

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS OF PRINCIPALS IN
ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED HIGH
SCHOOLS WITH HIGH AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE
GRADUATION RATES

Rhonda Cherie Crutchfield Dillard, Doctor of Education, 2013

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Education

This qualitative case study examined the self-efficacy beliefs of three high school principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high graduation rates for African American males. With the demand on school systems to perform in a politically driven, assessment-based paradigm, there is a need to describe and analyze the specific strategies that principals utilize to ensure academic success for African American males and explain how the belief about their abilities contribute to African American male graduation. To conduct this examination, the researcher analyzed transcripts from semi-structured interviews. The study's findings affirmed that self-efficacy beliefs were considerably influenced by mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states; each respective of a particular dynamic experience. The findings from this case study added to current knowledge about principal self-efficacy and the need for leadership development programs to include the review of efficacy-developing practices. Studying the self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates proved a significant way to learn about how today's schools address the barrier to graduation for African

American male students. This study also added to the current knowledge about the influence of leadership on African American male achievement and graduation success. This study has policy and practice implications for districts interested in building the capacity for principal leadership through a strong sense of self-efficacy.

Self-Efficacy Beliefs of Principals in Economically Disadvantaged High Schools with
High African American Male Graduation Rates

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Dedication

To My Angels ...*Watching Over Me*

Kevin Darnell Crutchfield “Unkie” —my beloved brother and eternal cheerleader, who has inspired me since early childhood...I still miss you!; Mildred “*Granny*” Turner—my humble and genuine quiet-spirited great-grandmother, who taught me what love looks like, I promised you that I would become a doctor as a pre-med college student (*though I wanted to be a neonatologist*)... I did it!; and Lena “*Madear*” Crutchfield —my gentle spirit-filled grandmother “*Saint Lena*.”

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[345-Prototype] T’Nia Cherie’ Crutchfield— the sweetest, most intellectual and compassionate daughter ~when I look at you I can feel God smile on me and hear Him say “*Ya’ done good!*”; my sons Terry Darnell Dillard (Jr.) and Trent Kenneth Dillard whose educational endeavors inspired my research associated with educating African American males ~ I’m so proud of you two and am inspired by your perseverance, athleticism, talents, confidence, and wisdom; and, Nadya Mahogany Crutchfield—my creative and optimistic niece ~ so proud of your vision! Special “Thank You!” to Terry D. Dillard, Sr. ~ your technological expertise throughout the years is immeasurable *as well as* your much appreciated encouragement; you are esteemed.

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“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” ~ Galatians 5:22-23

*Creator God, the Alpha and the Omega, who is, and who was, and who is to come,
the Almighty*

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“I believe we are here on the planet Earth to live, grow up and do what we can to make this world a better place for all people to enjoy freedom.”

— Rosa Parks

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study

When the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB) reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), it caused transparency and forced increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools. For the first time in the nation's history, raising achievement levels among racial and ethnic groups to those of their peers was an explicit goal of federal policy. Noting that African Americans and Hispanics were consistently underrepresented at the target trajectory but constantly overrepresented at the bottom, educators around the nation recognized the ramifications of the landmark legislation. Today, African American males often comprise the lowest performing group within a given school district and are at a significantly higher risk of dropping out than any other American student (Dove, 2009). Under the *Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act* (section 5-401 of the Annotated Code of Maryland) local school systems are required to develop comprehensive master plans designed to accelerate academic performance of all students and eliminate achievement gaps that exist among various segments of the population. Many researchers suggested that, in order to achieve academic success, African American male students require a positive perception of school, congenial relationships with teachers, and a safe school environment (Toldson, 2008; Felner, 2007; Moore, 2006; Saphier, 2005; Jordan & Cooper, 2001). Under NCLB, principals are now mandated to serve as the instructional leaders who have the skills necessary to help teachers to teach, help students to learn, and strive to meet challenging state achievement standards (Title II, section 2113). Principals have the responsibility of promoting the successful achievement of all students. NCLB has increased accountability

and changed the educational landscape at the federal, state, and local levels (NASSP, 2005).

Currently, only half of African American male students who start high school graduate within four years, compared with 75 percent of White students (Toldson, 2010; Valentine, 2005; Edney, 2004). Some schools are experiencing greater success with graduation than other schools serving students from similar backgrounds. Goldring & Schuermann (2009) asserted that the increased emphasis on accountability has numerous implications for the role of the educational leadership. It is important that research looks at the culture of high schools with high graduation success for underrepresented populations and document the impact leadership has on student achievement (Ferguson, 2011—NAF presentation). Learning how public school principal leadership influences the graduation of African American males is one of the great challenges facing researchers who are studying the graduation gap today.

Ultimately, the successful achievement of students leads to a successful pathway to graduation. Individuals who drop out of school are twice as likely to be unemployed, and for those who find work, their advancement in that occupation is limited, the pay is low (the average high school dropout earns just 37 cents for every dollar earned by a high school graduate), and health insurance is not readily available (Behnke, Gonzalez, & Cox, 2010). Dropping out of high school also has a negative impact on society by actually costing the United States \$260 billion in lost wages, taxes, and productivity (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). The educational plight of high school graduation is a matter of national imperative for African American males; public schools must address the role of the principal in promoting graduation. Individuals who drop out are also more

likely than their peers to become teen parents, they are 3.4 times more likely to become incarcerated or involved in illicit activities; and they are more likely to live in poverty and depend on state aid (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009). Individuals who drop out of high school may experience lowered aspirations, self-efficacy, and self-worth and are much more likely to become substance abusers than those who do not drop out (Behnke et al., 2010).

