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Factors that Contribute to High School Senior African American Male Students' Academic Success

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Factors that Contribute to High School Senior

African American Male Students' Academic Success

by

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Abstract

There are many studies that examine the negative academic factors that hold African American male students back from being academically successful students. This research changes the narrative because it examines the positive factors that help African American male students become academically successful in school. These students are the future role models of the African American community, and their footsteps could possibly show other African American male students how to become stronger students. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore factors that contribute to high school senior African American male students' academic success. The participants were African American senior male students who had a grade point average of 3.0 or higher. These students also attended an urban high school. This study examined both the in-school factors and the out-of- school factors that impacted the academic success of African American high school senior male students. Seven themes emerged from the interviewees' responses specific to each research question. Four themes emerged from in school factors and three themes emerged from out of school factors. The in-school themes included: supportive teacher providing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, students motivated to obtain academic success, teacher and student relationships, and cultural responsiveness of teachers. The out-of-school themes included: parent support and encouragement for academic success, extended family members' support and advocacy for student educational success, and positive peer support and pressure for academic performance.

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List of Abbreviations

AVID   Advanced Via Individual Determination

CRT   Critical Race Theory

CRS   Culturally Responsive Schools

CRSL   Culturally Responsive School Leaders

ESEA   Elementary Secondary Education Act

ESSA   Every Student Succeeds Act

GPA   Grade Point Average

HBCU   Historically Black College Universities

IB   International Baccalaureate Program

NAEP   National Assessment of Education Process

NCES   National Center for Education Statistics

NCLB   No Child Left Behind Act

RP   Restorative Practices

Chapter I: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

African American male students face challenges in K-12 education (Wells, Duran, & White, 2008). They oftentimes struggle to navigate the obstacles inherent in urban schools (Bell, 2010a, 2010b). Many obstacles inhibiting African American male students' success are evident in the early years, resulting in a poor academic experience during elementary school. Students are not developing a strong foundation and therefore they continue to confront adversity throughout their school years; this phenomenon can result in falling further behind in the academic achievement gap and dropping out of school (Bell 2009, 2010a; Schott Foundation of Public Education, 2010).

Levin, Belfield, Muennig, and Rouse (2007) and Thomas and Stevenson (2009) reported that there are many deep-rooted issues that affect African American male students' success in school; some of these problems stem from how the educational system is structured. African American male students are at an increased risk of being placed in special education and being suspended or expelled from school (Ferguson, 2003). Statistically, African American students are suspended three times as frequently as their Caucasian peers (Sartain et al., 2015). This results in a lack of instructional time, which prevents the development of basic academic skills and reduces the chances these students will graduate. Without a high school diploma, it is hard to find employment, and once a young man has no means of income, he often turns to crime or drugs (Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, & Bagley, 2014). The disparity between African American male students' and White students' academic proficiencies in traditional education settings is destroying African American Black males (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Holcomb-McCoy, 2007; Orr, 2003).

African American males often live in low-socioeconomic areas and attend urban schools that do not rank high in student achievement compared to other institutions (Harris et al., 2014). There are hardships that African American males face while attending school in an urban community: high crime rates, high homelessness, high teenage pregnancy rates, high drug addiction rates, and high unemployment (Bell, 2010a; Schott Foundation of Public Education, 2010). In light of these hardships, and in order to overcome these obstacles, African American male students need strong educational skills to function in society (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2001). Yet, African American males are not graduating from high school, exacerbating the problems found in urban communities (Orfield, Losen, Walk, & Swanson, 2004; Schott Foundation of Public Education, 2010). Bell (2014) reported that 26% of the African American male student population dropped out of school due to academics, but 74% dropped out because they encountered situations such as being homeless, using drugs, and joining gangs.

Background

It is imperative that African American male students in K-12 schools embrace education, not only for personal reasons, but because many Africans and African Americans had to die, fight, and experience segregation for the right to have an equal opportunity for education (Fox-Genovese & Genovese, 2005). There is a need to educate African American male students on their history in order to confront the gaps in the United States' education system (Brown, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to Butchart (2010), the phenomenon of African American males being deprived of a strong educational foundation dates back to 1861 when African Americans were released from slavery and denied educational rights by White southerners. Butchart (2010) stated, "White southerners responded to that demand with

overwhelming force and violence, ranging from simple intimidation through incendiarism, physical violence, shootings and murder against students and teachers" (p. 41).

African American students faced Jim Crow laws and other discriminating acts of racism (Highsmith & Erickson, 2015). Jim Crow laws enforced racial segregation between Black and White people in the South. They were designed to keep Black and White people from interacting with each other physically and socially, including marriage, social events, and attending the same schools. If people did not abide by these laws in the Southern states and cities, they would be punished harshly. These historical wrongdoings became a part of African American and Caucasian culture (Horsford, 2019). When the abuse that African Americans have endured is identified, the current struggle of African American male students in school and society will be better understood. African Americans have experienced 200 years of slavery and 90 years of Jim Crow laws, and they are still facing acts of discrimination and White privilege (Odrowaz-Coates, 2016) These inequities are documented in the school system and justice system (Highsmith & Erickson, 2015).

Brown v. Board of Education was a court case that took place in Topeka, Kansas; this case was tried in several lower courts and then finally heard by the Supreme Court in 1954 (Wishon, 2004). Brown v. Board of Education focused on African Americans' equal rights and opportunities in the segregated public schools. Brown v. Board of Education represented a time period when African Americans were fighting to end segregation in public schools. This case became the cornerstone for the Civil Rights Movement, because the Supreme Court unanimously voted to end segregated schools (Brown Foundation for Educational Equity, 2004). Although many people thought this ruling would be the end to segregation, it put even more of a strain on African Americans; local officials and school board members refused to follow the protocol that

was ordered by the Supreme Court (Wishon, 2004). According to Jankov and Care (2017), segregation did not end; schools were just as segregated 50 years after the Brown v. Board of Education decision was passed.

K-12 curriculum and culture have contributed to educational racism and affected the identity of African American students in education (Ogbu, 2004). Many African American cultures have been absented from history's teachings, which makes it hard for African American male students to identify with modern day educational curricula; it is simply not relevant to their culture (Pai & Adler, 2001). Ogbu (2004) contended that African American students lost their identity because, throughout history, they were forced to act White and convert to White beliefs. For example, some successful African Americans have been accused of trying to act White because of the way they talk or the mannerisms they display around other African American people who are not as proper (Davis, 2003).

Statement of the Problem

The achievement gap between White and Black students in K-12 is alarming (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015). This gap places African American male students at a significant disadvantage, not only in education but in everyday life (Davis, 2005; Noguera, 2003). Insufficient gains have been made to address the achievement gap at both the national and state levels. The National Assessment of Education Process (NAEP) showed there was progress in reducing the achievement gap between Black and White students from 1965-2013 in reading and math, but African American students are still many years behind White students (NAEP, 2013). According to NAEP, if the achievement gap continues to close at such a slow rate, it will take two centuries before the Black-White math gap closes and over one and a half centuries until the reading gap closes (NAEP, 2013).

The achievement gap hinders Black students across the United States. The National

Center for Education Statistics (Aud et al., 2012) reported that only 57% of African American

males earn a traditional high-school diploma. African American students have made a 12% gain

in regard to their graduation rate from 2012 to 2014, but there is still a wide gap between White

students' and African American students' graduation rates.

Figure 1 Graduation Rates by Sub Groups
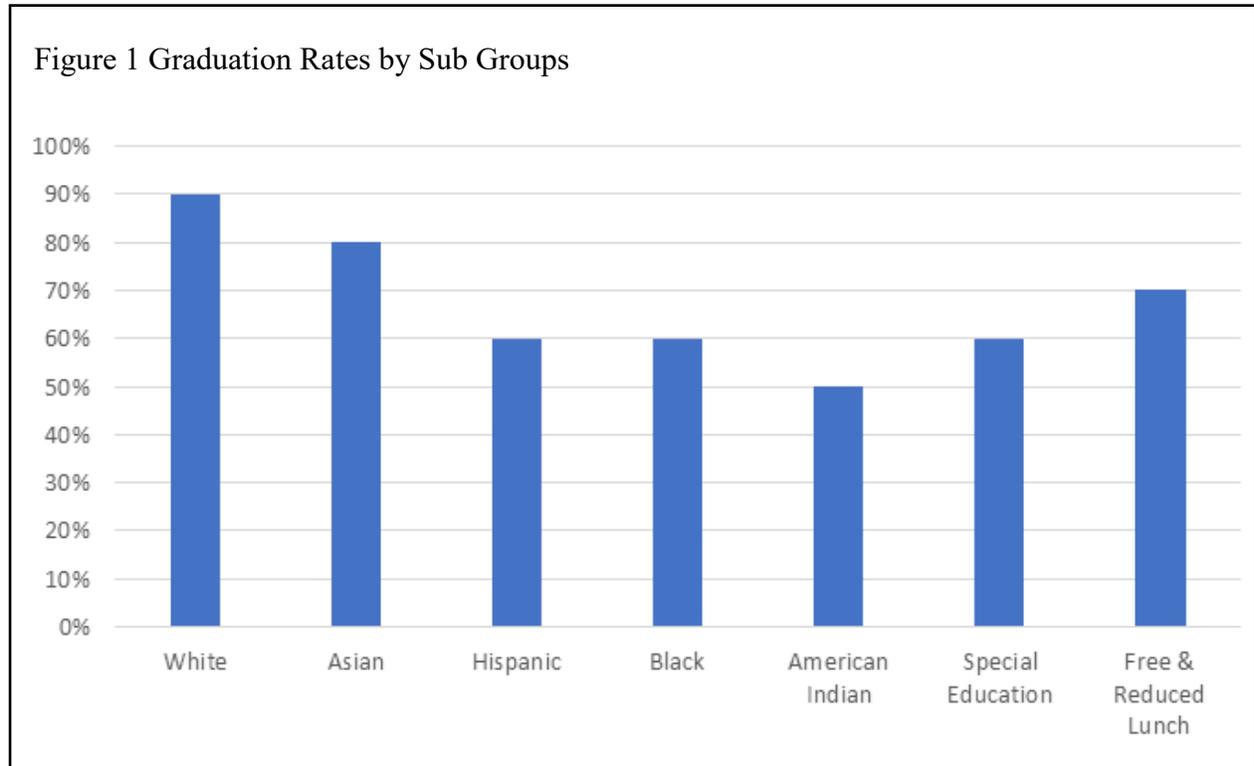
Although there has been some improvement in the graduation rate of African American

male students, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done. The graduation rate for African

America male students in the Minneapolis Public School District system has made small gains

from 2013-2017 (Minnesota Report Card, 2018). However, there are still a substantial number of

African American male students not graduating from the district's high schools. The following

figure and table depicts the 2017 statistics for African American male students in Minnesota, and

specifically, in Minneapolis.

Figure 2 Minnesota Report Card 2017
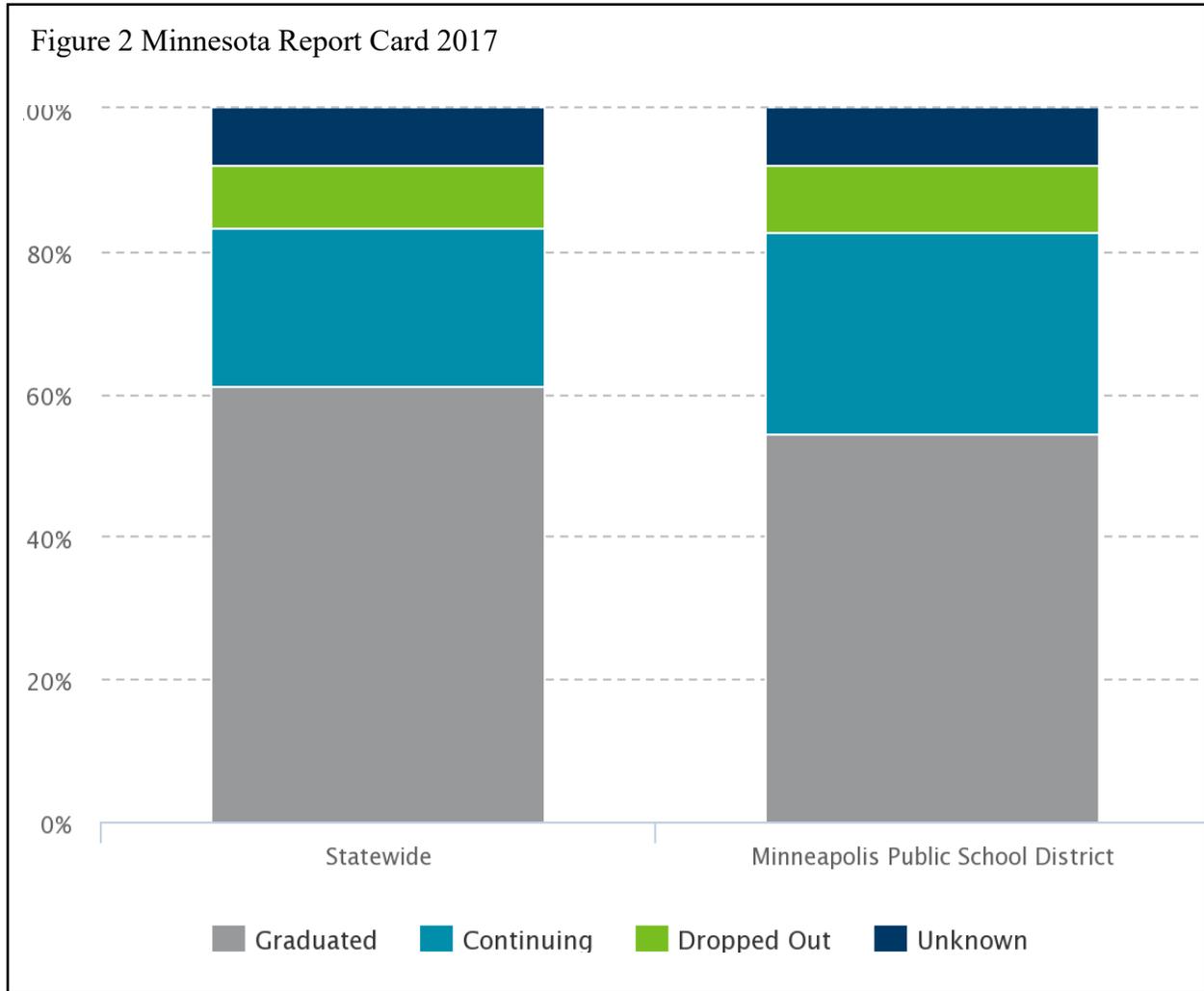
Table 1

