view_only=86ca99fb760a418994fc7c25b6b2ebe6. Due to restrictions in the data use agreement, we cannot directly share the data with other researchers. However, other researchers can request the data directly here: <https://calschls.org/reports-data/>.

Methods

Participants

We used data from the 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 waves of the CHKS core survey and school climate module, which ask California public secondary school students (grades 6–12) to respond to questions about resiliency, risk behaviors, school climate, and their experiences in school (see here for full surveys: <https://calschls.org/administration/downloads/>). We used data from two school years because most schools participate in the survey every other year, and this allowed us to include the maximum number of schools. For schools that

completed the survey in both years, we used the 2018–2019 data.

The CHKS survey is conducted by WestEd, a non-partisan research, development, and service agency, for the California Department of Education (WestEd, 2019). All California public school districts are invited to participate. Participation is voluntary (except for schools that receive Tobacco Use and Prevention Education grants), but many districts participate because the survey provides them with data that they need to meet accountability and grant reporting requirements. Additional modules, including the school climate module, are optional. Following California state law, parents of 6th graders provided active consent (i.e., written permission for their child to participate), and parents of 7th–12th graders provided passive consent (i.e., were informed about the survey and notified the school if they did not want their child to participate).

245,633 students from 864 schools completed the relevant modules. This was approximately 8% of secondary school students and 18% of secondary schools in California at the time. As preregistered, we excluded responses for the following reasons: because there was no CDS code (school identifier code) associated with students' responses in the CHKS datasets, and their responses could not be linked to school data ($n = 23$ students); because data from the California Department of Education (used for creation of covariates) was not available ($n = 144$ students); because there were missing responses to the respecting differences questions (though they completed other parts of the climate module that contained these questions; $n = 15,525$ students); because students did not report demographic characteristics that were relevant to our primary predictor measure (specifically, $n = 4,180$ students for not reporting their gender identity, $n = 504$ students for not reporting the language spoken at home, $n = 1,354$ students for not reporting whether they received free/reduced-price school lunch, $n = 2,495$ students for not reporting their race, $n = 10,795$ students for not reporting their sexual orientation); because students attended a nontraditional school that did not provide grade

information ($n=5,105$ students), and because the student reported they only answered “some” or “hardly any” questions in the survey honestly ($n=444$ students). This left a final sample of 205,064 students from 751 schools.² See Table 1 for demographic information about the sample.

Predictors

Count of Marginalized Identities. Following past work (Albright & Hurd, 2020; Griffith et al., 2022), we used a count measure to assess the number of marginalized identities a student held. Specifically, we categorized each student as either marginalized (1) or not marginalized (0) with respect to their race, language spoken at home, income (i.e., receiving free/reduced-price lunch), sexuality, and gender identity (not transgender vs. transgender or questioning) and then summed those scores. We chose these identities because the norms and practices of American schools marginalize students with these identities (Antonelli & Sembiante, 2022; García, 2009; Gay, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lareau, 2011; McBride & Neary, 2021; Stephens, Markus, & Phillips, 2014). We did not include whether someone was a boy or girl in our list of marginalized identities because there is evidence that both boys and girls are marginalized and privileged in different ways (Voyer & Voyer, 2014; Zhang et al., 2025), and thus it was not possible to categorize either group as marginalized vs. privileged.

See Table 1 for details on how students were classified across each identity dimension. Scores ranged from 0 (student holds no marginalized identities) to 5 (student holds five marginalized identities). See Table 1 for the distribution of the count of marginalized identities.

Respecting Differences. The respecting differences measure was the average of students’ agreement with two items ($r=.62$, $p<.001$) assessing whether “Adults in this school respect differences in students (for example, gender, race, culture, sexual orientation)” and “Students in this school respect each other’s differences (for example, gender, race, culture, sexual orientation).” Items

were rated on a five-point scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*).

To ensure that this measure truly captured schools’ support for students from diverse backgrounds, we examined whether schools that students rated as having high levels of respect for differences were also schools that supported students from diverse backgrounds in other ways identified by the literature (e.g., that prioritized and valued diversity, incorporated diverse perspectives into their curricula, and protected students from identity-based bullying) (Bonilla et al., 2021; Bourne et al., 2026; Brannon & Lin, 2021; Dee & Penner, 2017; Earnshaw et al., 2018). To do this, we conducted analyses using schools as the unit of analysis in which school-level averages of the respecting differences measure were correlated with school-level averages of other metrics assessing support for diversity. As expected, schools’ respect for differences was negatively correlated with students’ reports of identity-related bullying, positively correlated with reports from students of color that their race/ethnic background was represented in the curriculum, positively correlated with teachers’ reports of instructional support for racial/ethnic diversity, and positively correlated with teachers’ reports of interpersonal support for racial/ethnic diversity ($r_s=.22-.71$, $p_s<.001$). The online supplemental material provides details on these analyses, including the specific measures and full results.

In addition, because people with marginalized identities are sometimes more sensitive to diversity-related cues in the environment than are people with privileged identities (Danbold & Unzueta, 2020), we sought to confirm that students with more marginalized identities agreed with students with more privileged identities about the degree to which their schools respected differences. To do this, for each school, we computed the school-level average rating for the respecting differences measure among four different groups: students with zero, one, two, and three or more marginalized identities. We then conducted analyses using schools as the unit of analysis, correlating the ratings provided by these different groups with each other. We found

Table 1. Counts and Percentages of Student Demographic Groups in the Sample.

		<i>N</i>	Percent
Grade in School	6th	1,896	0.92%
	7th	61,231	29.86%
	8th	4,270	2.08%
	9th	65,629	32%
	10th	9,574	4.67%
	11th	54,962	26.80%
	12th	7,502	3.66%
Sex	Female	96,306	50.59%
	Male	93,942	49.35%
	I'd rather not say	99	0.05%
Transgender	No	199,395	97.24%
	Yes*	2,088	1.02%
	I am not sure if I am transgender*	3,581	1.75%
Sexual Orientation	Straight	175,808	85.73%
	Gay or Lesbian*	3,480	1.70%
	Bisexual*	12,549	6.12%
	I am not sure yet*	9,749	4.75%
	Something else*	3,478	1.70%
Race/Ethnicity	American Indian/Alaskan Native, not Hispanic*	1,925	0.94%
	Asian, not Hispanic*	23,522	11.47%
	Black, not Hispanic*	6,157	3%
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, not Hispanic*	2,279	1.11%
	White, not Hispanic	46,650	22.75%
	Hispanic*	104,540	50.98%
	Multiracial, not Hispanic*	19,991	9.75%
Language Spoken at Home	English	129,857	63.33%
	Spanish*	57,062	27.83%
	Mandarin*	2,027	0.99%
	Cantonese*	1,035	0.50%
	Taiwanese*	188	0.09%
	Tagalog*	2,503	1.22%
	Vietnamese*	2,331	1.14%
	Korean*	801	0.39%
Free/Reduced-Priced Lunch	Other*	9,260	4.52%
	No	82,334	40.15%
	Yes*	95,451	46.55%
	I don't know	27,279	13.30%
Count of Marginalized Identities	Zero	30,450	14.85%
	One	52,966	25.83%
	Two	62,104	30.29%
	Three	52,181	25.45%
	Four	6,535	3.19%
	Five	828	0.40%