Principals of improving schools hold higher expectations with regard to the educational accomplishments of their students and believe that their students will complete high school (Edmonds, 1979; Brookover & Lezotte, 1977). Principals have the responsibility of establishing school culture and climate, thereby setting the tone for graduation. As leaders, it is imperative that principals ultimately believe they can do so. Bandura (2002, 1997), under the construct of his Social Cognitive Theory, defined this belief as perceived self-efficacy.

With the demand on school systems to perform in a politically driven, assessment-based paradigm, there is a need to describe, analyze, and compare the specific strategies that principals utilize to ensure academic success for African American males and explain how the belief about their abilities contribute to African American male graduation. Education statistics continually reveal that African American males tend to have the highest percentage of virtually every indicator of school failure, such as dropout, absenteeism, suspension, expulsion, and low achievement (Garibaldi, 2007, 1997; Ferguson, 2002; Jordan & Cooper, 2001; Dunbar 1999). Factors tied to high school graduation of African American males are important to families, communities, school districts, and society. Through the acquisition of a high school diploma, these factors

enable the African American male to contribute to the progress of society by modeling the importance of education, reducing recidivism, increasing the opportunity for college access, and increasing earning potential. According to census data, the lifelong earning potential for a high school graduate is about 1.8 times that of a high school dropout. On average, a high school graduate earns \$7,000 more annually than a person who did not complete that level of education (NCES, 2010). Many schools are engaged in comprehensive reform efforts; however, few reform models explicitly confront the unique conditions facing African American males (Jordan & Cooper, 2001).

African American Male Achievement

Every black community, regardless of economic resources, contains examples of young African American males who achieve in school, regardless of immeasurable social disadvantages (Toldson, 2010). Several noteworthy examples of schools that defy existing educational achievement misperceptions of African American students exist. For the third year, every senior at Urban Prep Academy, the only all-African-American, all-male charter high in Chicago, Illinois, has been accepted to college; Capital Prep in Hartford, Connecticut, has sent 100% of its predominantly low-income, minority, first-generation high school graduates to four-year colleges every year since its first class graduated in 2006; Eagle Academy for Young Men, an all-boys school in the Bronx, New York City, designed to provide intense academics and a supportive environment to young men of color who may be at risk of falling behind or dropping out of high school has made tremendous strides; and 90% of Harlem's Children Zone in Harlem, New York City, were accepted into college for 2010–2011 year.

Though several examples of academic success for African American male students exist, research indicates that African American males start school woefully behind their peers; after a year in kindergarten, just 7% of African American boys are reading on grade level (MSDE, African American Male Workgroup Report, 2007). Research of the factors that influence academic success of the African American male begins with the mindset of the African American male. From a historical perspective, Woodson (1933) indicated that the Negro like all other oppressed people must learn to do the so-called impossible and think for themselves. Many African American males have been exposed to continued failures and have developed a feeling of hopelessness. The oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have been resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires (Freire, 1970).

There is documented concern about the equity in the relationship between quality of education and student ethnicity. Although the nation's students are improving over time in academic performance, the disproportionality of graduation between African American and White students is growing. Two variables that many researchers suggest as critical components in studying the disparity in achievement in schools are race and family socioeconomic status (SES) (Barth 2001; Hinson, 2002). The disparity in school performance associated with race and ethnicity, typically referred to as "the achievement gap," is noticeable in grades, test scores, course selection, and college completion. As the gap between the achievement of African American males and their White counterparts continues to widen, the role of the principal (as leader of the administrative team) with

regard to increasing student graduation in schools has become a major focus for educators.

Toldson (2008) found that high-achieving African American males had a positive perception of school, congenial relationships with teachers, and felt safe in the school environment. African American males need to believe that school work is relevant and that learning is important to their future. African American males perform best when they feel supported and are in an environment they feel is safe (Toldson, 2008 p. 45). Jekielek, Moore, Hair, and Scarupa (2002) explained three critical areas that are vital to youth success: educational achievement, health and safety, and social and emotional development. In addition, mentoring programs or relationships lead to positive academic behaviors for participating youth (e.g., better attendance, improved attitude toward school, positive social attitudes) (Jekielek, Moore, Hair, & Scarupa, 2002 p. 4).

Instructional Leadership

The principal as the instructional leader plays a significant role in creating an effective school. Sergiovanni (1998) suggested that effective instructional leadership by principals includes (a) managing technical activities, (b) providing interpersonal support and encouragement of staff, (c) intervening with instruction, (d) modeling important goals and behaviors, (e) signaling to others what is important, and (f) developing an appropriate and unique school culture. Other scholars add another component to effective instructional leadership by relating the achievement of students to the success of the principal (Edmonds, 1982; Greenfield, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986).

Many research studies have recognized that principals are more than building managers; they are responsible for leading school improvement efforts. A review of the literature suggests that instructional leadership requires leaders who are able to balance the instructional program, set goals, scrutinize curriculum, evaluate staff, and appraise results (Amodeo & Taylor, 2004; Elmore, 2000; Hallinger & McCary, 1991; Rainey, 2007). Instructional leadership, as defined by Brookover (1985), is the ability to promote effective instruction and high achievement for all students. Effective instructional leaders advocate for excellence in student performance by building a system of relationships with stakeholders in their schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). Exemplary leaders (a) challenge, (b) take risks, (c) inspire a shared vision with collaboration, (d) model behavior, and (e) encourage passion in their constituents (Kouzes and Posner, 2002).