Minnesota Report Card 2017

Demographic	Graduated	Continuing	Dropped Out	Unknown
Statewide	61.1%	22.3%	8.8%	7.8%
	2,094	766	300	268
Minneapolis Public School District	54.3%	28.4%	9.4%	7.9%
	289	151	50	42

Harsh punishments for African American students are an obstacle to their academic

success. African American male students receive zero tolerance consequences for exhibiting

some of the same misbehaviors as other students in the class (Dickerson, 2014). African American male students start a downward journey when they are expelled from school, placed in juvenile detention, or are incarcerated. This opens the prisoner pipeline for African American male students who are unsuccessful in school and society (Heitzeg, 2009). According to Wastern and Pettit (2010), 35% of African American males placed in a correctional facility at a young age do not graduate from high school. King (1992) discovered that there are more African American male students who are incarcerated than attend a college or university in the United States. They are simply not receiving a strong academic foundation during their K-12 school years (The Education Trust, 2014). When students are under-performing in school, they tend to fall into bad patterns that can spiral and escalate into poor academic and social concerns (Lynn et al., 2010).

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore factors contributing to senior African American males' academic success in high school in order to better address the achievement gap, low academic achievement, and low high school graduation rates for African American male students. This study explored school and non-school factors positively influencing academically successful high school African American male students.

RQ1. What school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

RQ2. What non-school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

Significance of this Study

Previous research revealed that African American male students are underperforming in urban K-12 education (Tatum & Muhammad, 2012). Historically, research focused on factors

inhibiting African American male students' educational success and the long-term consequences. Yet, not all students in this subgroup follow the documented trend. There are African American male students attaining academic success in urban settings. This study explored the factors inside and outside of school that positively contribute to African American male students being academically grounded and engaged in school. The findings of the study will provide valuable insights for school districts, administrators, teachers, students, and parents. Results could reduce the achievement gap and positively influence graduation rates and career readiness.

Teacher benefits. The study's findings aim to guide teachers by providing insights regarding effective teaching practices when working with African American male students. This student group often comes from the inner-city and has a different mindset and living standards than the classroom teacher (NCES, 2006). Educators are being tasked to gain knowledge about what is culturally relevant for African American male students in school; in order to do so, they need to be aware of how to create a different space to reach these students beyond the traditional learning environment (Delpit, 1995). Findings may educate teachers on some of the historical disparities that African American male students have faced and continue to face in the classroom today. This study aimed to uncover educational and social data that would show teachers how to create stronger connections with African American male students. The results may assist teachers in increasing student engagement, which could prevent students from falling into the achievement gap, dropping out of school, and underperforming in school (Harre & van Langenhove, 1999).

Student benefits. Continued research can benefit African American male students by preventing them from falling into the achievement gap (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). The findings from this study hopes to uncover critical information that could give underperforming

students the educational boost and foundation to prevent them from dropping out of high school. Identifying factors that influence African American students' school experience may increase reflection and self-awareness (Cokley, 2003; Graham, Taylor, & Hudley, 2015).

Results from this study have the potential to empower African American male students and build their self-esteem by introducing them to historic tragedies that have taken place over history, so they can have a deeper understanding of where they came from and how important education was then and is now (Epstein, 2000; Montecinos, 1995). Kharem (2006) contended that African American male students need to know where they came from historically in order to build positive self-esteem and self-confidence, which supports academic success in these students. However, there are many African American male students that are academically successful in traditional K-12 schools, which serves as the impetus for research seeking to understand the factors contributing to the students' academic success (Same et al., 2018).

Parent benefits. This study aimed to increase the ability of parents of African American males to positively impact their child's academic performance by identifying factors and strategies shown to support school success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2007). Research has shown that when parents are involved in their child's education, there is a higher chance for their child to be successful in school (Cousins & Mickelson, 2011). African American parents support the establishment of a strong academic foundation by holding their child accountable for schoolwork and behavior inside and outside school and dealing with distractions that could take their child's focus off school (Hayes & Cunningham, 2003; Trusty, 2002). When students do not have this kind of support from their parents, they can have an inaccurate view of what is important in school, which could cause students to be disengaged from school (Jeynes, 2007).

Parents need more support to be confident in their decisions about their child's academic journey (Anderson & Minke, 2007). The finding of this study may give parents the confidence to ask questions and look for the right information for their child's academic success (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Though extensive research has shown that parent engagement positively impacts the academic success of African American male students, there has been a lack of bridging research to practice (Gasman, Nguyen, Conrad, Lundberg, & Commodore, 2017). Parents may benefit from this study's finding because the data will be solicited from students' authentic school and family experiences, which may identify specific behaviors and actions supporting academic achievement.

Definition of Terms

Achievement gap. Persistent disparity in academic achievement between minority and disadvantaged students and their White counterparts (Valentino, 2018). The achievement gap is damaging the African American community due to the fact that African American male students are not finishing high school and not obtaining employment, which is causing a financial and social gap for African American families (Kenyatta, 2012).

African Americans. Black people who live in the United States and descended from Africa (Walls & Hall, 2018).

Brown v. Board of Education. A landmark United States Supreme Court case in which the Court declared state laws establishing separate public schools for Black and White students to be unconstitutional. A movement against racial segregation and discrimination in the southern United States came to national prominence during the mid-1950s (Foster, Root, & Lee, 2015).

Discrimination. Unequal or unfair treatment due to being different from another person (Doucet, Banerjee, & Parade, 2018). African Americans are discriminated against on a daily

basis due to the color of their skin; they are discriminated against when it involves job opportunities, housing, and social justice (Victor, Thacker, Gary, Pawluk, & Copolillo, 2017).

Jim Crow law. Statutes and ordinances established between 1874 and 1975 to separate the White and Black races in the American South (Highsmith & Erickson, 2015). Black and White people were not legally allowed to associate with one another in social settings or social institutions, and it was punishable by physical harm or incarceration.

Low-socioeconomic status. The social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income, and occupation (Dietrichson, Bøg, Filges, & Klint Jørgensen, 2017). Low-socioeconomic is the quality of life for many African American male students whose families live in poverty (Barone, 2011).

Prisoner Pipeline. When school disciplinary policies and law enforcement policies intersect, and students are pushed out of the classroom and into the criminal justice system (Martin & Beese, 2017).

Segregation. The action or state of setting someone or something apart from others (Jankov & Caref, 2017). Schools were segregated prior to the 1950s, so Black students were not allowed to attend White schools, and Black teachers were not allowed to teach at White schools.

Urban school. A school that is located in the inner city (Leach, 2018). In almost all major American cities, low income African American students attend urban schools because of their economic make up (Harper, 2015).

White privilege. White-skinned people benefiting from societal privileges because of their race (Edwards, 2017). African Americans are treated unfairly by some White people because they feel they have privilege (Green & Dantley, 2013).

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter Two discusses how education reform, Federal Reform Acts, local reform efforts, critical race theory, inequities impacting African American male students, early childhood and college and career readiness, culturally responsive schools, restorative practice, and church guidance are needed in urban community to help support African American males' academic success. Chapter Three describes the research methodology, which includes: methods and designs, setting, instrumentation and measures, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations and delimitation. Chapter four describes the in-school and out-of-factors that contribute to African American males' senior academic success in urban high school. Here are the in-school factors: supportive teacher providing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, students motivated to obtain academic success, teacher and student relationship and cultural responsiveness of teachers. Here are the out-of-school factors: parents that support their child academically and socially outside of school, extended family that supports their school-age family members academically and socially outside of school and friends that support their peers academically and socially outside of school. Chapter five ends with the research questions, summary of findings, conclusion, further discussion: students experience racism, recommendation for further study, implications for practice and concluding comments.

Chapter II: Literature Review

To best understand how African American male students become academically successful in today's schools, this chapter focuses on factors playing a role in African American male students' academic success within urban school settings. These factors include academic foundation, disparities, socioeconomics, historical background, reforming education, and forming relationships. Understanding how social and educational factors are implemented within academically successful African American male students' lives might guide schools' efforts toward meeting the needs of the historically marginalized population.

Federal Educational Reform

The achievement gap between subgroups of race, poverty, and disability has been acknowledged, and federal educational reform initiatives have aimed to address the disparities in educational institutions. Federal educational reform is looking to enhance educational opportunities, decrease racial disparities, and increase resources in school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was created to hold schools accountable for educating under-achieving, inner-city minorities. NCLB's standardized assessments included Grades 3 through 8 and required assessment results to be disaggregated by subgroup with the goal of 100% grade level proficiency by 2014. NCLB mandated public access to assessment results and labeling of schools based on students' academic proficiency. Jordan and Cooper (2002) reported that reforming inner-city schools does not work unless schools get the necessary resources. NCLB provided funding for additional educational assistance for students not meeting proficiency benchmarks, so they could be given the same educational opportunity as the majority

student group (Ballou & Springer, 2017). Jordan and Cooper (2002) expressed concern with NCLB that the United States President Bush implemented to close the racial achievement gap. Jordan and Cooper (2012) found it solved some problems, but it created other problems. Hess and Petrilli (2009) found that NCLB had a negative effect on how teachers taught their students because teachers were only focused on increasing students' test scores not on what students needed or wanted to learn (Jennings & Bearak 2014).

Every Student Succeeds Act

The United States President Obama administration reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) resulted in the passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 (Haller, Hunt, Pacha, & Fazekas, 2016). ESSA aligned with research and was designed to address challenges and barriers found in NCLB. States gained more flexibility to set student achievement goals as well as to develop consequences for schools that did not reach their predetermined goals (Haller et al., 2016). ESSA emphasized students' overall academic growth rather than focusing on grade level achievement and gave states the freedom to use nationally recognized tests to replace a statewide standardized testing system (Herman et al., 2017).

ESSA eliminated punitive punishment for school districts that did not meet the standards of NCLB and prevented the government from forcing implementation of the common core academic standards in schools. Obama's bill did not use the one size fits all philosophy to reform schools but looked at students as individuals (Johnson, 2016).

ESSA and NCLB focused on African American students as one sub-group which schools were accountable for academic proficiency and growth. Peterson (2016) noted United States Presidents Bush and Obama made great efforts to try to reform schools for underperforming

students, but neither President was able to eliminate the achievement gap amongst African American students living in poverty.

Local Reform Efforts

Stiefel, Schwartz, and Wiswall (2015) determined that there has been considerable effort spent on reforming high schools in urban areas. Their research revealed that reforming smaller urban high schools had a greater impact on student academic performance than reforming larger high schools in the inner-city. They advocated that creating smaller schools would increase students' academic success. Urban districts throughout the United States recognized Stiefel et. al.,'s (2015) findings. Major metropolitan cities started to change the format of their urban school settings to small school (Werblow & Duesbery, 2009). Philanthropists acknowledged the benefits of small schools. The Gates Foundation has supported small school efforts by donating over 600 million dollars to small schools (Stiefel, Schwartz, & Wiswall, 2015).