Note. * denotes identities that we classified as marginalized in our count of marginalized identities.

moderate to large positive associations among the ratings of students with different numbers of marginalized identities ($r_s = .44-.79$, $p_s < .001$).³ That is, students with fewer and more marginalized identities generally agreed about how much people in their school respected differences. Again, the supplemental material provides details about these analyses.

Covariates

Model estimates were adjusted for the proportion of students in each grade who were eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch, the proportion of students of color in each grade, and the total number of students enrolled in the school.⁴ These metrics have all been linked to our outcome variables in past research (Benner & Graham, 2011; Caldas & Bankston, 1997; Goldsmith, 2009; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009; Perry & Mcconney, 2010; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). The supplemental material provides details about these covariate measures.

Outcomes

Belonging was assessed with the School Connectedness Scale (Resnick et al., 1997). Students rated five items (e.g., “I feel close to people at this school”) on a five-point scale from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .83$).

Students' Grades were assessed with the item “During the past 12 months, how would you describe the grades you mostly received in school?” This was on a 6-point scale from 1 (*Cs, Ds, Fs*) to 6 (*Mostly As*). The lowest point was originally three different responses (“Cs and Ds,” “Mostly Ds,” and “Mostly Fs”), but we collapsed them into one response because relatively few students selected these responses. Similar self-report items have been used in other large-scale studies of adolescents (Harris & Udry, 2008; Miech et al., 2023), and self-reported grades correlate highly with actual grades (Kuncel et al., 2005).

Academic Motivation was assessed with the Striving for Excellence subscale of the Inventory of School Motivation (McInerney & Sinclair,

1992). Students rated four items (e.g., “I try hard to make sure that I am good at my schoolwork”) on a five-point scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* ($\alpha = .89$).

Feeling that Teachers Care was assessed with a six-item composite (e.g., “At my school there is a teacher or adult, who really cares about me”). Students rated each item on a four-point scale from 1 = *not at all true* to 4 = *very much true* ($\alpha = .90$). These are items developed by CHKS to assess caring relationships with and high expectations from teachers or other adults in the school. Although CHKS initially conceptualized them as two separate scales, they now recommend analyzing them as one composite (Hanson & Kim, 2007).

Skipping School was assessed with one item: “During the past 12 months, about how many times did you skip school or cut classes?” Again, this is similar to one-item self-report measures that have been used in other large-scale studies of adolescents (Harris & Udry, 2008; Miech et al., 2023). Students who reported skipping school 0 times were coded as 0, and students who reported skipping any school were coded as 1.⁵

Depression was assessed with one item: “In the past 12 months, did you ever feel sad and/or hopeless almost every day?” Students responded either *No*, coded as 0, or *Yes*, coded as 1. Adolescents who respond yes to similar single-item dichotomous measures of depression are also more likely to report moderate to severe depression scores on the Patient Health Questionnaire (Verlenden et al., 2024), a widely used tool to screen for depression (Manea et al., 2012).

Reporting Suicidality was assessed with one item: “In the past 12 months, did you ever seriously consider attempting suicide?” Students responded either *No*, coded as 0, or *Yes*, coded as 1. This question was taken from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System, which is conducted regularly with large, nationally representative samples of youth (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). It is correlated with other multi-item measures of suicidality and mental health and to self-reported suicide attempts (May & Klonsky, 2011).

Table 2. ICCs for Empty Models and Descriptive Statistics for Outcomes and Predictors of Interest.

Measure	ICC L2	ICC L3	N	M	SD	Min	Max
Respecting Differences	.01	.05	205,064	3.41	1.00	1	5
Count of Marginalized Identities	.00	.31	205,064	1.78	1.11	0	5
Belonging	.02	.06	204,943	3.56	0.82	1	5
Average Grade	.02	.09	204,624	4.19	1.59	1	6
Motivation	.01	.02	204,882	3.93	0.87	1	5
Teachers Care	.01	.03	204,676	2.88	0.78	1	4
Skip School	.04	.03	204,557	0.25	0.44	0	1
Depression	.01	.02	203,557	0.33	0.47	0	1
Reporting Suicidality	.01	.02	189,995	0.16	0.37	0	1

Note. The Level 2 ICCs provide the proportion of variance that is explained by the student’s grade level within their school. The Level 3 ICCs provide the proportion of variance that is explained by the school.

Table 2 provides descriptive statistics for all outcome variables, and the supplemental material contains detailed information about all measures, including a full list of all items and how composites were computed.

Results

Data Analysis Plan

To account for the data’s nested structure, multi-level models were specified with students (level 1, $n=205,064$) clustered by grades (level 2, 6th–12th grades) in schools (level 3, $n=751$). We included grade as a nesting level because previous work shows that academic and mental health outcomes vary systematically across adolescent developmental stages (Benner & Graham, 2009; Hankin et al., 1998; Wang & Eccles, 2012).