Principals are responsible for promoting the successful achievement of all students. Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe and Myerson (2005) contend that the role of the principal has swelled to include a staggering array of professional tasks and competencies. Principals are expected to be educational visionaries; instructional and curriculum leaders; assessment experts; disciplinarians; community builders; public relations/communication experts; budget analysts; facility managers; special programs administrators; as well as guardians of various legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. In addition, principals are expected to serve the often-conflicting needs and interests of many stakeholders, including students, parents, teachers, district office officials, unions, and state and federal agencies.

As leaders, principals drive the vision for their school and promote the successful achievement of all students. Principals must be able to demonstrate instructional

leadership behaviors, which are the foundation for instructional leadership at the school level (Sergiovanni, 1998). Additionally, principals are charged with ensuring that teachers are effectively teaching and students are demonstrating high levels of academic achievement (Lezotte, 1994).

The Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura (1997) developed the social cognitive theory to explain that the control that individuals exercise through agentive actions is largely influenced by the strength of their efficacy perceptions. The social cognitive theory proposes that efficacy beliefs are formed based on the cognitive processing of individuals (Goddard, 2002; Bandura 1997 p. 79). The social cognitive theory specifies that efficacy beliefs are developed through individual cognitive processing that specifically weighs the influence of efficacy-shaping information obtained through four sources—mastery experience (experience), vicarious experience (modeling), social persuasion (encouragements/discouragements), and affective states (physiological factors) (Goddard, 2002; Bandura, 1997). What principals do is a direct consequence of what and how they think (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; McCormick, 2001; Leithwood and Steinback, 1995; Leithwood et al., 1994; Sergiovanni, 1991). One dynamic way to understand principals' motivation and behavior is through their sense of efficacy. Self-efficacy has a significant impact on goal-setting, level of aspiration, effort, adaptability, and persistence (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Bandura, 1986; Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

Self-Efficacy

Bandura's social cognitive theory holds that beliefs about personal agency are the foundation of action; and self-efficacy beliefs are an element of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1997, 1986, 1977). Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Ross & Gray, 2006; Bandura, 1997). Individuals who feel that they will be successful on a given task are more likely to do so. This is because the individual adopts challenging goals, tries harder to achieve them, perseveres despite setbacks, and develops coping mechanisms for managing their emotional states (Gist & Mitchell, 1992; Bandura, 1986). A principal's sense of efficacy is a judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Bandura 1997). Self-efficacy is a principal's self-perceived capability to perform the cognitive and behavioral functions necessary to regulate group processes in relation to goal achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; McCormick, 2001 p. 30). Level and strength of efficacy are two dimensions of importance in determining self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, Hillman, 1986; Bandura, 1981). The strength of efficacy beliefs should be assessed by asking respondents questions. Bandura (1981) maintained that self-efficacy does not exist in a yes-no definitive sense. Bandura (2000) indicated that personal efficacy affects behavior directly by impacting goals, outcome expectations, affective states, and perceptions of socio-structural impediments and opportunities. These beliefs affect the development of functional leadership strategies and the skillful execution of those strategies (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; McCormick, 2001).

In the case of a teacher's individual efficacy beliefs, a small but impressive body of research indicates that these beliefs have large effects on both teacher performance and student outcomes (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Research in the area of principal self-efficacy has been considerably less. Researchers know very little about the efficacy beliefs of leaders (Leithwood & Jantzi 2008; Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000; Gareis & Tschannen-Moran, 2005), and even less about the antecedents of those beliefs (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Chen & Bliese, 2002).

Background

This study was conducted in Darnell County Public Schools (DCPS) a school district in a suburban/urban county. DCPS has the highest African American male graduation rate among the country's large districts (The Schott Report, 2012). The district comprises 200 schools—131 elementary schools, 38 middle schools, 25 high schools, 5 alternative schools and 1 technical high school; 34 schools are National Blue Ribbon schools. A National Blue Ribbon distinction is an honor for elementary, middle, and high schools whose students demonstrate very high levels of achievement or progress. National Blue Ribbon schools have helped close gaps in achievement, especially among disadvantaged and minority students. To be named a Blue Ribbon School is to join an elite group. Of more than 138,000 in the United States, just over 6,000 of America's schools have received this honor over the past 28 years. (ed.gov, 2012) DCPS is the largest school district in its state and serves more than 144,000 students, representing more than 164 countries and speaking 184 languages. The

student population is 45% White, 23% African American, 23% Latino, 12% Asian American, and 2% Native American.

Though the district's students comprise a varied socioeconomic range, including 30% Free and Reduced-price Meals (FARMS), the aggregated graduation rate is 90%. DCPS is reported as having the highest graduation rate among the nation's 50 largest school districts; the district has repeated this status for three consecutive years. There exists a 65.9% Advanced Placement participation rate and an average combined SAT score of 1653.

In 1999, DCPS developed a comprehensive strategic plan that described the district's mission to provide all students with a rigorous and high-quality education. Today, the district builds on its original strategic plan by implementing strategies and initiatives that promote equity and excellence by creating the organizational culture, the conditions, and the support systems necessary to ensure students' success. Many of the initiatives are intended to strengthen students' abilities to problem solve, think critically, and express their thoughts and inquiries. Other strategies have been implemented to create collaborative learning communities where each child's specific learning needs are met. Several key goals of the district are to ensure success for every student by providing an effective instructional program, strengthen productive partnerships for education, create a positive working environment in a self-renewing organization, and provide high-quality business services that are essential to the educational success of students.