McQuillan (2008) discovered that smaller schools allow students to have less distractions while they are learning and provide a more intimate, warm, and personal setting for the students, teachers, and leaders. This study revealed that smaller schools can better provide adequate education with proper guidance from teachers that meet students where they are at academically. Shear et al. (2008) found that smaller schools help students with anxiety because the school is more personable, less intimidating, and offers a supportive learning environment. Schools enrolling 300-450 students offered a more personalize education and build social and academic confidence (Shear et al., 2008).

McQuillan (2008) stated when districts created smaller schools, students felt they had a choice verses being forced to go to failing schools. McQuillan (2008) compelled struggling

school districts in the inner-city to consider closing and opening small schools that provide a stronger education, confidence, and build social and academic confidence (Shear et al., 2008).

Suter and Bruns (2009) found that another way to reform education in urban schools is to deal with the mental health epidemic that is harming African American students around the United States. This study reported that many urban schools do not have mental health support, which causes problems in school because it is hard for students to function and challenging to communicate with parents due to mental health issues that have not been diagnosed nor treated.

Suter and Bruns (2009) reported that African American students are dropping out of school, being suspended, expelled, and turning to drugs to self-medicate due to the lack of support. These authors stated urban schools need to form partnerships with local colleges and universities for mental health support. Harkavy, Hartley, Hodges, and Weeks (2013) revealed when universities' mental health programs get involved with inner-city schools, they provide services that support students academically and emotionally in school, which can help students to function on a higher level in school and in society.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a platform created to uncover racism that exists in laws, education, legislation, and society (Hughes, Noblit, & Cleveland, 2013). CRT identified the unjust racial discrepancies that were historically rooted in law and institutions (Hughes et al., 2013). CRT uncovered hidden White supremacy and racial power inequities that exist in American society and looked at how to restore law and order between race and power.

History of Critical Race Theory

CRT revealed that racism really does exist in American society (Milner, 2008). CRT explains how White people used the civil rights legislation to their advantage by being privileged

to certain laws and educational benefits. CRT takes a broader look at how citizenship and race play an important role in the United States. CRT puts a great deal of emphasis on understanding the educational inequity that people of color in our society experience.

CRT can be used to examine the discriminating injustices that have taken place in history with African American male students (Allen, 2006). This theory explores racial bias in how race, law, and power have prohibited African Americans from being equal. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006), CRT is the platform for examining racial discrimination against African Americans trying to gain equal educational rights as American citizens. African American male students have been faced with many disparities when it comes to receiving a fair and equal education over the years, and this is something that they are still fighting for today's education system (Mitchell & Stewart, 2013). Lancellot (2016) examine the desegregation of public schools through the lens of educational leaders. The author revealed that the United States has always had a problem with racial justice in our public schools. The inequalities that were identified were racism, sexism, and classism. These practices cause social and educational problems for Africans.

Lancellot (2016) revealed that desegregation during the Brown v. Board of Education period was not as successful as African Americans thought because many African American educators and students suffered during this time period. Black educators lost their jobs to White educators; therefore, White teachers were forced to teach African American students to whom they would teach the bare minimum through a White prejudice educational lens. If African American educators were teaching, they would teach through a different lens. Lancellot (2016) discussed how the topic of race needs to be openly talked about between White and Black students given the circumstance that Black and White students are raised differently, so the topic

is viewed differently in each race's home. White students tend to ignore race due to the White privilege they receive in society; therefore, discrimination is not a main topic in their households. African American families experience racism quite often, so this is a topic discussed in their households often (Lancellot, 2016).

In 1970, Derrick Bell was one of the first African American male civil rights lawyers to teach at Harvard Law School. Bell studied and wrote about the challenges and misconceptions of Western racial history (Curry, 2008). Bell's CRT work helped to support a minority legal scholarships program, which contributed toward the fight for civil rights, equal laws, and opportunities for people of color. CRT exposed how the United States was handling the slowly evolving movement of racism.

Brown (2010) examined how African American students were not excelling in K-12 schools in the nineteen and twentieth centuries and concluded that it was due to educational curriculum that was not culturally appropriate. Research contended that inaccuracies of African Americans' history had a negative impact on African Americans, which affected young African American scholars of the twentieth century. In the nineteen and twentieth centuries, African Americans' history looked like it did not even exist due to racism and other prejudiced actions that existed in America (Brown, 2010). Researchers found that White supremacy was used to depict African Americans lazy, unintelligent, and inferior to Caucasians. Literature, news media, and school texts painted a negative picture of African Americans' culture and their history (Howard, 2008). This had a significant negative impact on African American males because people thought they were violent and dangerous

Johnson-Ahorlu (2017) found how CRT provided a platform for African American male students to speak out against injustice, and an education system that had oppressed African American students for centuries.

Black Students Attending White Institutions—Critical Race Theory

According to Strayhorn (2012), historically African Americans have been racially marginalized in society, which causes a problem when African American students attend primarily all-White colleges or universities. Black students have problems trusting White students and White adults because of the oppression they have faced in society (Guiffrida & Douthit, 2010).

Strayhorn (2012) studied issues that Black students faced when attending predominantly White colleges and identified campus racism, daily micro-aggressions, and feeling they do not belong at the school. Lee (2016) found that African American students were uncomfortable with the climate because they felt they had racial micro-aggression, poor relationships with teachers, White peers that did not understand them, and they experienced racism in school and outside of school in the community.

Kena et al. (2015) stated that White advisors play a pivotal role in Black students' experience attending a White college. The authors revealed how White advisors made Black students feel unwelcome, which led to a lack of belonging. This study found that advisors' lack of knowledge about race and racism influences students of color to feel unwanted at school, and this affects students' relationships and academic achievement. Strayhorn (2012) stated that advisors use of CRT could provide a foundation for African American students to feel normalized and valued in a systemic White institution.

Hurtado and Ruiz (2012) conducted a national study of 4,037 students of color attending 31 campuses. More than half the students reported some type of racial feeling at school. Black students reported racial incidents involving campus police more than their peers and described feeling like they did not belong at the university. Black students reported that they often experienced people making negative racial comments on a regular basis.

Mitchell, Wood, and Witherspoon (2010) believed that in order to make change the White advisors will have to use CRT to start looking at Black students through a different lens to make sure social justice and cultural competency is being practiced. Mitchell et al. (2010) pointed out that White institutions are clearly designed for White students, which leaves little room for diversity. Black students become invisible in the academic and social world of a White institution.

Inequities Impacting African American Male Students

African American male students are struggling to achieve academic success in schools (Douglas & Peck, 2013). Bradshaw, O'Brennan, and McNeely 2008) found a discipline gap between the White and Black students. Black students were not afforded the same fair and inclusive treatment as the White students when it involved disciplinary actions at school. Bradshaw et al. (2008) revealed that this type of unfair treatment made Black students feel unwelcomed and discriminated against. Bottiani, Bradshaw, and Mendelson (2017) examined the equity gap between Black and White students' disciplinary actions in high school. Their study included 58 high schools and a sample comprised of 19,726 adolescent students. They discovered that Black students tended to be over-represented in referrals for defiance and other subjective disruptive behaviors such as talking in class. They found that White students were disciplined for objective infractions like fighting and smoking on school grounds. These authors

also examined how gender impacted discipline disparities amongst students. They found that Black male students are two times as likely as Black females to be suspended, and Black males are six times as likely as White females to be suspended. The discipline disparity caused African American students to drop out of school, and some students became part of juvenile justice system (Finn & Servoss, 2014).

Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace, and Bachman (2008) studied the discipline disparity between African American and White Grade 9 students. They discovered that African American were 31% more likely to get a discretionary discipline referral than White students displaying the same behaviors. Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz (2016a) contended that high schools need to re-examine practices involving conflict with African American students such as handling rule infractions, re-engaging students after an infraction has occurred, and suspending students. Many high schools only have one form of disciplinary practice, which is suspension or expelling students, and this usually affects African American students the most (Bowman-Perrott et al., 2013).

According to McGee (2013), Black students were being suspended three times more than White students, and Whites students graduated high school 70% more than African American male students. Researchers found that African American students were being suspended from school 26.2% compared to White students, who were being suspended from school only at 9.9% before restorative practices were implemented (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009). Morgan (1991) discovered that students being suspended rarely catch up with their missed assignments and are unable to complete their assignments because they miss the instruction in class. McGee (2013) stated that educators need to find an alternate to suspension keeping Black males in school, so they can be eligible for graduation. He also stated that these statistics are very alarming because

more and more African American male students are dropping out of high school each day. African American male students are struggling academically, which has long-term financial and social consequences for African American communities and families. According to Van Dorn, Bowen, and Blau (2006) a high percentage of African American students are dropping out of high school or being incarcerated before they reach the age of 18. These hardships impact the African American community drastically because it is hard for African American males to get a job when they do not have a high school diploma or they have a criminal record (Van Dorn, Bowen, & Blau, 2006).

Early Childhood

McCarthy and Morote (2009) examined the link between early childhood pre-schools and high school graduation rates for African American male students in the United States. They found there was a strong connection between early childhood programs and male students graduating from high school. McCarthy and Morote (2009) advocated for increased financial investments in Head Start and pre-school programs. They contended that the key to African American males graduating high school was creating a solid foundation for early learning before they start kindergarten.

Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2017) researched how low-income African American parents impact their child's educational future by playing a role in their child's literacy before they enter into kindergarten. Jarrett and Coba-Rodriguez (2017) discovered that when parents are not involved in their child's educational pre-school learning, their child could be at risk for not being ready for kindergarten. Studies have found that when families enroll their children in pre-school readiness programs such as Head Start, their children had a strong start during kindergarten (Bitler, Hoynes, & Domina, 2014; Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2017).

Bitler, Hoynes, and Domina (2014) discovered that school readiness programs like Head Start help low-income African American students before they get to kindergarten. These researchers found that students having participated in Head Start programs enhanced their cognitive skills. They studied over 84 Head Start programs, which included at least 5,000 pre-school age students ranging from three to four years old. The children were randomly selected to the Head Start program or a control group. These authors identified a significant difference in results between both groups. They revealed that the Head Start program group out-performed the control group in literacy, prewriting, and social skills.

Reardon and Portilla (2016) reported that early childhood education programs are making an impact in low-income areas. These researchers found that between 1998-2010, early childhood programs have made a great advancement in improving students' reading and math skills before they entered kindergarten. When students are introduced to an early childhood education, they have a stronger educational foundation, which increases their chance of being more productive in the future as far as graduating from high school, attending college, and gaining employment (Chetty et al., 2011).

College and Career Readiness

Research indicated that African American male students are starting to make improvements in high school graduation rates and attending college (Ross et al., 2012a). The NCES reported that the drop-out rate for African American male students has decreased in recent years. In 1995, the drop-out rate was at 15% for African American male students while in 2010, the rate decreased to 9%. In 1980, only 8% of African American students earned a bachelor's degree, but by 2011, the number of bachelor degree graduates increased to 20% for African American male students (Ross et al., 2012a).

Wood and Vasquez Urias (2012) researched first-year minority male students going into post-secondary education. The study included 16,580 participants, of which 4,830 were community college students and 11,750 attended a proprietary school. Results showed 89.4% of the minority students preferred community college and 10.6% preferred proprietary schools. Wood and Vasquez Uria (2012) found that community college was a more satisfying fit for low-income, minority students. They discovered that these students excelled in their major classes and the cost was affordable.

Harper (2015) identified why African American male students pick Historically Black College Universities (HBCU). He found that HBCU colleges provide specific supports for Black students, and students more easily relate to the university's culture. Harper (2015) revealed that HBCU schools provided African American male students a sense of belonging, helping them to feel supported while they pursue their educational goals. HBCU colleges can provide a strong education for African American male students because there are students and teachers that look like them and share some of the same interests (Harper, 2015).

HBCU Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) programs, like Morehouse, benefit African American male students in college and the workforce (Gasman et al., 2017). Gasman, Nguyen, Conrad, Lundberg, and Commodore (2017) showed how to reduce the education gap between African American males and White students. Gasman et al. (2017) revealed that when African American male students participated in STEM college programs it increased their social and academic awareness in school.

Saenz and Ponjuan (2011) revealed that Latino males and African American males have one of the lowest percentages out of any other races and genders of attending college. This research states that 46% of Latino and 45% African Americans will be able to attend college

compared to 51% to 67% of Asian and Caucasian students who will go to college. Saenz and Ponjuan (2011) pointed out that poverty, gender, school discipline policies, language, and cultural barriers play a part in how African American and Latino males function in school. Therefore, their post-secondary opportunities can become very limited due to their circumstances and conditions. Corwin and Tierney (2007) found that urban high schools had success getting African American students to post-secondary when the high school had a relationship with a college, creating a path for African American students to attend post-secondary. These authors revealed how consistent practices, organizational structures, and students' development can help promote African American students to further their education after high school (Corwin & Tierney, 2007).