We used linear models for continuous outcomes and logistic models for binary outcomes, with random intercepts at the grade and school levels. We did not include random slopes because our research questions concern average associations and average moderation effects—quantities indexed most precisely by fixed effects—rather than heterogeneity in those associations across schools or grades. Models were fit for each outcome using an iterative approach, beginning with an intercept-only model, followed by a main effects model (with the covariates and main

effects terms), and a full main effects and interaction model (with the covariates, main effects, and interaction terms). We standardized the predictors and covariates. The full model was:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Outcome}_{ijk} = & \gamma_{000} + \gamma_{010} * \text{Proportion in the} \\ & \text{grade who are students of color}_{jk} + \gamma_{020} * \\ & \text{Proportion in the grade who receive} \\ & \text{free/reduced-price lunch}_{jk} + \gamma_{001} * \text{Total} \\ & \text{enrollment in the school}_k + \gamma_{100} * \\ & \text{Respecting differences}_{ijk} + \gamma_{200} * \text{Count} \\ & \text{of marginalized identities}_{ijk} + \gamma_{300} ** \\ & \text{Respecting differences}_{ijk} ** \text{Count of} \\ & \text{marginalized identities}_{ijk} + U_{00k} + \\ & U_{0jk} + r_{ijk} \end{aligned}$$

In the model above, the i^{th} outcome score for a student in the j^{th} grade attending the k^{th} school is equal to the sum of the conditional mean (γ_{000}), the unique effects of the covariates, respecting differences and count of marginalized identities (γ_{010} – γ_{300}), and the residual variation attributable to consistency within schools (U_{00k}), grades (U_{0jk}), and students (r_{ijk}).

As a preemptive correction for type one error inflation due to planned estimation of multiple models, we set our alpha to .001. Approximate R^2 values are reported as marginal and conditional R^2 statistics, based on Nakagawa and colleagues’ recommendations (Nakagawa et al., 2017).

Primary Analyses

Across all four linear models, individual-level factors accounted for the most variance, though the degree of clustering differed by outcome (reported in Tables 3 and 4). Residual variance was higher for average grade ($\sigma^2=2.19$, $SD=1.48$) than for belonging, teachers care, and motivation (σ^2 range = 0.56–0.75). School-level intercept variance followed a similar pattern, with average grade showing the largest between-school differences ($\tau_{00}=.11$) and the remaining outcomes displaying modest variance. Grade-within-school variance was negligible across all four outcomes ($\tau_{00}=.01-.05$) and consistently smaller than or equal to school-level variance, suggesting that schools are a more consequential clustering unit than grade level.

For the logistic models, individual-level variance was fixed at 3.29, as is standard practice, and was not an estimated parameter. Similarly, school-level intercept variance ($\tau_{00}=.06-.09$) consistently exceeded grade-within-school variance ($\tau_{00}=.02-.12$), with the exception of skipping school, where clustering at the grade-within-school level was more prominent.

The intercept-only (or “empty”) model was specified to evaluate the intraclass correlations (ICCs; reported in Table 2). The ICCs ranged from .00–.04 for Level 2 and .02–.31 for Level 3, indicating that 0–5% of the variance in the outcomes was explained by the student’s grade level within their school, and 2–31% of the variance in the outcomes was explained by the school. See the supplemental material for the full results of the empty models.

Primary Research Questions 1 and 2

In the main effect model (reported in Table 3), we added the main effects terms for the count of marginalized identities and the extent to which the school respected differences to the models. First, with respect to Primary Research Question 1 (*What is the relationship between the number of marginalized identities that a student holds and the student’s academic and well-being outcomes?*), we found that, as hypothesized, students with a greater number of

marginalized identities reported lower belonging, grades, perceptions that teachers cared, and motivation, and a higher likelihood of skipping school, feeling depressed, and reporting suicidality. The confidence intervals for these estimates were all relatively tight (0.03 above or below the estimates), and the effect sizes were small for linear outcomes (e.g., $|bs|=0.02-0.16$) and logistic outcomes (e.g., ORs = 1.13–1.50).

Second, with respect to Primary Research Question 2 (*What is the relationship between the extent to which a student’s school respects differences and a student’s academic and well-being outcomes?*), we found that when schools respected differences more, students had higher belonging, grades, perceptions that teachers cared, and motivation. They were also less likely to skip school, feel depressed, and report suicidality. The confidence intervals for these estimates were all relatively tight (0.01 above or below the estimates), and the effect sizes were small for linear outcomes (e.g., $|bs|=0.20-0.28$) and logistic outcomes (e.g., ORs = 0.79–0.83).

Primary Research Question 3. Finally, as reported in Table 4, when we added the interaction terms to the models, the interaction terms significantly predicted belonging, grades, sense that teachers cared, depression, and reported suicidality. Specifically, contrary to our hypothesis, the relationship between respect for diversity and these outcomes was stronger among students with fewer marginalized identities, see Figures 1–5. Respect for diversity and count of marginalized identities did not significantly interact to predict motivation or likelihood of skipping school, see Figures 6 and 7. The confidence intervals for these estimates were all relatively tight (0.01 above or below the estimates), and the effect sizes were very small for all outcomes (e.g., $|bs| \leq 0.02$ for linear outcomes, and ≤ 1.03 for logistic outcomes).

Exploratory Analyses

We conducted additional exploratory (not preregistered) analyses to address three supplementary research questions.

Table 3. Linear and Logistic Main Effect Models for All Outcomes.