DCPS developed a target trajectory system that predicts college readiness and success. The system has adopted requirements that are more demanding than the state's

high school graduation requirements, which include a) read at advanced levels in Grades K–2, b) Score “advanced” in reading on the state’s assessment in Grades 3–8, c) Complete advanced math in Grade 5, d) Complete Algebra 1 by Grade 8 with a “C” or higher, e) Complete Algebra 2 by Grade 11 with a “C” or higher, f) Score 3 on an AP exam or 4 on an IB exam, g) Score 1650 on the SAT or 24 on the American College Testing exam. DCPS’s strategic plan recognizes that there is more work to be done to eliminate the achievement gap and raise the academic achievement for all students. The district’s plans to lead systemic change is the renewing of its efforts to ensure equity and excellence for all students so that academic success is not predictable by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, or disability.

DCPS’s graduation rate for African American males was 74% and among the highest in the nation for 2012. DCPS has far outperformed its state’s graduation rate for African American males by 17 percentage points and the nation by 22 percentage points. In 2010, DCPS had the fourth-highest graduation rate in the nation for African American males at the time. Since the 2010 reporting from the Schott Foundation, DCPS has increased the graduation rate for African American males by 9 percentage points in a span of two years and has tied for the highest ranking. The Schott Report (2012) also identified the graduation rate gap between African American and White males. DCPS’s graduation rate gap is 17 percentage points for 2012. This is a 5 percentage points improvement from the 2010 report and is much lower than the state’s graduation gap of 24 percentage points. Nationally, the graduation gap for African American and White males is 26 percentage points.

Statement of the Problem

Today's young African American males are in a state of crisis; educated African American males are an endangered species. Significant research has focused on factors that positively impact academic achievement and ultimately the graduation rates of African American males—positive school-related growth experiences, emphasis on teacher-student relationships, didactic learning, and emotional support (Toldson, 2011). Few studies have examined the impact that principal leadership beliefs have on the graduation of African American males. Exposure to principals with a strong sense of efficacy in their leadership skills may inspire African American males to achieve. This qualitative case study will explore the perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high graduation rates for African American males.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the self-efficacy beliefs of three high school principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high graduation rates for African American males. The student population for this study attended high school campuses identified as having highly diversified demographics. The campuses studied excelled on the state's High School Assessment examinations, according to Darnell County Public Schools data, and had a high success rate for graduating African American males. The study seeks to describe the perception of each principal's self-efficacy beliefs regarding African American male academic achievement and graduation.

The research questions that guide this study are as follows:

- 1) What are the perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates?
- 2) What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding their ability to promote graduation success of African American males in their economically disadvantaged high schools?
- 3) What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding teaching strategies and student learning in order to sustain increased graduation rates among African American males?
- 4) What self-efficacy beliefs impact leadership practices?

Significance

The fact that African American males epidemically maintain the highest high school dropout rates, despite the development of rigorous standards, high-stakes testing, and the growing mandate for school systems to demonstrate student achievement supports the need for this study. Research shows that, from one generation to the next, equitable access to high-performing public educational systems can break down the barriers to success and change the future trajectory of historically disadvantaged students (Schott 50 State Report, 2010). The principal is recognized as the chief executive officer who assumes the ultimate responsibility for the success of the school (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). Adams and Kirst (1999) asserted that the accountability demands to shrink the achievement gap require attention to issues of leadership conceptualization and practice. Therefore, it is practical that this study would add to the understanding of

administrative leadership seeking solutions to producing high graduation rates for African American males.

This study is significant because it explores the self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates. Describing principals' self-efficacy beliefs with respect to their role in teaching and learning may explain the phenomenon of continual success of African American male graduation in their economically disadvantaged high schools. Furthermore, understanding the self-efficacy beliefs of principals may contribute to the gap in literature pertaining to the understanding of what principals believe about their ability to directly affect student learning.

Delimitations of the Study

The intent of this case study is to examine the self-efficacy beliefs of principals of the three high schools in a suburban-urban county which have demonstrated high success with promoting graduation achievement in African American males. For this study, a high school was defined as a school containing Grades 9 through 12. The study was delimited to economically disadvantaged high schools within the selected suburban county that were rated as above the state average for African American male graduation rates for the 2010 and 2011 academic school years. This study included only principals that have provided consistent leadership in their respective high schools for at least two years. Hallinger (1984) recommended that principals with less than two years of experience tended to bias the results by underrating their performance).

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study was largely dependent on the efficacy results submitted by the selected participants. The study assumes that the efficacy that was reported by the selected participants represented their true ideals.

Definition of Terms

Key terms are defined as follows:

- 1) Academic Achievement—[Graduation] Completion of all State Department of Education regulations and requirements, which qualify students for the privilege to graduate from the state-approved high school campus.
- 2) Academic School Year—The academic term spanning from September to June of the graduation year. For example, 2010 represents September 2009–June 2010.
- 3) African American—Of African descent, non-Hispanic; Black
- 4) Economically Disadvantaged—At one time or another, serving a student population of 40% or more that is at or below the poverty level (Hinojosa, 2005).
- 5) Black—Of African descent, non-Hispanic; African American
- 6) High School—A comprehensive campus that meets the academic needs of students between the ages of 14 and 18 years old, encompassing Grades 9 to 12.
- 7) Instructional leadership—Can be defined as “those actions that a principal takes, or delegates to others, to promote growth in student learning.” In practice, this means that the principal encourages educational achievement

by making instructional quality the top priority of the school and brings that vision to realization (e-Lead, 2011).