Aldana (2014) conducted a study that found Catholic schools in urban areas were a better fit for African American and Latino students. The study revealed that 81% of African American and Latino students that attended Catholic high schools graduated from high school and went on to attend a four-year post-secondary school. Bryk, Lee, and Holland (1993) conducted a similar study that pointed out how urban Catholic schools have a greater positive impact on African American students than public schools when it comes to preparing them for post-secondary. Bryk et al. (1993) identified how African American students felt Catholic schools gave them a sense of community. Aldana (2014) discovered that Catholic schools taught students to prevail socially and academically in school, which prepared them for post-secondary.

Culturally Responsive Schools

According to Bazron, Osher, and Fleischman (2005), Culturally Responsive Schools (CRS) are needed in districts throughout the United States. Schools are being globally integrated, so teachers need to be trained to teach from a culturally responsive point of a view. CRS develop

teachers and students who understand how to blend culture and race with education (Bal, Afacan, & Cakir, 2018). When teachers were trained to be culturally responsive, it enhanced their social awareness and problem-solving ability (Darvin, 2018).

Teachers becoming culturally responsive and increasing their culturally responsiveness requires special training. Nilsson, Kong, and Hubert (2016) researched how some teachers have to be reconditioned because they are so used to the old traditional way of teaching students (Wallace & Brand, 2012). Culturally responsive teachers may solve potential problems that come from unequal distribution of power and privilege. This starts to create a shared sense of responsibility for all parties because they learn to trust and respect each other. Juettner (2003) reported that teachers who are not culturally responsive have misconceptions of students of colors' behavior and learning gaps as disabilities or problems because the teachers are unfamiliar with students' diverse backgrounds and cultures (Darvin, 2018).

According to Mogge, Martinez-Alba, and Cruzado-Guerrero (2017), when teachers were culturally responsive toward parents it established a stronger relationship between the parents, students, and teachers. Culturally responsive teachers better understood parents' needs and how to adapt to some of the barriers that hinder students from learning.

Olson and Rao (2016) discovered culturally responsive teachers encouraged academic and cultural excellence; therefore, helping students to learn about each other's cultures and traditions. Culturally responsiveness teaches students to socially interact and learn from global experiences. Students feel comfortable with exploring differences of opinion and sharing their cultural point of view.

Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) stated that culturally responsive school leaders (CRSL) are intentional on how they treat race matters in school. CRSL ensured a high

priority on developing and improving the way teachers see and teach race in classrooms (Lopez, 2015). According to Vass (2017), CRSL creates a school environment that is inclusive for staff, teachers, students, and parents, so the atmosphere is welcoming and accepting to everyone regardless of their race, gender, or social status. Vass (2017) found that culturally responsive leaders are needed in schools today because our school communities are becoming more diverse.

Restorative Practice

Gregory, Clawson, Davis, and Gerewitz (2016) have taken a new approach to examine the link between Restorative Practices (RP) and diverse students' relationships with their teachers. They found that restorative practices supported positive teacher and student relationships among all racial groups. The approach is a pro-active alternative to punitive approaches, which could help create a more equitable school climate for all students (Hantzopoulos, 2013).

Hantzopoulos (2013) showed that when teachers used RP and were aware of the disparity issues, discipline improved in the school and referral disparities were reduced between White/Asian and African American/Latino students. Gregory et al. (2016) analyzed and described data regarding factors contributing to disproportionality in school discipline referrals, suspension, and expulsions. Gregory et al. (2016) measured progress and outcomes due to implementing RP. They found what steps and decisions needed to be made to help schools improve equitable school discipline practices. They discovered the benefits to administrators, principals, teachers, coaches, behavior specialists, and educators when they were involved in the school discipline policies and practices.

Costello, Wachtel, and Wachtel (2010) examined how RP is an alternative to suspensions. It helps to restore community and build opportunities for students. RP is considered

to be a pro-active tool for teachers and students used to prevent conflict or solve problems. Mirsky (2011) found that RP is the key to creating stronger communication between teachers and students because RP creates space for students to communicate to their peers and teachers about problems they are having in school. RP allows students to talk about positive and negative situations that happen in school. Teachers can use RP to get certain points across to their students without offending them, and RP opens the grounds for students to respectfully express themselves about the school environment, peers, and teachers. Mirsky (2011) mentioned that RP allows students to have a respectful voice in their classroom without being punished for expressing their truth. Costello et al. (2010) found that RP can be used to facilitate classroom circles to talk about situations with peers and teachers before they become issues in school. RP provides a safe place for students and teachers to express their real feelings.

Gregory et al. (2016) reported that RP circles give students and teachers a chance to learn about each other as they form relationships throughout the school year. RP circles are a way to develop a sense of shared responsibility and ownership over the classroom environment because it increases expectation and accountability between students and teachers. RP classroom circles are a place where teachers can address classroom rules, behavior expectations, and consequences. Gregory et al. (2016) researched how teachers used RP to improve the school climate. This study revealed that teachers that used RP had stronger relationships with their students as opposed to teachers that did not use RP. These authors found that students felt a high level of respect for their teachers even when teachers had to discipline them. Gregory et al. (2016) discovered that RP reduced the racial discipline gap due to prevention work that was done every day in class. RP also lowered disruption and defiance referrals in class with students of color.

Advanced Via Individual Determination

Parker, Eliot, and Tart (2013) revealed African American male students have been underachieving academically and socially in urban school settings for many years. Education has not been a top priority for many African American male students because students feel they have been discriminated against, they lacked educational knowledge, or they were faced with hardships outside of school. These authors believed there has been psychological damage done by society when it comes to the educational future of African American male students, which tends to affect their pride, confidence, and their educational advancement.

Advanced via individual determination (AVID) is a school program that is successfully helping African American students around the United States to improve their academic achievement, better meet their social needs, and be better prepared for college (Pugh & Tschannen-Moran, 2016). According to Pugh and Tschannen-Moran (2016), AVID focuses on four major areas in students' life styles: making sure supportive, family-like relationships are created in classrooms, pushing students to see the value of academics, increasing students' preparation for college, and setting reachable educational goals for students.

Tramonte and Williams (2010) discovered that AVID helps African American students' social and academic achievement because it increases their self-efficacy. Bernhardt (2013) revealed that AVID created a bridge to decrease the racial/ethnic educational disparity gap that inner-city schools encounter. Inner-city schools often do not have the necessary educational resources to support African American students' success in high school so AVID is imperative in inner-city schools (Parker, Eliot, & Tart, 2013). Osborne (1999) mentioned AVID is one way African American male students can overcome some academic and social achievement gaps. Pugh and Tschannen-Moran (2016) found that AVID holds African American students to a

different academic and social standard. AVID challenges students by making sure they understand the process of education. AVID prides its program on developing students for the future, building educational structure, and conveying respect for education.

Pugh and Tschannen-Moran (2016) revealed that AVID programs can create a strong educational foundation for African American students to understand educational and social values. These researchers found that once exposed to AVID, students are more likely to attend college after high school. Pugh and Tschannen-Moran (2016) discovered that students who attended AVID and college preparatory classes become confident in their academic affairs. Parker et al. (2013) found that African American boys who attend an inner-city school usually have experienced disparities and racism at some point in their lives; therefore, when these students get involved with AVID, it teaches them to be committed to education. Parker et al. (2013) discovered how AVID helps low-income students pursue college after high school. This study revealed how low-income students have a hard time getting prepared for college because they do not have the academics or support system like AVID provides. Darling-Hammond (2010) referred to AVID as one of the keys to decrease the educational gap in many schools, because AVID has additional resources for urban schools that support students that have fallen behind, and students who need guidance to go on to college. Darling-Hammond (2010) mentioned the educational resources that AVID provides: expert teachers, individual student support, quality curriculum, college readiness material, and information that will prepare students for high school and college.

Church Guidance

Gaines (2010) provided historical context regarding African American churches having a powerful influence on the African Americans' education. Gaines (2010) revealed that Black

churches served as the mediator between families and school. Churches are known in the African American community for having church leaders who reinforce equal opportunities for African America students by volunteering in schools. This helps African American students feel safe and invested in their community and school environment (Mitchell, 2010).

McCray, Grant, and Beachum (2010) stated that church is an outside-of-school factor that contributes to African American students' success. They reported that there were three factors developed when students are educated in a safe environment like the church: self-development, self-realization, and self-assertion. Church provided a strong educational platform for education, which was evident when members of the church expressed the importance of education to students who attended the church. When educated church members made a connection with African American males, it alleviated the anxiety that students experienced in school (Irvin, Farmer, Leung, Thompson, & Hutchins, 2010).

Land, Mixon, Butchner, and Harris (2014) conducted research that tracked six high school African American male students who attended an inner-city school. Land et al. (2014) found that church was a factor that helped students overcome barriers and stay focused on education. Students received the spiritual guidance and instruction that helped them socially and academically in school and outside of school. Gaines (2010) reported that Black churches are known in the community as functioning as an educational space for students to feel safe. Gaines (2010) mentioned that Black churches have been invested in education ever since the civil rights movement and before.

Black churches have taken a stand in urban communities to teach their congregations how important education is for youth. Isaac, Guy, and Valentine (2001) stated that Black churches have positioned themselves to get involved with school boards to help make change

with African American students and to make sure their rights are not being violated in school or the community. Black churches make sure African American students have a voice in education. Isaac et al. (2001) found that Black churches are a staple for education according to history because Black churches were the meeting place for African Americans to gather and talk about politics, equal rights, and educating youth.

According to Isaac et al. (2001), the Black church provided education assistance, as well as religious support. Isaac et al. (2001) revealed how historically Black churches offered educational assistance, health service, arts and crafts, and leadership practices. Mattis et al. (2004) found that during the civil rights movement, men and women served two different purposes in the Black churches. Women were more involved in the non-organizational side, such as religious duties, and men were involved in the organizational side, such as politics and programing.

United States former President Barack Obama created an advisory group that consisted of Black churches in the low-income neighborhoods in 2009. He formed partnerships to help resolve some of the crises that neighborhoods face on a day-to-day basis. The Obama administration turned to the churches to reach out to the community (Derthick & Rotherham, 2012). The Black churches acted as the ears and voice of the community to work with the Obama administration to help with prisoner reentry, violence prevention, and to support fatherhood programs (Office of Justice Programs, 2015). The Black churches and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services partnered together to support mentoring, health, wellness, and job training for the African American community (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).

Next, Chapter Three describes the research methodology, which includes: methods and designs, setting, instrumentation and measures, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations and delimitation. Chapter Four describes the in-school and out-of-factors that contribute to African American males' senior academic success in urban high school. Here are the in-school factors: supportive teacher providing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, students motivated to obtain academic success, teacher and student relationship and cultural responsiveness of teachers. He is the out-of-school factors: parents that support their child academically and socially outside of school, extended family that supports their school-age family members academically and socially outside of school and friends that support their peers academically and socially outside of school. Chapter Five ends with the research questions, summary of findings, conclusion, further discussion: students experience racism, recommendation for further study, implications for practice and concluding comments.

Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the factors that contribute to senior African American male students' academic success in high school. Findings from this study may aid African American male students in breaking the vicious cycle that prevents them from experiencing positive school experiences. Findings may help close the achievement gap, lead to increased African American male students' graduation from high school, and increase the number of African American male students attending college. The goal of this research was to gain insights that support African American males in establishing a strong educational and social foundation during and after high school.

This chapter has nine sections of interest that will aid in exploring factors that contribute to high school senior African American males' academic success: research method and design, research questions, setting, respondent selection, instrumentation and measurements, data collection procedures, data analysis, limitation and delimitations, and ethical considerations.

Research Method and Design

A qualitative method was used to explore the factors that contribute to high school senior African American males' academic success. Creswell (2014) claimed, "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research takes place in a naturalist form during the research process. The qualitative method is flexible and a more natural procedure for the researcher and the participants. This method allows the participants to be themselves, which creates an opportunity for them to answer open-ended questions spontaneously, freely, and in their own words.

Case studies require deep analyses involving an up-close, in-depth, and detailed examination of a particular subject. Merriam (2009) suggested that a case study is a finite number of people who could be interviewed about complex situations, real life influence, and major decisions. This case study was designed to deeply investigate the influences that address the achievement gap and support academic success of African American male students.

While quantitative research is a statistical method that analyzes numerical data, it causes the researcher to miss natural human emotional factors on which the researcher bases the findings (Creswell, 2014). According to Merriam (2009), case studies provide detailed information that can enhance new findings or support ideas about real-world problems, which affect African American male students every day.