Predictors	Belonging		Average Grade		Teachers Care		Motivation		Skipping School		Depression		Reported Suicidality	
	Estimates	CI	Estimates	CI	Estimates	CI	Estimates	CI	Odds Ratios	CI	Odds Ratios	CI	Odds Ratios	CI
(Intercept)	3.56*	[3.55, 3.57]	4.18*	[4.15, 4.22]	2.88*	[2.87, 2.89]	3.92*	[3.91, 3.93]	0.33*	[0.32, 0.35]	0.48*	[0.46, 0.49]	0.18*	[0.17, 0.18]
Proportion of Students with Free/Reduced-Price Lunch in School	-0.04*	[-0.06, -0.03]	-0.25*	[-0.29, -0.21]	0.00	[-0.01, 0.02]	-0.05*	[-0.06, -0.03]	1.11*	[1.06, 1.17]	1.05	[1.02, 1.09]	0.93*	[0.90, 0.97]
Proportion of Racial Minorities in School	0.02	[0.00, 0.04]	0.04	[0.00, 0.08]	-0.00	[-0.01, 0.01]	0.07*	[0.06, 0.08]	0.88*	[0.84, 0.92]	0.81*	[0.78, 0.84]	0.78*	[0.75, 0.81]
Total Enrollment in School	-0.04*	[-0.05, -0.03]	0.05	[0.02, 0.09]	-0.04*	[-0.05, -0.03]	-0.02*	[-0.03, -0.01]	1.11*	[1.07, 1.15]	1.02	[1.00, 1.05]	0.98	[0.94, 1.01]
Respecting Differences	0.28*	[0.27, 0.28]	0.21*	[0.21, 0.22]	0.22*	[0.21, 0.22]	0.20*	[0.19, 0.20]	0.83*	[0.82, 0.84]	0.82*	[0.81, 0.83]	0.79*	[0.78, 0.80]
Count of Marginalized Identities	-0.07*	[-0.08, -0.07]	-0.16*	[-0.17, -0.15]	-0.07*	[-0.07, -0.06]	-0.02*	[-0.02, -0.02]	1.13*	[1.11, 1.14]	1.38*	[1.36, 1.39]	1.50*	[1.47, 1.52]
Random Effects														
σ^2	0.56		2.19		0.54		0.70		3.29		3.29		3.29	
τ_{00}	.01 grade/cbscode		.05 grade/cbscode		.01 grade/cbscode		.01 grade/cbscode		.12 grade/cbscode		.03 grade/cbscode		.02 grade/cbscode	
	.02 cbscode		.11 cbscode		.01 cbscode		.01 cbscode		.09 cbscode		.06 cbscode		.07 cbscode	
ICC	.04		.07		.02		.02		.06		.03		.03	
N	7 grade		7 grade		7 grade		7 grade		7 grade		7 grade		7 grade	
	751 cbscode		751 cbscode		751 cbscode		751 cbscode		751 cbscode		751 cbscode		654 cbscode	
Observations	204,943		204,624		204,676		204,882		204,557		203,557		189,995	
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	.14 / .17		.07 / .13		.09 / .11		.06 / .075		.02 / .08		.04 / .06		.05 / .08	
AIC	463998.25		743637.53		456085.56		511280.81		224033.75		251258.19		162320.05	
log-Likelihood	-231963.05		-371787.65		-228005.51		-255603.77		-112008.87		-125621.09		-81152.03	
LRT Test Comparing Main Effects Model to Intercept-Only Model	27034.05*		6011.16*		17759.45*		10634.51*		1662.46*		4871.63*		4466.06*	

Note. Although the models are presented together, it is not appropriate to compare the estimates from different models because the outcome variables are not on the same scales. Bolded estimates are significant, $p < .001$.
* $p < .0001$.

Table 4. Linear and Logistic Full Models for All Outcomes.

<i>Predictors</i>	Belonging		Average Grade		Teachers Care		Motivation		Skipping School		Depression		Reported Suicidality	
	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>Estimates</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>CI</i>	<i>Odds Ratios</i>	<i>CI</i>
(Intercept)	3.56*	[3.54, 3.57]	4.18*	[4.14, 4.22]	2.88*	[2.87, 2.89]	3.92*	[3.91, 3.93]	0.33*	[0.32, 0.35]	0.48*	[0.47, 0.49]	0.18*	[0.17, 0.18]
Proportion of Students with Free/Reduced-Price Lunch in School	-0.04*	[-0.06, -0.03]	-0.25*	[-0.28, -0.21]	0.00	[-0.01, 0.02]	-0.05*	[-0.06, -0.03]	1.11*	[1.06, 1.17]	1.05	[1.01, 1.09]	0.93*	[0.90, 0.97]
Proportion of Racial Minorities in School	0.02	[0.01, 0.04]	0.04	[0.00, 0.08]	-0.00	[-0.01, 0.01]	0.07*	[0.06, 0.08]	0.88*	[0.84, 0.92]	0.81*	[0.78, 0.84]	0.78*	[0.75, 0.81]
Total Enrollment in School	-0.04*	[-0.05, -0.03]	0.05	[0.02, 0.09]	-0.04*	[-0.05, -0.03]	-0.02*	[-0.03, -0.01]	1.11*	[1.07, 1.15]	1.02	[1.00, 1.05]	0.98	[0.94, 1.01]
Respecting Differences	0.28*	[0.27, 0.28]	0.21*	[0.21, 0.22]	0.22*	[0.21, 0.22]	0.20*	[0.19, 0.20]	0.83*	[0.83, 0.84]	0.82*	[0.81, 0.83]	0.78*	[0.77, 0.79]
Count of Marginalized Identities	-0.07*	[-0.08, -0.07]	-0.16*	[-0.17, -0.15]	-0.07*	[-0.07, -0.06]	-0.02*	[-0.02, -0.02]	1.13*	[1.11, 1.14]	1.38*	[1.37, 1.40]	1.50*	[1.48, 1.52]
Respecting Differences* Count of Marginalized Identities	-0.01*	[-0.01, -0.00]	-0.02*	[-0.02, -0.01]	-0.01*	[-0.01, -0.01]	-0.00	[-0.00, 0.00]	0.99	[0.98, 1.00]	1.03*	[1.02, 1.04]	1.02*	[1.01, 1.03]
Marginalized Identities														
Random Effects														
σ^2	0.56		2.19		0.54		0.70		3.29		3.29		3.29	
τ_{00}	.01	grade.cskcode	.05	grade.cskcode	.01	grade.cskcode	.01	grade.cskcode	.12	grade.cskcode	.03	grade.cskcode	.02	grade.cskcode
ICC	.02	elscode	.11	elscode	.01	elscode	.01	elscode	.09	elscode	.06	elscode	.07	elscode
N	.04		.07		.02		.02		.06		.03		.03	
	7	grade	7	grade	7	grade	7	grade	7	grade	7	grade	7	grade
Observations	204,943		204,624		204,676		204,882		204,557		203,557		189,995	
Marginal R ² / Conditional R ²	.14 / .17		.07 / .13		.09 / .11		.06 / .075		.02 / .08		.04 / .06		.05 / .08	
AIC	463993.57		743624.05		456072.00		511293.10		224033.88		251226.77		162310.49	
log-Likelihood	-231954.23		-371775.12		-227992.231		-255603.55		-112007.94		-125604.39		-81146.24	
LRT* Test Comparing Interaction Model to Main Effects Model	17.65*		25.07*		26.56*		.44		1.86		33.42*		11.56*	

Note. Although the models are presented together, it is not appropriate to compare the estimates from different models because the outcome variables are not on the same scales. Bolded estimates are significant, $p < .001$.
* $p < 0.001$.

