

Introduction

School staff play a critical role in shaping student health behaviors. While teacher workload is well-studied, less is known about how staff define and experience health in schools. The Patachou Foundation’s PataSchool program partners with two charter schools in Indianapolis to improve nutrition and health equity through kitchen renovations and scratch cooked meals. This project explores how school staff understand and envision health and well-being within their school communities. Findings will inform future efforts to support wellness among students, parents, and school staff.

Methods

- Qualitative study designs were used with n=36 staff members, including teachers, administrator, and cafeteria staff, participated in semi-structured interviews or focus groups.
- Interview and focus group transcripts were cleaned and descriptive coding was performed using NVivo.

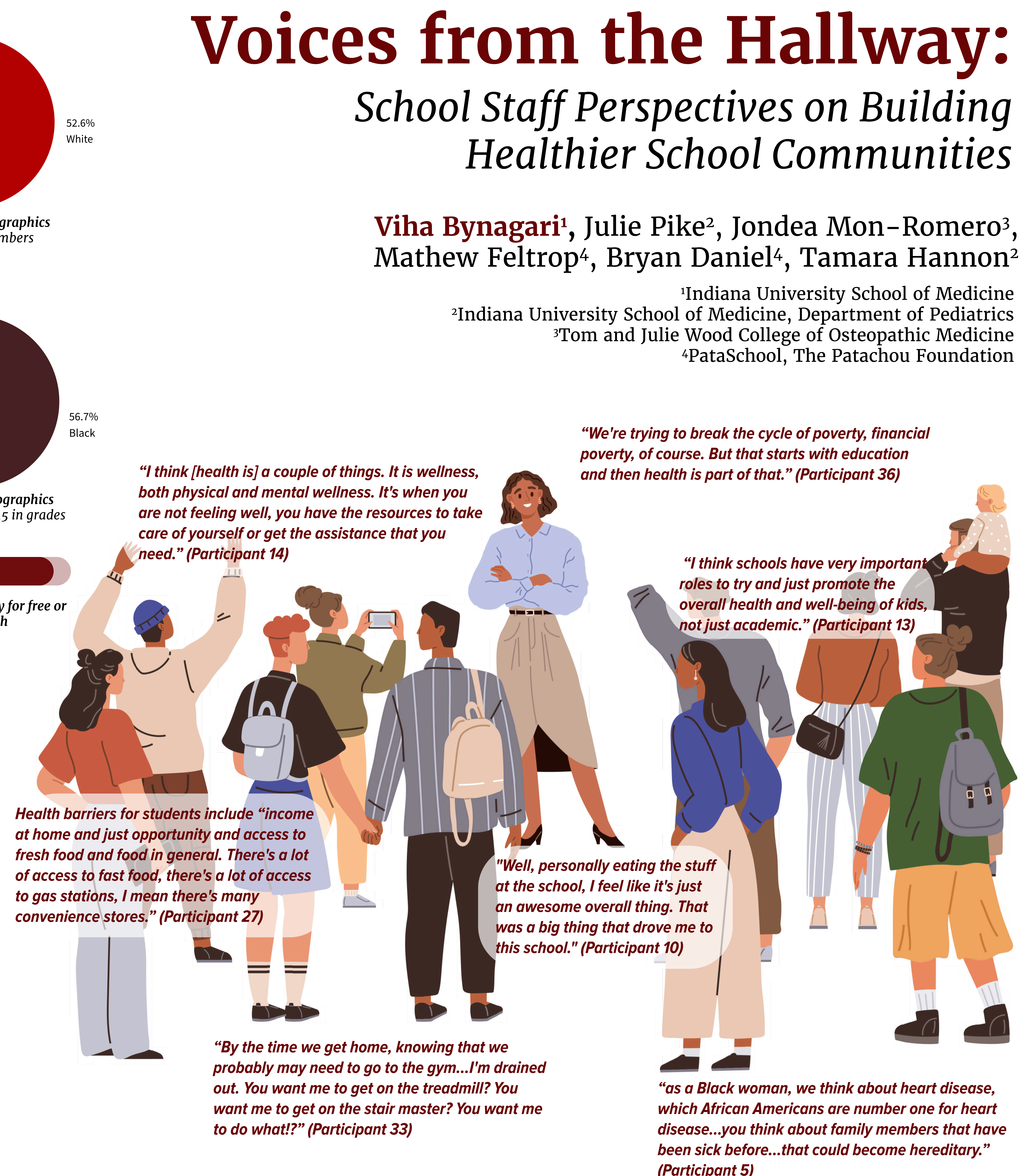
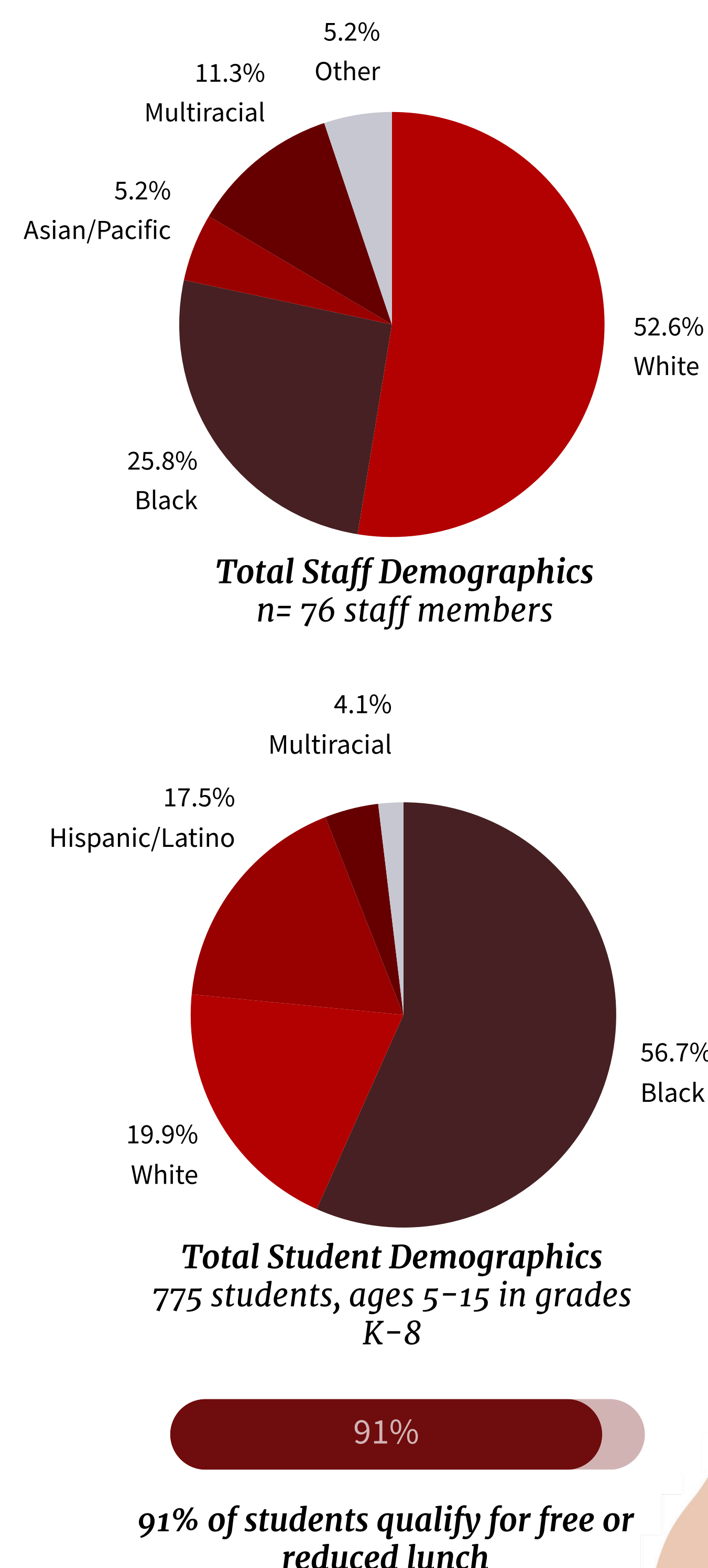
Discussion

Staff view health as a combination of physical, mental, and emotional well-being and believe schools play a key role in shaping health habits for both themselves and students. Many described barriers to their health such as time constraints, stress, and limited access to healthy food. Scratch cooked meals through PataSchool were seen as a valuable support for promoting health. Staff also expressed interest in wellness initiatives that extend beyond the school day, suggesting that such programs could further improve the health of the entire school community. Continued community engaged partnerships and research are needed to evaluate these opportunities

Conclusions

School staff view schools as central to promoting health for themselves and students. Their voices highlight the need to address persistent barriers and to invest in initiatives that support well-being across the entire school community. To build healthier school communities, more work is needed to promote wellness through targeted and interactive sustainable strategies. Future Partnerships ideas include:

- Staff **wellness initiatives** to boost morale, reduce stress, and strengthen staff capacity to **model healthy behaviors**.
- **Visual, hands-on, and family-oriented** programming to reinforce student learning and empower caregivers to support healthy habits at home.
- Strategic **community partnerships** to extend support beyond the school day and ensure long-term sustainability



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