- 8) Principal—Individual certified and contracted by local school district to serve as building lead administrator.
- 9) Socioeconomic Status (SES)—The ability of a family to provide the resources and services necessary to sustain the health and well-being of family members, based on their financial situation (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).
The percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced-price meals.
- 10) Student Achievement—In the Standards for Maryland Professional Development Schools, student achievement refers to the holistic success of the student. This may be measured using a variety of means, including but not limited to standardized test scores, grades, work samples, and student performances (MSDE, 1999).
- 11) Graduation Rate—The graduation rate that the state has previously reported for Annual Yearly Progress calculations is now called the Leaver Rate.
- 12) Leaver Rate - The Leaver Rate reflects the percentage of students who received a state high school diploma during the reported school year, and counts all graduates instead of a particular group of students, or cohort.
- 13) Underrepresented Population—Minority student population (e.g., African American, Hispanic).
- 14) FARMS Rate—Free and Reduced-price Meals System. The percentage of a school's population that qualify for meal assistance.

- 15) Ever FARMS — The percentage of student families that have participated in the FARMS program at any time while enrolled in DCPS.
- 16) Current FARMS — The current percentage of student families that are participating in the FARMS program.
- 17) Mastery Experience—Successful or failed experiences described by participants that cause implementation, reinforcement, or removal of an action in order to increase African American male academic achievement or graduation.
- 18) Vicarious Experience— Observation of the successful or failed experiences of others, as described by participants, that cause implementation, reinforcement, or removal of an action in order to increase African American male academic achievement or graduation.
- 19) Social Persuasion— Participant experiences of encouragement or discouragement that cause implementation, reinforcement, or removal of an action in order to increase African American male academic achievement or graduation.
- 20) Affective States—Physiological or emotional experiences described by participants that cause implementation, reinforcement, or removal of an action in order to increase African American male academic achievement or graduation.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this case study was to investigate the self-efficacy beliefs of principals in three economically disadvantaged high schools with high graduation rates of African American males. This chapter will review the literature on the components of graduation success for African American males as well as provide an in-depth discussion of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. The social cognitive theory is the leading body of research and is the theoretical foundation for the conception of principal self-efficacy. This section will review the construct of the social cognitive theory and explain the concepts of this multi-directional theory. In this section, self-efficacy as a high predictor of behavior is discussed in several contexts, the nature of collective efficacy is explained, and the nuance of principal efficacy is introduced.

No Child Left Behind Act, 2001

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (NCLB, 2001) indicates that all school districts in the nation confront the issue of academic achievement and disengagement among all racial and ethnic groups within their population to alleviate inter-group disparities. Because of the mandate to disaggregate student achievement data, there has been a growing concern regarding the lack of academic achievement for African American males. According to USDE (2004), NCLB continues to be defined as the “cornerstone of President George W. Bush’s administration” (p.3). With the passage of NCLB, Congress reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA). With the determination to reform America’s schools, NCLB requires that every child demonstrate proficiency on state-defined education standards by the end of the 2014 school year. NCLB has obliged state school officials to develop benchmarks for

measuring progress and making sure that every child is learning. States are required to separate or disaggregate student achievement data, and hold schools accountable for subgroups so that no child is “left behind” (USDE, 2004).

The reauthorization of the *No Child Left Behind* legislation has called for educators to reexamine how all children learn and how teachers instruct. Ashby (2006) argued that there is minimal support for the pedagogical approaches promoted for low-income students. Ashby asserted that high-stakes testing has resulted in highly teacher-centered and inflexible classroom environments. Cummings (2011) claims that there must be a rebalancing of literacy instruction for low-income students by emphasizing literacy engagement, which is strongly related to the development of reading comprehension (Ashby, 2006). The author further submitted that policy makers should consider reshaping legislation that funds classroom instruction for low-income students based on empirically supported pedagogical principles that are applied equivalently in schools serving both low-income and high-income students.

The passage of NCLB 2001 is one of the most progressive pieces of legislation to date regarding the education of all children. The principle of NCLB changed the landscape of education in that all school districts across the United States are held to a consistent standard that all children will achieve at high levels. While research continues to emerge with the purpose of examining the adequacy of funding for such a large achievement goal for all students, recent literature suggests that NCLB has eliminated what many have overlooked when examining the achievement of school districts across the country (Ashby, 2006; Hamilton & Stecher, 2004; Kim & Sunderman, 2004; DeCohen & Clewell, 2007).

Pathway to Graduation Success for the African American Male

Literature associated with the academic success of African American males provided an overview of the characteristics associated with this group's successes and challenges. However, a majority of the literature focused on reasons why African American males were not academically successful; how they did not want to be portrayed as smart; or how they were so used to poor performance that they did not want to be associated with challenging courses or coursework. With finding patterns of this limited perspective, it was noted that the literature discussed what was lacking in African American male students' lives: mentors, motivating and supportive teachers, an engaging curriculum, and a supportive environment.

This study examined literature associated with academic success patterns of African American males, primarily at the secondary level. In addition, it focused on key influences affiliated with success through the scope of four lenses:

- 1) Mindset of the African American Male—The literature explored the learning patterns of the African American male as well as factors that influence learning and academic performance.
- 2) Learning Communities—The literature examined practices and culture that enabled African American males to sustain their level of academic achievement, usually in unique environments.
- 3) Curriculum Engagement—The literature examined reform, standards, and presentation of curriculum to students. It examined project-based curriculum as well as effective professional development required for educators.

- 4) Mentorship—The literature in this category explored the impact of a positive role model as well as advocacy and support systems in the lives of African American male students.