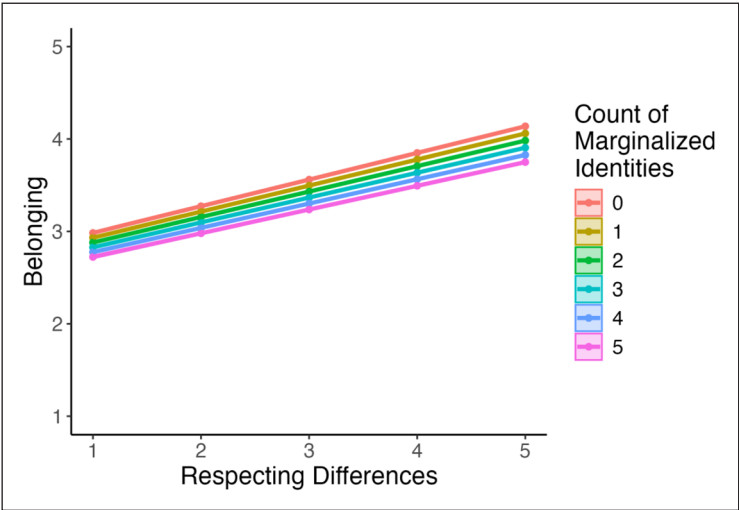


Figure 1. Interaction of respecting differences and count of marginalized identities predicting belonging.
Note. This interaction is significant. See Table 4.

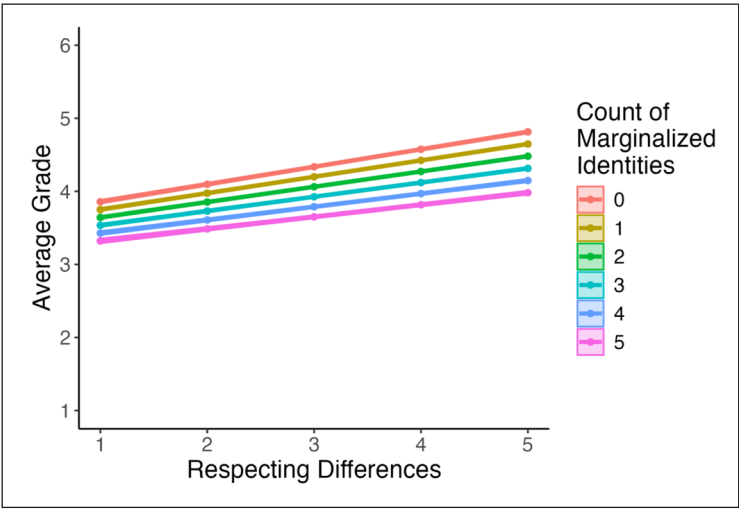


Figure 2. Interaction of respecting differences and count of marginalized identities predicting average grades.
Note. This interaction is significant. See Table 4.

Supplementary Research Question 1. First, we investigated whether respect for identity-related differences, rather than respect for people in general, was driving the observed effects. Specifically, we reran the primary analyses controlling for a measure of respect for people within the school in general, measured as the mean agreement with

the items “Adults in this school treat all students with respect” and “Students treat each other with respect” ($r = .45, p < .001$). The only models whose results changed when this covariate was added were the models predicting suicidality. Specifically, after adding this additional covariate, the respecting differences measure no longer

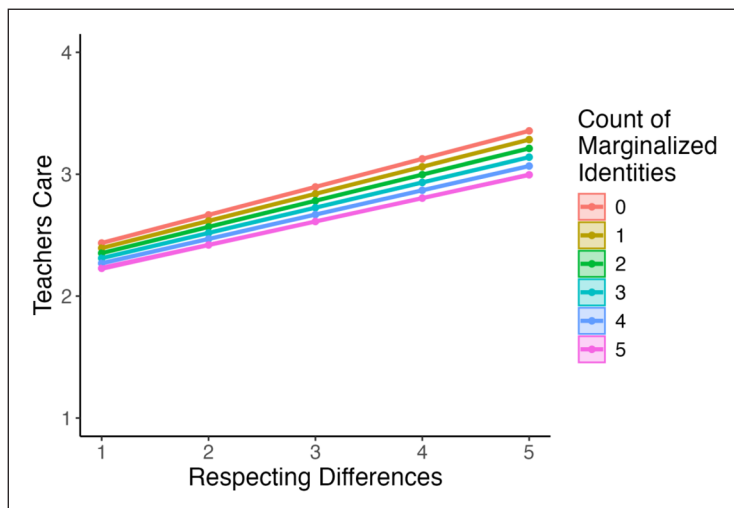


Figure 3. Interaction of respecting differences and count of marginalized identities predicting feeling that teachers care.

Note. This interaction is significant. See Table 4.

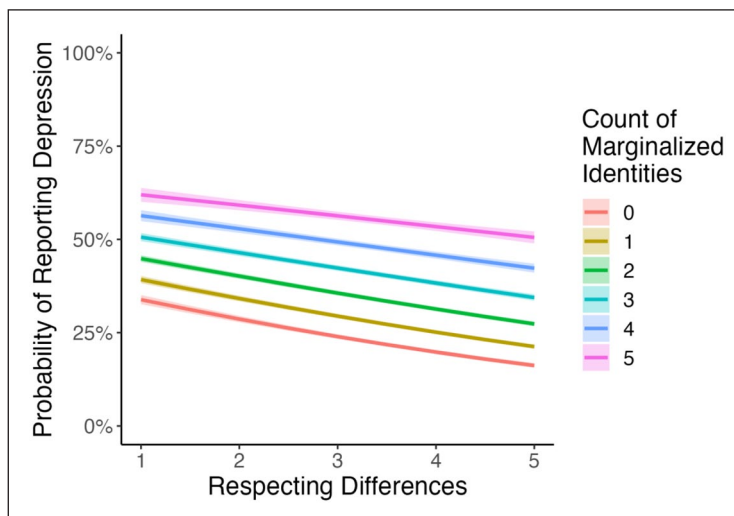


Figure 4. Interaction of respecting differences and count of marginalized identities predicting probability of reporting depression.

Note. This interaction is significant. See Table 4.

predicted suicidality, and the interaction between the count of marginalized identities and respecting differences (which had previously been in the opposite direction of the hypothesis) was no longer significant. Details on these analyses are reported in the supplemental material.