This study used semi-structured interviews to gather research information from African American students. The semi-structured interviews encouraged participants to be honest and open about their answers, allowing them to be themselves during the interview. The interview was comprised of open-ended questions, and the researcher prompted for more information, in order to further explore particular themes or responses.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore factors contributing to senior African American males' academic success in high school in order to better address the achievement gap, low academic achievement, and low high school graduation rates for African American male students. This study explored school and non-school factors that positively influence academically successful high school African American male students.

RQ1. What school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

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RQ2. What non-school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

Setting

The setting of the study was purposefully selected to be an urban Midwestern high school in order to obtain participants with the realistic conditions and experiences regarding the unique challenges and successes that African American male students face in an urban school setting. The study provided an authentic perspective on how successful high school senior African American male students function in a unique geographic location.

The urban high school served 1,100 students in Grades 9 to 12. The student body was comprised of 60% African American, 20% Hmong, 5% Latino, 5% Native American, 5% Caucasian, and 5% Somali. Dyson, Hett, and Blair (2003) stated that in some inner-city schools 95% of their students qualify for free and reduce lunch. These authors revealed that children living in poverty can have negative experience in school due to the fact of their living conditions at home.

This school had an International Baccalaureate program (IB) for Grades 9 to 12 students. Students in Grades 11 and 12 may choose to engage in varying levels in the IB program and/or career-related programs. There were different academic programs for students attending. Of these programs, 10% of the students were enrolled in special education, 10% of the student body had a 504 plan, which ensure that children who have a disability will be identified under the law, 30% of the student body was enrolled in the International Baccalaureate program, and 40% of the student body was enrolled in traditional education.

Respondent Selection

The sample included nine academically successful African American male senior students attending an urban Midwestern high school. The students selected had a grade point average (GPA) of 3.0 or higher. A list of potential respondents was secured by the high school counselor. The potential respondents were ranked by GPA. The researcher invited the nine students with the highest GPAs to participate in the study. If a student declined a second-round invitation was sent to the student next in GPA rank. This process was continued until nine participants were secured.

Instrumentation and Measurement

This study used a semi-structured interview approach to gather information from African American male high school senior students. According to Merriam (2009), semi-structured interviews provide a comfortable and flexible atmosphere for respondents answering questions. Creswell (2014) defined semi-structured interviews as a method that involves a number of steps, such as: providing introduction, verifying informed consent, reviewing the research goals, reminding participants of the reason for their selection, estimating the length of time, assuring confidentiality, and requesting permission to record. Table 2 includes the research question, interview questions, and research linked to review the specific area of interest.

Table 1

Interview Protocol

Research Question	Interview Question	Literature Review
RQ1. What school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?	1. Think back as far as you can. What is one of your very first positive school memories?	According to Bazron et al. (2005), culturally responsive schools are needed in our school districts around the United States. These researchers state that schools are being globally integrated at a fast pace so teachers need to be trained to teach from a culturally responsive point of a view when educating students.
	2. Think of your best academic experience in high school. What or who helped you to do well in your courses?	Restorative practices provide a positive teacher and student relationship among all racial groups, and this could be the alternative to punitive approaches, which could help create an equitable school climate for all students no matter what race or gender). (Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2016).
	3. Describe your relationship with your teachers and how it impacts your school experience?	There is a positive academic link between early childhood pre-schools and high school graduation rates for African American male students in the United States (McCarthy & Morote, 2009).
	4. How do principals, teachers, and other school staff from a different race connect with you culturally?	An increasing level of attention has been directed towards the achievement of African American male success in school. Hines and Holcomb-McCoy (2013) identify some of the key factors that contribute to students' success in school.

Research Question	Interview Question	Literature Review
RQ2. Non-school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?	5. What are your parents' expectations for you in school? How do you know?	When African American parents establish a strong Academic foundation for their children outside of school, such as holding them accountable for schoolwork and behavior inside and outside school, it contributes to their academic success (Hayes & Cunningham, 2003; Trusty, 2002).
	6. Has your family shared in your school experience? How have they been involved?	According to Annunziata, Hogue, Faw, and Liddle (2006), family can contribute to African American males' success in school as well. The authors interviewed 211 African American male students in Grades 6-8 and their parents. They found that when Black boys have strong relationships with their family members and their family believes in education, this creates a supportive and positive network which helps the African American boys to do well in school (Annunziata, Hogue, Faw, & Liddle, 2006).
	7. How do your peers (friends and classmates) respond to your success in school?	Academically successful African American students were teased about acting White. (Davis, 2003)
	8. Do you have someone in your community, such as a mentor, church leader, or go-to person that has influenced your school experience and/or expectations?	Gaines (2010) provided historical context regarding African American churches having a powerful influence on African Americans' education. During the civil rights era, Black churches were the anchor for communities; they promoted religion, education, and social justice.

Research Question	Interview Question	Literature Review
Open Ended	9. Have you observed unequal or differences between racial groups at your school? If yes, how did that impact your academic achievement?	According to McGee (2013), there are many urban schools that continue discrimination practices by not providing African American male students an equitable education. McGee (2013) revealed the many disparities between Whites and African American males being suspended from school and graduating from high school.
	10. Tell me how race, law, and/or power impacted your academic achievement in school.	Critical Race Theory can be used to examine discriminating injustices that have taken place in history with African American male students (Allen, 2006). This theory explores how race, law, and power have prohibited African Americans from being successful all over the nation.

Data Collection Procedures

Once students were selected, a letter of invitation and a consent form were delivered to students' classrooms, and sent by mail to each student's home. The letter described the study's purpose, interview procedure, and researcher's contact information, and listed criteria for inclusion. The informed consent letter emphasized that all students that participate in this study are on a voluntary basis, and the researcher confirmed with all students that there will be no physical or mental harm to them during this study. The letter explained the removal of personally identifiable information in order to protect respondents' confidentiality, detailed information about the utilization of a confidential transcription service, and the safety of respondents' information due to all information being stored in a password-protected, locked system/space.

The respondents' interviews were conducted in a safe and quiet location in the school. The interviews consisted of 10 open-ended questions and lasted between 45- 60 minutes for each student. All interviews were saved onto a digital voice recorder for transcription purposes.

Data Analysis

Interviews were recorded in a quiet and safe location of the school, so there were no distractions during the interviews. The digital recording was transcribed by a professional transcriber. All personally identifiable information was removed including place and participants' names. In order to fully protect the privacy of respondents, the researcher altered any specific information about family. After transcripts have been reviewed for accuracy and protected against the provision of personally identifiable information, respondents received a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy. Signatures were obtained from each student and a parent/guardian.

Once the accuracy of all transcripts was verified, the researcher read through transcripts two times to gain a broad foundational understanding of the responses. These readings were designed to orient the researcher to the data and reaffirm alignment between the data and the research questions.

The researcher read the transcripts for the purpose of designing a coding system. This type of coding process is sometimes referred to as open coding. The researcher generally makes notes next to any unique information, referred to as a meaning unit that provides support to answer research questions (Merriam, 2009). Then, the researcher read through all transcripts two more times, and the researcher used initial codes to capture the ideas that repeatedly appear in the transcripts.

The researcher's next steps during the coding process grouped codes together, referred to as analytical coding. While open coding is descriptive in nature, analytical coding requires more reflection and interpretation. Analytical coding is a method that requires multiple analyses of each transcript so as to narrow the initial list of codes, refine the code names to reflect accurately the content of each category, and arrive at codes that occurred across multiple transcripts (Merriam, 2009). Once all data was coded, the researcher analyzed codes across interviews to identify themes. A theme emerged as a finding if it occurred in five of the nine interviews. A code book was used to journal ideas and make decisions.

After the researcher finalized codes, an independent analyst was contacted in order to promote credibility and reliability. The independent analyst reviewed the coded book, and independently coded two interviews. The researcher and independent analyst met during this process to ensure thorough understanding of all codes and potential situations in which to use them. The reliability check yielded 96% coding consistency.

Limitations and Delimitations

The researcher intends to share this information with schools and districts around the country. Readers of the study should be aware of its limitations as they determine application of findings. The sampling of settings was limited in this research because it included one Midwestern urban school. An additional limitation was the small sample size of nine. A larger research team could broaden the scope of the research to a larger sample.

This study lacked diversity of gender and race. Only high school senior, male, African American students were included, so the perspective of younger students and students of diverse races were not documented. The purposeful sample population allowed for an in-depth focus of a specific group.

Finally, time constraints of interviews were a necessary reality that might limit the exploration of certain topics. The hour time limit was determined as a commitment that would not deter possible participants from consenting to participate.

Ethical Considerations

When researchers use qualitative research, there are a number of ethical considerations to be aware of during the research process (Merriam, 2009). The researcher took many precautions during this study to protect participants' confidentiality and rights. The research was conducted through one-on-one interviews in safe, quiet rooms at the school. All interviews were scheduled at times that did not interfere with students' testing or classroom assignments. Participants' transcripts did not contain names to protect the identity of the participant. The researcher explained to the participants that this research was a voluntary basis with no benefit and there was no penalty for participants withdrawing from the study. This information was noted in the invitation letter and the informed consent forms. Before the researcher recorded participants,

they were made aware of all audio recording, and they were advised that they may stop recordings at any time and for any reason. The researcher took extra precaution to properly store audio recordings in a safe and secure location.

After all interviews had been transcribed, the researcher had the participants check for accuracy. The researcher provided a copy of the transcript to each respondent. Any corrections, deletions, or clarifications requested were honored by the researcher. When the researcher shared the transcript with the outside source all names and locations were removed.

The researcher followed the ethics research guidelines that come from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). The CITI program uses a social science research methodology that teaches awareness of history and ethical principles, student research, educational research, research on children, privacy and confidentiality, informed consent, monitoring risk in social and behavioral sciences, research regulations, and researching human subjects.

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Chapter IV: Findings

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high schools. Participants included nine senior African American male students with GPAs at or above 3.0. Respondents participated in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews in a quiet and safe location in the high school.

Discussion of the Sample

All participants were 17 or 18 years old. Six of the interviewees participated in extracurricular activities and two were employed, one at the Wing Stop and the other at a golf course. Demographic information is presented in Table 3 at the time of the study.

Table 3

Interviewee Participants

Pseudonym Names	Age	Employment	Family Household	Involvement in Extracurricular Activities
John	18	Unemployed	Two Parents	None
Rob	18	Unemployed	Single Parent (Mother)	Basketball, National Honor Society
Terry	17	Unemployed	Two Parents	School Choir
Kevin	18	Golf Course	Two Parents	Football
Mike	18	Unemployed	Two Parents	None
James	18	Unemployed	Two Parents	Football, Basketball, Track
Dexter	18	Unemployed	Two Parents	Debate Team
Tim	18	Unemployed	Two Parents	None
Kris	18	Wing Stop	Single Parent (Mother)	National Honor Society

Theme Development

The data was sorted by research question. A thorough review of the codes determined that there were codes that appeared in only one interview, which seemed to be more of an anomaly than a generalized code. Those codes were removed: Incentive, Tutors, and Supportive Church. Repeated reads of the codes were conducted in order to identify themes. Three codes in RQ2 (Supportive Mom, Supportive Dad, and Supportive Parents) were collapsed in a shared theme of "supportive parents provided encouragement and support toward their child's physical and mental needs inside and outside of school." After rigorous analysis, themes emerged. To be identified as a theme, a construct must have occurred in at least seven of the nine interviews.

In the first research question, which focused on factors that contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school, four themes emerged.

RQ1. What school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high schools?

- Supportive teacher providing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation

- Students motivated to obtain academic success

- Teacher and student relationship

- Cultural responsiveness of teachers

Theme 1: Supportive teacher providing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The study's findings aim to guide teachers by providing insights regarding effective teaching practices when working with African American male students. This student group often comes from the inner city and has a different mindset and living standards than the classroom teacher (NCES, 2006). Teachers mitigate these differences by providing extrinsic and intrinsic

motivation in efforts to support students. Respondents agreed that supportive teachers are needed to help African American male students succeed in school.

John, one of the participants, stated that knowing that his teacher had his back and believed in him made him feel like he could accomplish anything. Alternately, John shared that "there are teachers that work in this school that I know don't care about the students and that's why they have a hard time with the students listening and learning from them." Mike stated that students who do not have strong support from teachers often have poor educational experiences; this can cause students to develop behavior problems and lose interest in school. Rob stated that when he had supportive teachers working with him they made sure all his needs were met educationally and socially. When he knew this, the sky was the limit.

Kris expressed how one of his teachers would go an extra mile to make sure he got up for school on time in the morning. His teacher bought him an alarm clock, and she would call his grandmother when he would over sleep. Kris stated, "Instead of just letting me be lazy and fail class, she pushed me to start getting to school on time." Another participant, Terry, also attributed his school success to supportive teachers, "I know teachers cared about me and want me to be successful in school, even when I was not believing in myself about my academic performance they would give me the encouragement to keep going forward."