Mindset of the African American Male

The academic achievement of African American males has been the focus of numerous scholarly studies over the past two and a half decades (Howard, 2008). Only a limited number of studies focus on high-achieving African American male high achievers specifically (Bonner, 2001; Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper, 2004, 2005, 2006b, 2006c; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Scholars have suggested that researchers focus more attention on African American student academic success as a way to counter negative societal messages about these students' intellectual ability (Toldson, 2010; Fordham 2008; Perry 2003).

Toldson (2010) challenged the tone and spirit in which research is traditionally conducted about black male achievement and asserted that failure by some should not be the guiding force behind policies aiming to remediate education. Toldson's 2010 study of 1,208 high-achieving African American adolescent males found that African American adolescent males who achieve in school have good modulation of aggressive behavior, positive attitude toward school, positive communication with parents, and some involvement with a religious faith.

Black high achievers remain an understudied segment of the student population. Consequently, we know far less about their academic, social, and psychological needs and experiences. Understanding more about the within-group differences in communities of color is important as institutions endeavor to successfully retain and serve a diverse

and complex student body (Fries-Britt, S. & Griffin, K. 2007). Fries-Britt, S. & Griffin, K. (2007) found that Black participants in an honors program described having their academic capabilities doubted and being accused of unfairly gaining access to the benefits and recognition associated with the program by their White peers. Many of the students commented that they liked to disrupt people's stereotypes by behaving in ways that are considered incongruent with being Black.

Andrews (2009) conducted a study in which high-achieving African American students identified race as significant to how they defined themselves and discovered ways to help Black students maintain school success without rejecting their racial or ethnic identities. Andrews identified that:

“high achieving African American students had positive attitudes about identifying as black or African American. When asked to discuss the significance of race in their lives, several students described a critical race consciousness when describing race group pride and their perceptions of societal beliefs about blacks. These students demonstrated a critical understanding of the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between blacks and whites in the United States” (Andrews, 2009).

Andrews (2009) used the Critical Race Theory (CRT) as an important theoretical framework because one of its central tenets is that racism is endemic to society (Delgado & Stefancic 2001). The CRT is a lens that enables a discourse about race, class, and gender to be the centerpiece for an analysis of African American male underachievement (Howard, 2008). Andrews (2009) found that “One student recognized that, as a member of a subdominant racial group in this society, he would experience discrimination but that

would not deter him from achieving his goals.” Another central tenet of CRT includes recognizing the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge (Matsuda et al. 1993). Positive peer groups, structural mechanisms in school, supportive adults, and supportive family members are all critical to positive identity construction (Andrews 2009).

Maton et al., (1998) explained that, although negative environmental challenges existed that presented threats to these student’s academic focus, other factors such as self-belief, self-discipline, and spirituality may play a role in academic success. McMillian (2004) argued that African American students have made significant progress over the last three decades, but noted that there is room for improvement among African American males. Maton, Hrabowski, and Grief (1998) identified factors such as persistent academic engagement, strict limit setting and discipline by parents, loving supportive family, and connectivity to the community and local resources that relate to the academic success of African American males. Grief, Hrabowski, and Maton (1998) listed in their study of African American fathers of high-achieving sons, six factors that are linked to academic achievement. They are as follows:

- 1) Child-focused love
- 2) Setting limits and discipline
- 3) High expectations
- 4) Open, consistent, and strong communication
- 5) Positive racial and male gender identification
- 6) Drawing upon community resources

Livingston and Nahimana (2006) explained that many African American families value education and provide effective environments for academic achievement.

Livingston and Nahimana (2006) suggested practices to improve achievement for African American males included the following:

- 1) Professional development that focused on African American children from economically disadvantaged communities
- 2) Identification and recruitment of African American male teachers
- 3) Internships and apprenticeships
- 4) African American male mentors
- 5) Research centers to assess and address the needs of African American males
- 6) Community partnerships

Livingston and Nahimana (2006) indicated that the success or failure of each strategy rested with the school leaders' ability to organize various community stakeholders and effectively communicate the needs of African American males. The need for educational leaders to provide nurturing, supportive educational environments that take into account the cultural and societal forces on the achievement of students has been argued through the literature (Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 1999; Ogbu, 1987; Noguera, 2003; Scheurich, 2002; Singleton & Linton, 2006; Tatum, 2005; Williams, 2001).

Harper (2005) studied high-achieving African American males on undergraduate college campuses. High-achieving Black males participating in Harper's national study noted that their academic achievement and engagement in campus activities and highly visible leadership positions enabled them to challenge and disprove pervasive stereotypes

about Black men held by faculty and staff (Harper, 2005; Harper & Quaye, 2007). Harper (2005) posited that more effort be devoted to increasing African American male student engagement in clubs, organizations, and educationally purposeful activities. Harper (2006b) offered an extensive list of practical strategies for doing so, including empowering actively involved African American male student leaders to recruit their disengaged same-race male peers to join student organizations; systematically collecting data to determine how African American males spend their time outside of class and why their engagement in campus activities is low; and forming an African American male engagement task force comprising stakeholders from across the campus.

When NCLB reauthorized the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESEA), it caused transparency and forced increased accountability for states, school districts, and schools. For the first time in the nation's history, raising achievement levels among racial and ethnic groups to those of their peers was an explicit goal of federal policy. Noting that African Americans and Hispanics were consistently underrepresented at the target trajectory, while constantly and consistently overrepresented at the bottom, educators around the nation recognized the ramification of the landmark legislation. There was work to do. Narrowing the achievement gap may require Black and Hispanic students to exert more effort than White classmates who currently have more knowledge and skill; after all, according to Ferguson (2002), no runner ever came from behind by running the same speed as race leaders.