Supplementary Research Question 2. Next, we examined whether the differences across intersectional identity groups were largely explained by the cumulative disadvantage of holding multiple marginalized identities (i.e., the count of marginalized identities), rather than the specific

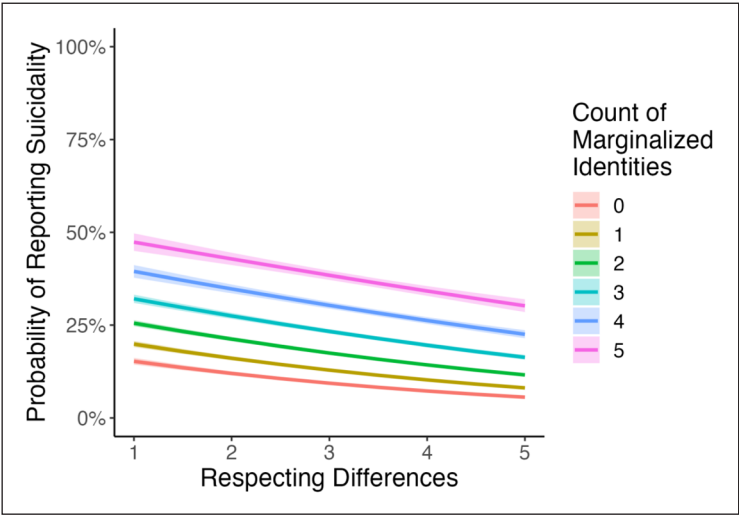


Figure 5. Interaction of respecting differences and count of marginalized identities predicting probability of reporting suicidality.
Note. This interaction is significant. See Table 4.

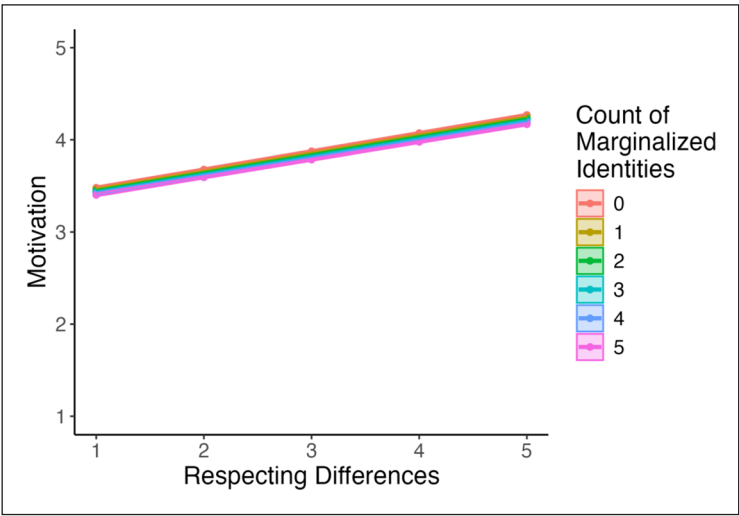


Figure 6. Interaction of respecting differences and count of marginalized identities predicting motivation.
Note. This interaction is not significant. See Table 4.

combinations of identities. To do this, we used the Multilevel Analysis of Individual Heterogeneity and Discriminatory Accuracy (MAIHDA) approach, which allows for the examination of

patterns of inequality across social strata (i.e., specific combinations categories, contexts, or in our case, identities) (Evans et al., 2024). We defined 224 possible intersectional strata (7 race/

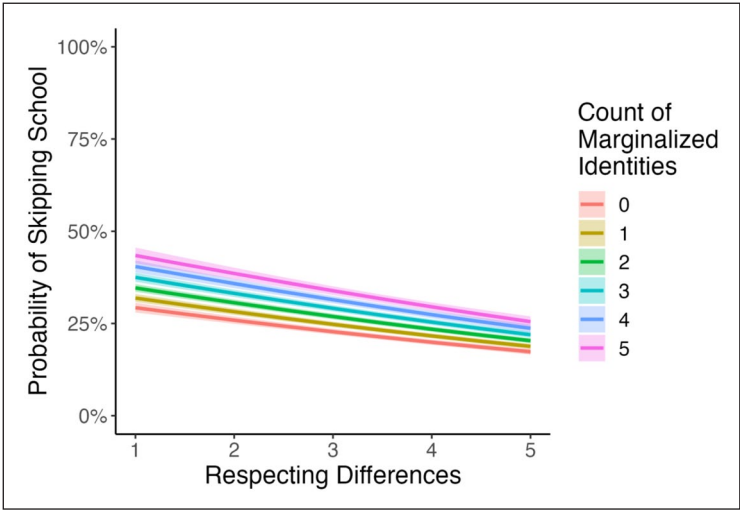


Figure 7. Interaction of respecting differences and count of marginalized identities predicting probability of skipping school.

Note. This interaction is not significant. See Table 4.

ethnicity categories $\times$ 2 language categories $\times$ 2 free/reduced-price lunch categories $\times$ 4 sexuality categories $\times$ 2 gender minority categories).

Following recommendations by Evans et al. (2024), we completed the supplementary MAIHDA in the following four modeling steps: Model 1 (i.e., empty model) was a two-level null model with strata and schools as cross-classified higher levels, entered as random effects. Model 2 (i.e., additive identity model) built on Model 1 by including the main effects of the categorical variables used to construct the strata as fixed effects (i.e., race, gender minority status, language at home, free/reduced lunch, and sexuality). Model 3 (i.e., main effect model) built on Model 2 by including the additional main effect of count of marginalized identities and respecting differences and all covariates. Model 4 (i.e., interaction model) built on Model 3 by including the interaction between the count of marginalized identities and respecting differences.

We calculated the proportional change in variance (PCV) between the models to evaluate how much of the strata-level and school-level variance was explained by additional predictors from one model to the next. The strata-level PCV between

Model 1 and 2 was of particular interest: a high strata-level PCV (e.g., $>80\%$) would indicate that strata differences are largely explained by the additive combination of individual identities rather than their unique intersections. The PCV between Model 1 and Model 2 was over 85% or higher for analyses with all outcomes. See the supplemental material for the strata- and school-level PCV for each model to the next.

Supplementary Question 3. As noted earlier, the existing research yields conflicting hypotheses on the experiences of students with privileged identities in schools that respect identity-based differences to a greater extent (Bardach et al., 2024; Iyer, 2022). In our primary analyses, we found that a school's respect for differences was related to better outcomes for all students, and this relationship was either equivalent across students with varying numbers of marginalized vs. privileged identities or even stronger among students with fewer marginalized and more privileged identities. These findings suggest that students who hold privileged identities have better outcomes in schools that have greater respect for differences. To test this claim more directly, we

examined whether a school's respect for differences predicted the outcomes among students who had no marginalized identities (i.e., straight, cisgender, White students who spoke English at home and were not eligible for free/reduced-price lunch and thus had a score of 0 on our count of marginalized identities). Using only students in this group ($n = 30,450$), we ran linear and logistic multilevel models with the covariates and the respecting differences measure predicting the outcomes. Respecting differences significantly predicted better outcomes across all outcome measures. Details on these analyses are reported in the supplemental material.