James stated his first interaction with a supportive teacher was in the Grade 1, and it set the tone for his experience with education and teachers. "This feeling would last through my educational future when I made that connection with a supportive teacher." Both Terry and Rob reflected that teacher support shows in their behaviors, attitude, and teaching. Tim stated, "Teachers that support their students can help shape their student's future by building self-confidence, which will help students be successful not only in school, but in life." All

participants shared that teachers played a significant role in their school success by preparing them mentally and physically for success. This preparation and support helped students focus and avoid the distractions that can occur in an urban school setting.

Having supportive teachers in the classroom is a large determinant of students' educational experiences. Tim shared how his caring teacher helped his relationship with his mother, "When my mom knew my teacher supported me, the teacher and my mother became closer, they stayed connected over the phone or through email. My mother would also visit the school more often." By using supportive practices, teachers facilitate students' learning and social awareness, which transforms a classroom into an inclusive learning community.

Supportive teaching-requires students and parents to be open-minded about strategies that a teacher may use to support the student. According to Dexter, "The teacher had to give me extra support in school and after school before I started opening up and forming a trustful bond with the teacher." Kevin stated, "Students need to realize that there are some good teachers that want to see them succeed in school."

Theme 2: Students motivated to obtain academic success. All respondents shared that they were motivated to work harder in class when they got good grades in high school. According to Kris, "I would work hard to get all A's in school because it would make me feel proud to have a high-grade point average." James stated "that every student has the same opportunity to do well in school. We are all a product of the same environment, but it is up to the individual person to choose what path they want to take education-wise."

Mike acknowledged that there are limitations to attending an urban school, but motivation is not one. Mike's motivation was to strive for a better life, and he believed that getting good grades would pay off for him in the future. Another respondent, Dexter, stated that

getting a high-grade point average motivated him to work harder to prepare for college and later get a good job. Mike noted "There are a lot of students at his school that do not seem to see how important education is and how much it plays a part in their future." Mike stated, "This is also what motivates me to do well in school, so I don't become a product of my environment that I live in."

Participants shared a cycle in which good grades led to a better self-concept, which resulted in more enjoyment of school. Kevin stated that he was not always motivated by his grades "until I met with my counselor, and he showed me how important my GPA was in high school, and it could affect me going to college if my GPA is not high enough." John said, "In order to improve my GPA, my parents got me a tutor. Working with a tutor motivated me even more to keep my GPA high." Tim added,

> Me and my friends took pride in getting good grades because we know this is one of the keys to being successful in school and life, so we made sure we did good on test[s] and handed in all of our homework.

Theme 3: Teacher and student relationship. All respondents agreed that students and teachers need to have good relationships to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom. John stated that his relationship with his teacher was like a mentor, "I could share many things with my teacher and I felt he never judged me and he gave me the best advice he could." Mike shared that his relationship with his teacher was like having a mother figure to guide him through the ups and downs of high school. This sentiment was shared by numerous participants. One respondent shared that if you can make a connection with a teacher it opens up a different avenue of trust, which allows students to be themselves, and push themselves educationally.

Kris explained he respected one of his teachers "because he [this teacher] was always on my ass." After he understood the teacher's intent, they grew closer, "This teacher ended up being one of my favorites." Terry explained how having a relationship with your teachers builds mutual trust, and this makes learning fun and interesting for everyone.

All respondents stated that strong communication between the student and teacher can result in increased student engagement in school. Kevin said, "Having a good relationship with my teacher made me feel comfortable in school; we had a strong bond that made me trust him 100 percent; we would joke in class, talk about our family members, and talk about sports." Teachers that do not have a good relationship with their students can sometimes lead to students being removed from class for disciplinary action (Bradshaw, O'Brennan, & McNeely, 2008). Teachers that have a good relationship with African American male students are able to connect educationally and socially with them in school. These teachers help students to see school in a different light and challenge students to finish high school, go on to college, or get a job.

Theme 4: Cultural responsiveness of teacher. Participants shared that having a teacher that understood their culture and beliefs strengthened the student-teacher relationship. Kevin stated, "When my teacher got to know some of my family traditions and beliefs, the connection between my mom, me, and the teachers was stronger."

Another respondent explained, "If teachers are not willing to invest time in knowing about other students' cultures and traditions, they are not only putting the students, but also themselves at a disadvantage." It was noted by Terry that, "When my teacher knew about my culture it made me feel more of a connection with her because I know she cared about my beliefs and traditions."

One respondent pointed out that we now live in a global world and not just teachers need to know about other cultures, but everyone living in this global world today. It is important for teachers to role model being culturally responsive in our schools. All respondents reported that being in a culturally responsive classroom helped them to understand other cultures and traditions. When teachers encourage students to share traditions and beliefs with the class, students gained a more global view of the world.

Kevin noted that culturally responsive teachers understand their students more than other teachers. These teachers get to know their students on a more personal level by taking the time to learn about students' culture. Mike shared,

> In addition to my teacher knowing me academically she knew me culturally too, which made a difference in our relationship. My teacher understood that I need to pray every day at a certain time, and she would always make sure I could leave and I got my missing work or any instruction I missed. While this was important to me, not all teachers understand the importance of teachers being culturally responsive, and this sometimes causes a disconnect between some of our African American male students and our White teacher working in the urban school settings.

Similarly, John shared, "When students and teachers understand where they come from, then they can create a new safe learning environment together."

In the second research question, which focused on the non-school factors contributing to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school, three themes emerged.

RQ2. What non-school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

- Parents that support their child academically and socially outside of school

- Extended family that supports their school-age family members academically and socially outside of school

- Friends that support their peers academically and socially outside of school

Theme 1: Parent support and encouragement for academic success. All respondents agreed that supportive parents were essential to academic success. According to Tim, "Having my parents around supporting me through my educational future was the key to me being successful in high school." One respondent stated, "My mom has been the rock of my life because she has supported me through everything that I have participated in especially school." Parents provide physical and mental support during their child's academic experience and help them learn to be productive students and citizens of their community.

Respondents shared that one of the main reasons they got good grades was to please their parents. Dexter mentioned how his mother was so proud of him that she would carry around his report card in her purse. Terry said his parents held him to very high standards regarding academics: "They pushed me to get A's during high school and stay out of trouble, and I was able to stay on the A honor roll just about every grading period." Supportive African American parents try to build a strong academic foundation by holding their child accountable in school and dealing with distractions that could take their child's focus off school (Hayes & Cunningham, 2003; Trusty, 2002).

All of the respondents shared that some of their friends that lacked strong parental support did not do well in high school. John shared that he knew some students that did not have strong parental support who dropped out of school. Students that do not have parental support can fall into negative patterns in school, be put on behavior contracts, become physically and verbally aggressive, have attendance problems, and get bad grades. Mike's perspective regarding

parents who are not involved in their child's school education was stated, "You can see how some of the students misbehave in school that don't have strong parent support. My friends who don't have supportive parents are doing poorly in school."

Respondents highlighted that having their parents involved in their academic experience really sets the foundation for their success in school. They claimed that parent involvement helped them to develop who they are mentally and physically. Four respondents stated that if it was not for their parents pushing them when times get hard in school, they did not know if they would have been as successful in school. Kevin said, "Sometimes we needed to be pushed to the other side, and we needed to know that others believe in us. That is why our parents play a pivotal role in being in our education."

Students needed to be motivated and guided in school. According to Terry, "I think it's the ability to communicate how they're feeling and the ability to identify their own needs that are important in young African American males' success in school." Research has shown that when parents are involved in their child's education, children are more likely to be successful in school (Cousins & Mickelson, 2011).

Theme 2: Extended family members support and advocate for student educational success. Respondents revealed that having supportive extended family members positively impacted their education. Mike shared that his uncle brought him to school and reminded him daily to get good grades and be a leader. Tim explained how his grandmother played a key role in supporting him through high school; his grandmother would take the time to meet with the principal and teachers every time she came to visit. Terry stated that his cousins would support him during high school by attending sports activities and his academic accomplishments. He said, "My family was one of things that kept me striving for excellence." Dexter stated that his

sister who no longer lives at home is what pushed him to want to succeed academically; she was an "A" student in high school, and he wanted to follow in her footsteps.

Dexter believed that his extended family members created a safe place outside school for him to talk about school and other social issues. John stated that his extended family supported him in just about any activity that he participates in. "They would come watch me play football, and band play in concerts, and they attend my awards ceremonies. When I see them at my events it makes me feel good." James said, "Family plays a big role in some of the factors that impact my success." Kevin explained that his aunt was a major part of his success in school. She not only pushed him to do well in school, but she led by example by showing his family how to be successful.

Respondents asserted that students need to have confidence in order to have success in school and life. Rob said his older cousin showed him what to avoid in high school. "My cousin dropped out of high school and got in a lot of trouble and never finished." Mike added,

> My extended family is an extension of my mother and father, so they treat me like I am their child and I respect them like they are my parents. My extended family advocates for me and keeps me on the right track.

Rob said, "Without my family investment in me the likelihood of me being successful in school is slim."

Theme 3: Positive peer support and pressure for academic performance. Rob stated that his friends were considered to be the reasons for student success in the classrooms. He said, "We would compete with each other to see who got the highest grades, and we would support each other when we needed help with a subject." James revealed how his friends had a direct impact on how he would develop academically and mentally in high school. "Having good

friends helped me identifying barriers and transition into new areas in high school that I could not even imagine doing without my friends' support." John stated that not all friends are friends in high school because some friends lead you down the wrong road, so it is important to know who has your best interest in mind. According to Dexter, "There were times my friends were more of a distraction instead of a help, so I had to figure out the hard way who was really my friend and wanted me to succeed in school." Terry said, "Some friends are jealous of your accomplishments and always try to down play your success in high school." James said, "I would definitely say that my friends are the reason for me wanting to attend college." Rob said that his friends have high academic expectations in school. "I would also try to motivate my friends that were not doing well academically in school to change their mindset about school."

Mike stated that there is a perception that African American males are difficult to get along with, but this is just a stereotype that has hindered Black males for many years. He continued, "When you have parents, teachers and friends surrounding you, you can be successful in almost anything you set your mind to." Kevin stated, "We are dependent on our friends in school because they provide a space where we can lean on each other for support." Mike emphasized,

> Friends are important to me because we laugh and have fun in school, which I believe is what makes me want to come to school every day. I figure out how to balance my school time with my friends in and out of school.

John stated, "We are going to need to have friends to make it work in school because there are things we can't always go to our parents or teachers about."

Several of the respondents mentioned that students of color were sometimes treated differently. Mike revealed, "This is why it is important to have friends so we can stick up for

each other, especially when it involves discriminatory acts in school." Dexter said, "There is a perception of when African American males gather together it's always something negative about to happen at our school." Terry stated, "I want to break that mindset towards African American males by getting good grades and going on to achieve great things." According to Rob, when you have good friends you can change the mindset of many people and create a movement for all students to thrive and work together to be a success in an educational environment.

Conceptual Map

Figure 3 shows a conceptual picture of factors that contribute to African American male students' academic success in an urban high school. There were four school-related themes that directly contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high schools: supportive teacher providing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, students motivated to obtain academic success, teacher and student relationship, and cultural responsiveness of teachers. Three non-school themes emerged that directly contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high schools: parent support and encouragement for academic success, extended family members support and advocate for student educational success, and positive peer support and pressure for academic performance.

The factors that contribute to African American males' academic success are represented by gold foundation, blue guidance arrows, green square platform, and red target areas.

Figure 3

Concept Map: Factors That Contribute to Senior African American Males' Academic Success

Concept Map

School Factors | Non-school Factors

Supportive teacher providing extrinsic and intrinsic motivation

Students motivated to obtain academic success

Teacher and Student Relationship

Cultural Responsiveness of Teachers

What school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

African American Male Seniors with GPAs above 3.0

Parent support and encouragement for academic success

Extended family members support and advocate for student educational success

Positive peer support and pressure for academic performance

What non-school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

This conceptual map agrees with Kharem's (2006) research. African American male students need to have positive support systems in order to build positive self-esteem and self-confidence; in turn, these factors support academic success in African American male students' lives.

Chapter V: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors that contributed to senior African American males' academic success in an urban high school. Participants included nine African American senior male students with a GPA of 3.0 or higher. Respondents participated in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews at a quiet and safe location in the high school. Interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for common themes. After multiple iterations of coding and feedback from all respondents, seven themes emerged.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer the question, "What are the factors that contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?" The factors explored were placed into two categories: school factors and non-school factors. During the course of this study, the following research questions guided the investigation:

RQ1. What school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

RQ2. What non-school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school?