Race-based epistemological approaches are important analytic lenses, particularly within qualitative research, because they offer the opportunity to challenge dominant ideology, provide transdisciplinary modes of inquiry, and suggest a space for insider

accounts of their experiences (Howard, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Research on factors that influence the graduation success of the African American male begin with focus on the mindset of the African American male. From a historical perspective, Woodson (1933) indicated that the Negro, like all other oppressed people, must learn to do the so-called impossible and think for themselves. Many African American males have been exposed to continued failures and have developed a feeling of hopelessness. The oppressed, who have adapted to the structure of domination in which they are immersed, and have been resigned to it, are inhibited from waging the struggle for freedom so long as they feel incapable of running the risks it requires (Freire, 1970).

The literature indicates that more attention be given to the African American population, specifically the male population, with a focus on understanding why they are underachieving. (Kujufu, 2001; McMillan, 2004; Noguera & Akom, 2000). Furthermore, the literature indicates that African American males from poverty-stricken as well as affluent households continue to perform at low levels, and perhaps by choice. This is associated with the notion of a “Cult of Anti-intellectualism,” where African American males resent intellectual pursuits for the fear of “acting White” and not being accepted by peers (Fordham, 2008; Smalls, 2007; Ogbu, 2003; Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). African American males indicated that they were bored with school and that they could put forth more effort if they wanted to (Ferguson, 2002).

Toldson (2008, 2009, 2010) used a mixed-method approach to analyze four national surveys that included more than 5,700 African American males. He documented the impact of four factors on both high-achieving and low-achieving African American males in contemporary school settings. The four factors addressed were 1) personal and

emotional, 2) family, 3) social and environmental and 4) school environment. Personal and emotional indicators ranged from quality of life to eating health, family indicators ranged from father in the home to father's educational attainment, social and environmental indicators ranged from adequate financial resources to school-based activities, and school indicators ranged from liking school to feeling safe at school. Toldson found that high-achieving Black male students had a positive perception of school, had congenial relationships with teachers, and felt safe in the school environment. Black males need to believe that school work is relevant and that learning is important to their future. Black males perform best when they feel supported and are in an environment where they feel safe. Toldson formulated his findings in the "Breaking Barriers" report, which recommended policy advocacy that support educational equity and holistic opportunities to learn.

Toldson (2008) indicated that high-achieving Black male students "liked" school and were not "bored" by school, and this had an impact on their school work because they considered it meaningful. He further indicated that Black male students who were academically successful perceived their teachers to be respectful people who treated them like they mattered and built up their strengths, instead of making them feel bad about their weaknesses. "Interest" is a significant part of the career decision process for African American males (Moore, 2006; Hrabowski, 1998). Earliest memories of interest in a particular field (particularly math and science) often times occurred at the elementary-school level or before for Black students; and parents and teachers played a significant role at nurturing those interests.

Learning Communities

There is considerable evidence that issues of race and cultural background play key roles in the education of Black students (Delpit, 1995; Jordan and Cooper, 2001). Many schools are engaged in comprehensive reform efforts. However, few reform models explicitly confront the unique conditions facing Black males (Jordan and Cooper, 2001). Education statistics consistently reveal that Black males tend to cluster at the bottom of the distribution of virtually every indicator of school failure, such as dropout, absenteeism, suspension, expulsion, and low achievement (Garbaldi, 2007, 1997; Ferguson, 2002; Jordan and Cooper, 2001; Dunbar 1999). All too often, the comprehensive high school finds alternative means for educating Black males by removing them from their home school and assigning them to alternative schools, with the stated purpose of meeting their academic needs (Dunbar, 1999). This proves detrimental to academic achievement and competitiveness. Unfortunately, Black males never recover from the initial slippage and are relegated to a poor education with few chances for upward mobility (Jordan and Cooper, 2001). Despite the role of alternative schools in reducing the dropout rates, policy makers at the state level struggle to differentiate a state accountability framework that evaluates alternative school effectiveness (Schlessman & Hurtado, 2012). The failure to differentiate an accountability framework for alternative schools can lead to negative consequences that affect alternative schools' abilities to provide education for at-risk students (Schlessman & Hurtado, 2012). African American males were disproportionately represented among students placed. Research comparing voluntary alternative schools versus mandatory alternative schools indicates that student improvement is rare in mandatory alternative

schools with a punitive purpose (Vanderhaar, 2010; Arnove & Strout, 1980; Raywid, 1999). Though the original purpose of the alternative schools for the “at-risk student” was to provide an alternative learning environment for students who had difficulty in the traditional school environment, research indicates that they are increasingly being used as an act of punishment, exclusion, and containment for disruptive students (Dunbar, 2001; Lehr, Lanners & Lang, 2003; Morrison et al., 2001)

School reforms that seek to create more personalized environments are attempting to develop contexts of productive learning (Felner, 2007). Felner believes that focusing on student motivation makes the personalization of the school context is a critical strategy for bringing the learner in as a full and active participant in enhancing and shaping his own learning. Small, personalized learning communities foster productive learning both by removing developmentally hazardous conditions and by providing opportunities to learn, opportunities to teach, and learning supports that enable a school to become a positive, developmentally enhancing context for students (Felner, 2007). Felner found that higher levels of implementation intensity and fidelity were important to getting major gains in achievement and adjustment among more socially and economically disadvantaged students. Felner indicated that, in order for schools to fully reform to an effective smaller learning community, five things needed to be in place:

- 1) Structural/organizational characteristics—change inside of the school;
- 2) Attitudes of the staff—staff buy-in is imperative
- 3) Climate/empowerment/experiential characteristics—professional learning communities
- 4) Capacity/skills—standards-based instruction and well-prepared teachers

5) Practice/procedural variables—relevant practices, processes, and procedures used for instruction.