Discussion

In a diverse sample of over 200,000 students in 6th–12th grade across more than 750 schools, we found that the more marginalized identities students held, the worse their academic and well-being outcomes. Specifically, those who were marginalized with respect to a greater number of identities (i.e., race, socioeconomic status, language spoken at home, gender, and sexuality) were less motivated, perceived that their teachers cared about them less, experienced a weaker sense of belonging, received lower grades, and were more likely to skip school, report depressive symptoms, and consider suicide than those who were marginalized on fewer of these dimensions (Primary Research Question 1). However, the more the school respected identity-based differences, the better students with both privileged and marginalized identities did on all these outcomes (Primary Research Question 2). We did not find evidence for our prediction that greater respect for differences in schools buffered students with more marginalized identities against negative outcomes (Primary Research Question 3).

Conclusions and Implications

Primary Research Question 1. There was robust support for our hypothesis that students with more marginalized identities would exhibit worse

outcomes, including worse academic performance (e.g., grades) and mental health (e.g., reported depression and suicidality). Moreover, supplementary analyses (Supplementary Research Question 2) suggested that the cumulative burden of holding more marginalized identities explained more of the variance than the intersections of specific identities. These results linking multiple marginalized identities to worse outcomes are consistent with other findings that have also shown that students with two or more marginalized identities have worse outcomes than individuals with just one (Coffey & Tyner, 2023; Kosciw et al., 2020; Swann et al., 2020; Thoma & Huebner, 2013). Moreover, we extend this work by examining a greater number of marginalized identities simultaneously.

Primary Research Question 2. There was also strong support for the conclusion that schools' respect for identity-based differences was associated with better outcomes. Here, although the estimates were again highly precise (i.e., tight confidence intervals), the effects were relatively small (see estimates in Table 3). However, it is notable that there was no evidence in these data that a school's respect for diversity was a "divisive ideology" that "makes students feel less . . . welcome," as critics of such efforts have warned (Finn, 2023; Rufo et al., 2023; Stripling, 2023). In fact, supplementary analyses with students who were privileged with respect to race, SES, language spoken at home, sexuality, and gender identity found that, even in this group, respect for differences was associated with better academic and well-being outcomes (Supplementary Research Question 3). Our findings that schools' respect for diversity is associated with better outcomes in the full sample and specifically among students with privileged identities is in line with a recent meta-analysis that found that the effects of pro-diversity school climates on students' outcomes was not moderated by the demographic composition of the school (i.e., whether the student body was primarily from a majority or minority group) (Bardach et al., 2024). Thus, our findings, along with other published research, challenge zero-sum characterizations

of diversity-related practice and point to the importance of inclusive climates for all students.

Supplementary analyses also showed that the relationship between schools' respect for identity-based differences and the outcomes persisted even when controlling for the extent to which people in the school generally respected each other (Supplementary Research Question 1). This suggests that respect for identity-based differences has a unique relationship with these academic and well-being outcomes. Thus, these findings are consistent with claims made by advocates of equitable and culturally responsive education, who emphasize that a generally positive school climate is different from one that explicitly and intentionally affirms students' identities (Gay, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Primary Research Question 3. We did not find evidence for our prediction that greater respect for differences in schools buffered students with more marginalized identities against negative outcomes. Interactions between these two predictor variables were either not significant or were in the opposite direction of our prediction. We hesitate to place too much weight on the significant interactions because their magnitude was very small ($|bs| = 0.01\text{--}0.02$ and ORs = 1.02–1.03). Nevertheless, one possible explanation is that schools' efforts to respect differences do not fully capture the experiences of students with multiple marginalized identities (i.e., do not take an intersectional approach) and therefore do not help students with multiple marginalized identities as much as they help other students. This is consistent with the literature on intersectional invisibility, which suggests that people with multiple marginalized identities are less visible than those with single marginalized identities because they are not prototypical members of any one marginalized group (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). This same type of invisibility is apparent in institutions' interventions that aim to promote equity (Cole & Duncan, 2023). For example, previous work finds that workplace interventions aiming to support women often prioritize white women's

needs over the needs of Black or Asian women (Wong et al., 2022). This invisibility leaves multiply marginalized individuals frustrated when institutions' attempts to promote equity fail to recognize their lived experiences (Dlott, 2025). A similar approach in schools might account for our findings that a school's respect for differences is less strongly linked to positive outcomes among students with multiple marginalized identities than those with fewer marginalized identities.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Directions

Our work has both strengths and limitations. One strength is that we tested our hypotheses during adolescence, a life stage when questions of identity are especially salient (Côté, 2009; Crocetti, 2017; Marcia, 1966). At this stage, identity-based marginalization may have particularly powerful negative consequences, and opportunities to feel supported and respected may be especially critical. At the same time, identities are in flux during adolescence (Crocetti, 2017), which raises questions about how the school context shapes students' identities and willingness to disclose them. Students might have been reluctant to disclose marginalized identities in schools that are less respectful of differences, which could have weakened our ability to observe hypothesized effects.

In terms of our measures, we used students' reports of how much people respect identity-based differences to assess the school climate. This is consistent with some research that has used self-report measures assessing respect for differences (Byrd & Chavous, 2011; Debnam et al., 2021). However, our approach differs from that of other work that either asks students to report on specific dimensions of their school's support for diversity (e.g., cultural socialization, equitable treatment) or assesses the climate via objective markers (e.g., course offerings) (Bonilla et al., 2021; Celeste et al., 2019; Coulter et al., 2016; Hatzenbuehler & Keyes, 2013; Levine et al., 2019). We suggest that one advantage of our measure is that it captures students' gestalt views of their schools' approaches to diversity

relatively quickly and easily. Students were likely able to draw on their observations of various school- and classroom-level factors relevant to multiple identities when responding to our measure. At the same time, however, our measure is limited because it does not identify the specific organizational factors that lead students to perceive that their school respects differences. Future research could investigate what characteristics of a school or classroom increase the extent to which students say that their school respects differences. Our analyses validating the respecting differences measure (see the Methods section) and previous research (Birnbaum et al., 2021; Bonilla et al., 2021; Brannon & Lin, 2021; Coulter et al., 2016; Good et al., 2020; Hatzenbuehler et al., 2014; Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014) suggest that explicitly discussing differences, the incorporation of diverse perspectives into the curriculum, equitable treatment from teachers and peers, and low levels of identity-based bullying and harassment likely play a role. However, it would be especially important to identify objective actions that lead to this perception in order to identify changes that schools can make to improve their climate and, consequently, student outcomes. The most effective changes are likely to be those that go beyond symbolic inclusion of marginalized groups by actually dismantling power structures within schools (Ahmed, 2012; Yi et al., 2024).