Summary of Findings

Multiple themes emerged from participants' answers specific to each research question. The themes relevant to question one addressed which school factors contribute African American males' high school senior academic success in an urban school. Participants identified four in-school factors that contributed to academic success: supportive teachers, students motivated by academics, a strong teacher and student relationship, and cultural responsiveness of teacher.

Three of the school factors were directly related to teachers. The impact of teachers may be even more significant for African American male student than other racial groups (Anumba, 2015). The participants also identified three out-of-school factors that contributed to academic success: supportive parents, supportive extended family, and supportive friends.

Supportive Teacher Providing Extrinsic and Intrinsic Motivation

During the interviews, the participants associated academic success with having support from their teachers. Overall, students felt that teachers who support students encourage them to be academically successful, attain a high-grade point average, graduate from high school, go to college, and get a good-paying job. In addition, students believed that these teachers encourage the students to be self-motivated in school, a key factor in African American males being academically successful in high school.

Four participants felt it was important that students receive some type of supportive help from the teacher to guide them through their academic future. One of the participants, Kevin, believed that academic success means gaining the respect of the teacher in class. He further shared that academic success happens when you have good teachers supporting you, both academically and socially. He said,

> I have always been taught to respect adults no matter what the situation entails, but it is not always the case at my school when the students are sometimes disrespectful towards the teacher while they are trying to teach. This is why I try to put myself in a position where I can make a connection with the teachers, so they enjoy supporting me and showing me different way[s] to learn in school.

John said that academic success comes from teachers believing in students and students believing in teachers. He stated, "Academic success usually is defined as getting A's on your

report card, but this can only happen if you have the support of your teacher." He shared that the more the student and teacher learn about each other, the more academically successful the student becomes. John believed that when teachers and students have a strong support system built, academic success is easy to achieve because they have a connection that helps both parties understand how they can use their relationship to advance the students' life.

According to Dexter, a person who is academically successful in school is "someone who is able to navigate through all the distraction that an urban school presents on a day-to-day basis." Dexter felt as far as academic success, many African American male students at his school get lost because they do not know how to take advantage of the teachers' support because of the hardship that they are up against in an urban community.

Rob mentioned, that

a lot of my family members have not been successful in school, so that some of them have not been successful in life. I know by achieving a good education and having a teacher that cares about me is the key to having a better lifestyle once I become an adult.

Students Motivated to Obtain Academic Success

Participants felt that self-motivation helps African American male students be academically successful and overcome some of the negative stereotypes that they face. Self-motivation can develop strong leadership within African American students, which can then give them the confidence to succeed at school and in life. Participants reported that African American male students do not always need teachers and parents to encourage them to be academically successful because they have to motivate themselves first, then look for help. All of the nine participants stated that caring about their GPA influenced them to stay on track. They found when they paid attention to their grades, it was easier to stay focused on their studies and goals.

Findings revealed that when students are self-motivated about their academic performance, they tend to be better listeners, better students, and better learners.

Teacher and Student Relationship

The participants revealed that having a nurturing teacher and student relationship at an urban school contributed to their academic success. When they knew teachers cared about them, it created a special kind of relationship; they trusted and valued what the teachers had to say and teach.

When teachers made positive connections with African American male students, it helped them build their confidence and realize their academic ability. John stated that he struggled in Grade 9 and refused to have a relationship with a particular teacher. However, when his mom forced him to stay after school, he was forced to develop a relationship with this teacher. He still seeks this teacher's advice and help even though he is a senior in high school.

Mike revealed that his relationship with his math teacher was very special because, "He treats me like a friend first, then a student. He always takes the time to ask what is going on in my life, and he shares what is going on in his life." This relationship made Mike work hard in school and strive for the best grades. Mike believed part of his drive was that he did not want to disappoint his teachers or parents.

> I believe my relationship with my teachers played a big part in why I'm so confident in myself and schoolwork. When you have good relationships with your teachers, it makes you feel like you can achieve anything in this world.

Mike further remarked,

Teachers also believe when they have a relationship with the student it helps with their

academic success sometimes because the students are more attentive listeners and they

trust what the teacher is saying and they are willing to take new chances.

Tim noted that his teachers were more than just your average teachers because they wear many

hats like school teacher, friend, counselor, and parent.

Cultural Responsiveness of Teachers

Cultural responsiveness of teachers is important in the academic success of African

American male students. Some African American males are disconnected from their teachers

because teachers do not know about their student's culture. Cultural awareness and

responsiveness, as noted by students, can have a major effect on the teacher-student relationship,

and the parent-school relationship. Culturally responsive teachers usually have a good

relationship with their students and parents because the teacher took the extra time to learn about

their culture and traditions. The participants suggested that all teachers take the time to

understand the African American students' culture, especially if they are working in an urban

school.

According to participants, cultural responsiveness of teachers not only helped African

American male students, but it also shed light on other cultures, so students can understand other

races, cultures, and traditions. Cultural responsiveness reduced bias and helped teachers

understand how students' cultures functioned in society. This approach is in contrast to the

historical approach, which was often rejected, of educators pushing personal beliefs and

traditions on students.

Parent Support and Encouragement for Academic Success

Participants noted that parental support and involvement influenced their desire to be successful in school. All of the participants expressed that their parents had high academic expectations. Mike stated,

Even though my parents did not have a good educational experience in school, they still placed a high value on my education. My parents always encouraged me to work hard and never give up. My parents have supported my academics, athletics, and extracurricular endeavors. My parents are always willing to go the extra mile and support me and my friends.

One participant, Terry, identified the strongest factor that contributed to his academic success as having strong, supportive parents. "I say 80% of my success comes from my parents pushing me and giving me the confidence to achieve anything I put my mind to." He understood academic success was important, so having someone to support him inside and outside of school was really important, too. He believed his parents have always been positive role models and really helped him to become a successful student. Tim stated that he worked hard in school in order to make his parents proud. "This was a way I thought I could repay them since I did not have any money to give them for all of the things they sacrificed for me."

When parents felt they were an extension of the school, they felt welcome which impacted their child's academic success. Terry's parents were active at his school, participating in PTA and other volunteer opportunities. Terry's parents knew all his teachers, principals and support staff, so they knew right away if Terry had a problem or was performing well. This support happened because Terry's parents were provided positive opportunities to be connected to the school. John said his mother pushed him to be the successful student that he is today by

reminding him about the struggles that African American male students face when they do not have a good education, "She told me if you do not have a strong education you will miss out on many opportunities that could affect your future."

Extended Family Members Support and Advocate for Student Educational Success

Participants in this study reported that extended family members played an active role in their academic success. Participants shared that they did better in school when they were motivated and encouraged by their extended family, including in extracurricular activities. Many participants felt their extended family had high expectations for them to get good grades and be an outstanding student at school. Participants talked about how their extended family gave them encouragement and guidance through high school.

Kevin stated, "As young Black men we already have marks against us, but when we have family members that believe in us we know we can overcome the way some people see African American males." Kevin believed that he needed to set a good example as a successful African American male student, so he can show younger African American male students how to be successful academically.

Mike's uncle played an important part in his academic success. He would take him to school every morning and give him words of encouragement he would never forget. He would tell him that an education is something no one can ever take from you and stress the importance of graduating from high school and college. In addition, Mike's uncle told him to treat people how you want to be treated, including your friends and teachers.

Mike continued by sharing that family gave him a different kind of support because a lot of them have known him since he has been born and helped raise him. They taught him the importance of school, how to respect staff and teachers, and to always have a strong mindset

when it involves his education. His extended family always supported his academics and athletics.

Positive Peer Support and Pressure for Academic Performance

Peers can influence each other in school in both positive and negative ways. During this study, the researcher found that friends help students become better students by offering support and encouragement, while other friends were more of a distraction because they started leading students down the wrong path. Peers offer motivation, guidance, and friendship: major factors that helped influence African American males' academic success in an urban school. Kevin stated that his mom says hanging around the wrong friends will get you in trouble. Tim stated friends have a very powerful impact on students' behavior in and out of school.

Peer relationships differ from adult and child relationships because friends tell each other things they do not tell their parents. Peers are important in students' lives because they listen to each other and value each-others' opinion. Friends, according to Dexter, were helpful when he felt stressed about school and home, by giving encouragement and serving as counselors.

He believed friends helped him study and gave him lots of personal and school advice. Dexter said, "Without true friends, school would be boring and I would be forced to talk to my parents or keep everything good or bad to myself." James believed friendships can create a special bond that holds each other accountable to stay focused on goals. To make sure friends achieve academic success, he said, "The trust level must be established, so we know we have each other's back in and out of school." James believed that in some ways peers have a greater influence than parents.

Further Discussion: Students Experience Racism

Despite the study's asset-focused approach, four of the participants expressed experiencing racism in their urban high school. Dexter believed some teachers have hidden agendas when educating African American male students. He has seen Asian students be treated differently from Black students just because they are not as loud. For example, when some Asian students are late to class, the teacher lets them right in; however, when one African American student is late, the teacher makes the student get a pass. Dexter shared that when everybody is talking in class the teacher always tells the Black students to be quiet first.

John has experienced racism from White students, stating

When they thought I stole their earphone, but I had a pair that look[ed] like theirs and the White teacher accused me before he heard my side of the story, so when I called my mom and she said she bought them, he was very apologetic, but the White students were not.

When African American male students experience these negative encounters, they start to feel inadequate about their academic abilities.

Kevin noted that experiencing racism is a motivator. He knows that he has to work twice as hard because some people do not want him to succeed. Kevin stated, "That is why I try my best to be academically successful in school."

Four of the respondents described experiencing racism in their school; they see a high percentage of Black students sent to the office and kicked out of school. Kevin said, "I have seen where the school has tried to put all the Black students in the same class to control their behavior." All respondents shared that they have seen some form of racism in their school by teachers or students. Until schools provide equal opportunity to all students, and not judge

students by the color of their skin or their country of origin, it is going to be hard to build a collaborative relationship between all parties.

Racism exists in urban schools today and can cause African American male students to lose interest in school. Dexter stated that he never experienced racism in the school personally, but he has seen other African American students treated differently than some of the Asian students. "The school never questions the Asian students when they are in the hallways with no pass, but they always question the Black students when they are in the hallway." John stated he experienced racism with a White teacher: "The White teacher would let the White students misbehave in class, but when the Black students misbehaved, he would send them to the office, and this would happen consistently." One respondent stated that because of the racism in the schools and in the world, African Americans have to work even harder to accomplish things: "My dad and mom have told me this ever since I have been little that Black folks have to work harder than White folks."

Conclusions

Challenges that African American male students face in an urban school setting have created a negative cycle that includes low academic achievement in high school. African American male students receive zero tolerance consequences for exhibiting some of the same misbehaviors as other students in the class (Dickerson, 2014). Our educational system and society need to break these trends and stereotypes by better understanding the experiences successful senior African American male students have with academic success in our urban schools. It is important that the education system and society focus on the positive attributes that African American male students display. African American male students can be successful with the right guidance and support.

Implications for Practice

Relationships and support are key factors for students to be successful academically and socially in school; without these factors, academic success is more difficult. Successful African American male students are relationship-driven; this is why it is so important for teachers and parents to form a bond with students in school and out of school. African American male students that are placed in supportive environments in and out of school tend to open up and trust and accept some the educational challenges because they know they have the support from teachers, parents, and peers.

Teachers, parents, and students need to collaborate to make decisions that will benefit students' academic success. Parents and teachers need to be in consistent contact via email, phone, or face-to-face interactions during students' high school experience. Parents and students need to know school administrators and support staff who will give students more support in school.

The cultural responsiveness of teachers is imperative when it comes to forming relationships with African American male students. Culturally responsive schools should ensure that they hire culturally responsive teachers, but they also need to ensure they provide teachers with professional development to support teachers. Students come from all parts of the world and teachers need to know how to adapt to different students' cultures. Professional development will give teachers more confidence and classroom management strategies to appropriately work with their students.

Teachers who take the time to understand the traditions and struggles of African American male students not only learn about African American male life, but they also get a chance to teach other students what they have learned. When African American parents see the

teacher has invested in their child, they develop more trust in the teacher, which strengthens the bond with the student. Though extensive research has shown that parent engagement positively impacts the academic success of African American male students, there has been a lack of bridging research to practice (Gasman et al., 2017).

There has been a big disconnection with some African American parents whose children attend urban schools. Some of these parents had a bad experience when they went to school, so now they are scared to get involved because they are dealing with the same trauma from when they were in school. Even though some African American parents are struggling with past issues, schools must do a better job of engaging parents in school. Schools need to make parents feel more comfortable and welcome instead of pushed away.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study included participants from two urban high schools. Findings could be generalized to a broader audience with an increased sample size from multiple urban schools.

Research should be extended to African American male students outside of Minnesota. This could result in gaining insights that benefit African American families in many different states that struggle with the achievement gap (Douglas & Peck, 2013).

Due to the vast majority of historical research being focused on barriers to success, continued research is needed to examine how African American males over-came some of the hardships. We can learn how successful African American male students were able to be successful, with the same socio-economic problems and hardships as other African American male students. Future research founded on a sociology lens, aimed at examining how African American male students' parents and family members affect their success, is warranted. Findings would be valuable to community programming such as early childhood education.

Further research may study the effect African American male students' have on teachers regarding cultural responsiveness. There needs to be a focus on parent and teacher relationship within the schools. In addition, the research can examine how powerful African American parents and culturally responsive teachers can be if they have a good relationship with each other around the student's educational journey. Future research is needed that focuses on how institutional racism influences African American males' academic success in urban schools. Biased practices must be identified and addressed in order to effectively serve marginalized populations.

Finally, future research may examine how peers influence African American males' academic choices in school, if schools can learn how peer influence will allow schools to be proactive and create systems that nourish positive peer support.

Concluding Comments

This study outlined factors that contributed to African American males' senior academic success in an urban school. The study revealed academic success had a great deal to do with the support and relationships the students had in and out of school with their teachers, parents, family members, and peers. Though these students attended school in an urban area and faced many distractions at home, at school, and in the community, they were able to overcome these hardships and be successful in high school. It is hard in today's world to be an African American male student because society has painted a false stereotype of Black males: these students all know how society sees them, but they also know how hard work pays off in the end.

Kevin said that "Every student has the same opportunity when it comes to being successful in school." According to Kevin, being a good student starts with how much you are willing to apply yourself at school and what you really want in life. "I don't mean to excuse all

barriers and road blocks that African American male students face, but with self-motivation and support from teachers and family, academic success is possible."

African American families and schools need to create an environment where both sides trust and feel comfortable with exploring new ways to reach African American male students, instead of pointing the finger at each other and placing blame on the African American male students for not being successful in school. This new bond between African American families and schools will have to start with honest communication among teachers, students, parents, and the community. In order to create this atmosphere, parties must be willing to listen to each other and respect each other's views; these conversations must occur when parties are level-headed instead of during an intense moment.

It was challenging to find African American male seniors that had 3.0 or higher GPA, which was recognized as academically successful in an urban high school, and met the study's criteria for participation. This reflects why the study is even more important in our urban schools that educate African American male students. Too often studies want to look at African American males who were not successful in high school and try to explore why they are not successful. We need to look at examples that successful African American male students have set for us, and learn to follow in their footsteps of academic success. As John said, "We need people in our life that we trust, and that believe in us."

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Appendix A Letter of Invitation

My name is John Baker, and I am a doctoral student at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. In addition, have worked in a public school for 25 years as a Dean of Students. You are invited to participate in a study on factors that contribute to senior African American male academic success.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your school counselor has identified you as someone who meets this study's criteria. The criteria to participate in this study are:

- Participants must be African American male seniors in high school
- Participants must have 3.0 Grade Point Average or higher

If you meet the above criteria and decide to participate, I will ask you 10 open-ended questions. The interviews will last between 45 and 60 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers and the information you provide will be strictly confidential. Your interview will be digitally recorded and subsequently transcribed. Because confidentiality is important to this study, many steps will be taken to protect privacy. First, all interviews and discussions will be private and confidential. Second, your name, school name, and the name of your community will never be used in this study. Finally, all audio files and transcripts will be stored in a secure location. All audio will be destroyed once this study has been completed. For future reference I will retain the transcript of your interview in a secure file on my personal computer.

The only other persons that will see a transcript of your interview are members of a research team that will assist me in identifying key themes of the interview text. All research team members and transcribers will sign strict confidentiality agreements.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose not to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before the interview is completed, your information will be destroyed. There are no risks for participating in this study.

If you are willing to participate in this study please return the signed informed consent form in the return envelope provided with this letter. Finally, it is important to note parent or guardian consent is also required if you are under the age of 18.

If you have any question about this study or its procedures, you may contact the researcher, John Baker at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮@bethel.edu or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Sincerely,
John Baker

Appendix B Participant Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a study on factors that contribute to senior African American male academic success. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you were identified by your school as a male, African American, senior at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ that has a 3.0 grade point average or greater. This research is part of a dissertation study at Bethel University.

If you decide to participate, I will ask you 10 open-ended questions. The interview is anticipated to last between 45 and 60 minutes and will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary and you may choose not to participate without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before the interview is completed, your information will be destroyed. There is potential risk for sensitive information (questions may generate discomfort and distress), you may skip questions, end the interview, or visit the school counselor, if you desire. You will receive a $20 gift card as a token of appreciation.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. None of this study's participants will be identified or identifiable in any written reports or publications. However, by state law, the researcher is a mandated reporter and must report any instances of physical abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse that he becomes aware of during the course of the study.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relationship with Bethel University. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel University's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research related injury, please call Dr. Tracy Reimer at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮.

You will be offered a copy of this form to keep. You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participating in this study.

_____
Student Name Printed

_____   _____
Student Signature   Date

_____   _____
Investigator Signature   Date

Appendix C Parental Informed Consent

Your child is invited to participate in a study on factors that contribute to senior African American male academic success. Your child was selected as a possible participant in this study because he was identified by the school counselor.

African American senior at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ that has a 3.0 grade point average or greater. This research is part of a dissertation study at Bethel University.

If your child decides to participate, I will ask him 10 open-ended questions. The interview is anticipated to last between 45 and 60 minutes and will be digitally recorded and then transcribed. Your child's participation in this study is strictly voluntary and your child may choose not to participate without penalty. If your child withdraws from the study before the interview is completed, his information will be destroyed. There is potential for risk of sensitive information (questions may generate discomfort and distress), your child may skip questions, end the interview, or visit the school counselor, if he desires. Your son will receive a $20 gift card as a token of appreciation.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with your son will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. None of this study's participants will be identified or identifiable in any written reports or publications.

However, by state law, the researcher is a mandated reporter and must report any instances of physical abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse that he becomes aware of during the course of the study. Your decision whether or not your child participates will not affect you or your child's future relationship with Bethel University. If your child decides to participate, he may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

This research project has been reviewed and approved in accordance with Bethel University's Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants' rights or wish to report a research related injury, please call Dr. Tracy Reimer at ▮▮▮▮▮▮. You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not your child will participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided your child may participate. Your child may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participating in this study.

_____
Parent Name Printed

_____   _____
Parent Signature   Date

_____   _____
Investigator Signature   Date

Appendix D Confidentiality Agreement for Use with Research Team

Factors that Contribute to High School Senior
African American Male Student's Academic Success

1) I, _____, agree to maintain full confidentiality of all

   research data received from the research team related to this research study.

2) I will hold in strictest confidence the identity of any individual that may be revealed

   during the transcription of interviews or in any associated documents.

3) I will not make copies of any audio-recordings, video-recordings, or other research data,

   unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher.

4) I will not provide the research data to any third parties without the client's consent.

5) I will store all study-related data in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my

   possession. All video and audio recordings will be stored in an encrypted format.

6) All data provided or created for purposes of this agreement, including any back-up

   records, will be returned to the research team or permanently deleted. When I have

   received confirmation that the transcription work I performed has been satisfactorily

   completed, any of the research data that remains with me will be returned to the research

   team or destroyed, pursuant to the instructions of the research team.

7) I understand that Bethel University has the right to take legal action against any breach of

   confidentiality that occurs in my handling of the research data.

_____   _____
  Researcher Name Printed   Researcher Signature

Date _____

Appendix E Confidentiality Agreement for Use with Transcription Services

Factors that Contribute to High School Senior
African American Male Student's Academic Success

1) I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full

   confidentiality of all research data received from the research team related to this

   research study.

2) I will hold in strictest confidence the identity of any individual that may be revealed

   during the transcription of interviews or in any associated documents.

3) I will not make copies of any audio-recordings, video-recordings, or other research data,

   unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher.

4) I will not provide the research data to any third parties without the client's consent.

5) I will store all study-related data in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my

   possession. All video and audio recordings will be stored in an encrypted format.

6) All data provided or created for purposes of this agreement, including any back-up

   records, will be returned to the research team or permanently deleted. When I have

   received confirmation that the transcription work I performed has been satisfactorily

   completed, any of the research data that remains with me will be returned to the research

   team or destroyed, pursuant to the instructions of the research team.

7) I understand that Bethel University has the right to take legal action against any breach of

   confidentiality that occurs in my handling of the research data.

_____   _____
  Transcriber Name Printed   Transcriber Signature

Date _____

Appendix F Protocol Procedure

Interviews were recorded in a quiet and safe location of the school, so there were no distractions during the interviews. The researcher used a digital recorder and note pad to collect information from interviewee.

This study had two research questions: What school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school and what non-school factors contribute to senior African American males' academic success in urban high school? This study used 10 open-ended questions for interviewees. The researcher used "can you tell me more about your experience" as a prompt to elicit more detailed information from the respondent questions that were asked.

The digital recording was transcribed by a professional transcriber. All personally identifiable information was removed, including, place and participants' names. In order to fully protect the privacy of respondents, the researcher altered any specific information about family. After transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and protected against the provision of personally identifiable information, respondents received a copy of the transcript to check for accuracy.

Once the accuracy of all transcripts was verified, the researcher read through transcripts two times to gain a broad foundational understanding of the responses. These readings were designed to orient the researcher to the data and reaffirm alignment between the data and the research questions. The researcher then read transcripts for the purpose of designing a coding system. This type of coding process is sometimes referred to as open coding. The researcher generally makes notes next to any unique information, referred to as a meaning unit, that provides support to answer research questions.

Then, the researcher read through all transcripts two more times, and the researcher used initial codes to capture the ideas that repeatedly appeared in the transcripts. The researcher's next steps during the coding process were to group codes together, referred to as analytical coding. While open coding is descriptive in nature, analytical coding requires more reflection and interpretation. Analytical coding is a method that requires multiple analyses of each transcript so as to narrow the initial list of codes, refine the code names to reflect accurately the content of each category, and arrive at codes that occurred across multiple transcripts. Once all data was coded, the researcher analyzed codes across interviews to identify themes. A theme will emerge as a finding if it occurs in five of the nine interviews. A code book was used to journal ideas and decision made.

After the researcher finalized codes, an independent analyst was contacted in order to promote credibility and reliability. The independent analyst reviewed the code book and independently coded two interviews. The researcher and independent analyst meet during this process to ensure thorough understanding of all codes and potential situations in which to use them.

A. Risks

1. **Privacy**
   Interviews were conducted in private location in the school for each student. Students were assured of their privacy.

   Ethics in research guidelines following the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) were observed in this study.

2. **Physical Stimuli**
   N / A. There are no physical stimuli risks present in this study.

3. **Deprivation**
   N / A. Participants were be deprived in any way at any phase of this study.

4. **Deception**
   N / A. No methods of deception were used in this study.

5. **Sensitive Information**
   There was potential risk for sensitive information (questions may generate discomfort and distress), participants may skip questions, end the interview, or visit the school counselor, if the student desires.

6. **Offensive Materials**
   N / A. No offensive materials were included in this study.

7. **Physical Exertion**
   N / A. This study only used open-ended interview methods and did not have any aspects of physical exertion.

B.   Confidentiality

Many measures were taken to protect student confidentiality. Pseudonyms were used to protect participant privacy and the name / location of each community or school were changed. Upon completion of the study, all audio recordings were destroyed. Interpretive research members and transcribers were required to sign confidentiality statements. The letter explained the removal of personally identifiable information in order to protect respondents' confidentiality, detailed information about the utilization of a confidential transcription service, and the safety of respondents' information due to all information being stored in a password-protected, locked system/space.

By state law, the researcher is a mandated reporter and must report any instances of obligated to report any instances of physical abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse that he becomes aware of during the course of the study.

C.   Signatures

"I certify that the information furnished concerning the procedures to be taken for the protection of human participants is correct. I will seek and obtain prior approval for

any substantive modification in the proposal and will report promptly any unexpected or

otherwise significant adverse effects in the course of this study."

Appendix G Interview Questions

1) Think back as far as you can. What is one of your very first positive school memories?

2) Think of your best academic experience in high school. What or who helped you to do well in your courses?

3) Describe your relationship with your teachers and how it impacts your school experience?

4) How do principals, teachers, and other school staff from a different race connect with you culturally?

5) What are your parents' expectations for you in school? How do you know?

6) Has your family shared in your school experience? How have they been involved?

7) How do your peers (friends and classmates) respond to your success in school?

8) Do you have someone in your community, such as a mentor, church leader, or go-to person that has influenced your school experience and/or expectations?

9) Have you observed unequal or differences between racial groups at your school? If yes, how did that impact your academic achievement?

10) Tell me how race, law, and/or power impacted your academic achievement in school.