As for the sample, one strength is that it is large (over 200,000 students in over 700 schools). Another is that the sample came from California, a large, diverse state with progressive education policies aimed at supporting marginalized students. Therefore, it is a useful context in which to test questions about identity. However, one drawback to our focus on California is that our findings may not generalize to states with different demographics or political climates. Another limitation is that our sample included only schools within California that chose to have students complete the optional school climate module of the CHKS, and this was a relatively small proportion of the students and schools in the state. The schools that opted in are likely schools that place a high value on school climate and are

committed enough to improving school climate that they want to collect data that give them information about what is or is not working well. This could have restricted the range of schools in our sample and might explain why we did not detect all of our hypothesized effects or why some effect sizes were small. Finally, we dropped students who did not provide responses to our measures and who did not answer the survey honestly. This could have meant that students who were the most disengaged in school were not represented in our analyses.

We acknowledge that while our estimates were precise (small confidence intervals), many of the effects we observed were relatively small. This may have occurred because school environments and students are complex, and there are many other factors besides our predictors that explain variance in our outcomes. Future research that captures specific practices that contribute to students' sense that their school respects differences or that compares students' performance in classes where teachers and peers do or do not respect differences might demonstrate larger effects.

We also note that while most ICCs were relatively low, indicating that there was considerable within-school (L3) and within-grade (L2) variation in most of the predictor variables, the school-level (L3) ICC for the count of marginalized identities was higher (see Table 2). This suggests that students with higher numbers of marginalized identities tended to be clustered within certain schools. This is not surprising, given that some marginalized identities (e.g., race and free/reduced-price lunch eligibility) are correlated, and schools are often segregated. We think that this is unlikely to have affected our conclusions because students with more vs. fewer marginalized identities generally agreed about how much their school respected diversity (see "Respecting Differences" subsection of the Methods). However, future research could test whether schools' demographic compositions moderate any of our findings.

There is also additional research to be done on how identities intersect to shape students' school experiences. Many scholars have emphasized the importance of attending to the complex ways

that specific identities intersect to shape individuals' experiences (Bowleg, 2008; Bowleg & Bauer, 2016). They argue that combinations of identities that reflect distinct analytic categories cannot be reduced to their individual components (Cole, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; McCall, 2005). Our supplementary analyses suggested that the cumulative effect of holding multiple marginalized identities, rather than the intersection of specific identities, explained much of the variation in the outcome measures. This may be due to our decision to focus on dimensions of identities where it was relatively clear which groups were marginalized and which groups were privileged. Specifically, while we included gender identity (cisgender vs. transgender/not sure) in our list of marginalized identities, we did not include gender (girl or boy), due to the complexities of gender-based disadvantage that make it difficult to categorize either group as marginalized vs. privileged (Voyer & Voyer, 2014; Zhang et al., 2025). Given that the effects of socioeconomic and racial disadvantage in school are more pronounced among boys than girls (Autor et al., 2019; Reeves & Kalkat, 2023), it is possible the patterns we observed play out differently among boys and girls. Future research could investigate this question.

It would also be useful to understand more about how school characteristics shape the relationship between a school's respect for differences and academic and well-being outcomes among students with varying numbers of marginalized identities. Specifically, we controlled for the racial and socioeconomic compositions of the schools, but it would also be useful to test whether student body demographics moderate the effects we observed. Given that a school's respect for differences was linked to positive outcomes for all students in our analyses, we suggest that this positive relationship is likely to persist across schools with many different demographic compositions.

Finally, our correlational and cross-sectional approach limits our ability to identify causal relationships among the variables and see how these processes unfold over time. To address this, future research could track shifts in students' perceptions of how much their school respects

differences and related academic and well-being outcomes as states shift their diversity policies (Natanson et al., 2024). Researchers could also conduct laboratory experiments that manipulate the extent to which a school respects differences and examine the effects on students with different identities.

Conclusion

Overall, our findings point to potential sources of risk and resilience in schools that serve diverse groups of students. On the one hand, students with more marginalized identities exhibit greater academic and well-being risk. On the other hand, the more schools respect differences, the better students with privileged and marginalized identities fare on multiple dimensions of academic and well-being success. We suggest that continued efforts to understand what makes students feel that identity-based differences are respected and supported are likely to help students of all backgrounds thrive.

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Ethical Considerations

The University of Washington Institutional Review Board determined that this work was not human subjects research (ID for this determination: STUDY00022603).

Consent to Participate

Following California state law, parents of 6th graders provided active consent (i.e., written permission for

their child to participate), and parents of 7th–12th graders provided passive consent (i.e., were informed about the survey and notified the school if they did not want their child to participate).

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement

Due to restrictions in the data use agreement, the authors cannot directly share the data with other researchers. However, other researchers can request the data directly here: <https://calschls.org/reports-data/>.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. We preregistered hypotheses for Research Questions 1 and 3. Because there were multiple contradictory predictions for Research Question 2, we did not preregister a hypothesis for this research question.
2. *N*s for individual models vary because students were removed from individual models if they did not have data on the outcome variable in that model.
3. To ensure that our results were not biased by the responses of individual students in schools that had only a few students in one of the groups, we only included schools that had 10 or more students in each of the four different groups of students in these analyses (*N* = 268 schools).
4. We began testing our models with additional covariates. However, as preregistered, we removed covariates at each step that did not account for significant portions of the variance in the outcomes. Results do not change if we include all covariates.
5. We also preregistered analyses with some other outcomes that overlapped conceptually with this

skipping school outcome. These were whether the participant had missed a day of school in the last 30 days for any reason, for reasons related to their well-being, or for reasons due to experiences at school (three separate outcomes). For brevity, we report these results in the supplemental material only (see “Preregistered Analyses with Missing School Outcomes” section of the supplemental material).

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