Curriculum Engagement

School engagement is affiliated with curriculum engagement and both attribute to student interest, academic achievement, and retention. Students have reported boredom with lessons, not with the complexity but with the lack of relevance and significance; this may lead to disconnection and increased dropout rates. The research literature defined engagement in three ways (Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004):

- 1) Behavioral engagement—participation, involvement in academic and social activities;
- 2) Emotional engagement—positive and negative reactions to teachers, classmates, academics, and school;
- 3) Cognitive engagement—thoughtfulness and willingness to exert effort necessary to comprehend complex ideas.

Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (year?) explain that, although engagement might begin with liking or participating, it can result in commitment or investment and thus may be a key to diminishing student apathy and enhancing learning.

Reform of curriculum includes more thoughtful and authentic learning experiences that challenge and excite students' interests and develop higher-order thinking and performance skills (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Students are bored with rote-oriented curriculum, which lacks rigor and has insignificant connection to their lives. Today's students are used to a world of technology that exposes them to instant gratification and

immediate responses. Curriculum that provides little opportunity for involvement or critical thinking is viewed as obsolete and nonprogressive.

Students of today are competing in global markets. With the proliferation of technology, adequate preparation in science and mathematics is rapidly becoming a requisite for workplace entry and mobility in today's information knowledge-based society (Moore, 2006; Hrabowski 1998). The literature indicates that interests on the part of the students should be nurtured by parents and teachers early on. Moore (2006) found that, pertaining to African American males' decisions to pursue an academic major and career choice,

- 1) meaningful academic experiences and relationships with school personnel and
 - 2) meaningful enrichment programs, opportunities, and academic experiences
- are relevant themes that emerged from the data.

Once children are ability grouped as slow learners at an early age, it is quite difficult for them to break the barrier that stereotypes them throughout their academic careers. Providing access to a more rigorous curriculum and enriched pre-college experiences would enable more African American males to pursue postsecondary degrees in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. African Americans have a natural proclivity for success in the sciences and their untapped talent and unlimited potential contributes to a shortage of African Americans in the aforementioned fields (Russell, 2005).

Mentorship

Jekielek, Moore, Hair, and Scarupa (2002) and Saphier (2005) focused on what was working for all students, mentorship programs and their effects on students, and

effort-based ability. These themes both encourage a method of support for all students, especially minority students. In Saphier (2005) it was found that all school staff believes that a) this is important, b) you can do it, c) I won't give up on you. His research was carried out in inner-city schools with disadvantaged children who were far behind academically. These minority students began to believe in their own effort-based ability with the positive and consistent support of their teachers. Jekielek, Moore, Hair, and Scarupa (2002) also looked at the culture of programs in support of students, mainly disadvantaged students, and its effects on students. Both researchers completed observations and carried out qualitative research without direct contact with students. In Graham and Anderson (2008), research also was conducted in an urban inner-city high school. A common thread to the aforementioned assessment of the literature is the importance of support and guidance on the part of a significant adult.

Instructional Leadership

Before the 1940s, principals sought to lead schools through methods of organization and supervision. By the 1950s, principals were expected to apply empirical and theoretical work done in the field of administration, and defend educational practices with empirical data that supported educator practices (Heck & Murphy, 1993). By the 1960s, the concept of the school as a governing bureaucracy reinforced the identity of the principal as a member of the educational bureaucratic structure. Heck and Murphy (1993) indicated that, by the 1970s, the principal had become the prime figure who connected the school and community in a meaningful way. The principal's role was to encourage positive and supportive interpersonal relationships, both inside and outside of the school. According to Hallinger (1993), it was in the 1960s and 1970s that principals began to

manage federal funds designated for curriculum reform and assistance with special population programs. The emphasis on the role of principal as manager throughout the years focused on the principal's managerial responsibility, with little emphasis on student achievement (Heck & Murphy, 1993).

The role of the principal has evolved from one of manager to instruction leader (Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1994; Heck & Murphy, 1993). Many researchers have analyzed the strategies and skills necessary for principals to be effective in improving and sustaining student achievement (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1986; Deal, 1987). Edmonds (1979, 1982) identified the following five characteristics of effective schools:

- 1) An orderly environment
- 2) An emphasis on basic skills
- 3) Frequent evaluation of student progress
- 4) High expectations
- 5) Strong instructional leadership by the principal

The acceptance of the five characteristics of an effective school reinforced the critical role of the principal as the instructional leader who promotes effective instruction and high achievement for all students (Brookover, 1985). The literature suggests that, in effective schools, the principals have a clear vision for the school and communicate that vision to teachers, students, and the community; establish a warm climate in the school; have enthusiasm for change; use participatory management and shared decision making;

and focus on the needs of teachers and all students (Barth, 1990; Blasé & Kirby, 1992). The principal is viewed as one who monitors and evaluates student progress, emphasizes student achievement, sets clear goals, has knowledge of instructional practices employed by teachers, protects instructional time, and maintains high visibility (Beck & Murphy, 1993; DeBevoise, 1984; Edmonds, 1979; Edmonds, 1982; Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985; Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Sweeney, 1982).

Successful principals contribute to student achievement indirectly through influence on other people or features of their organizations (Leithwood et al., 2004). Cotton (2003) summarized research on principals and student achievement by stating that “many leadership behaviors and traits of principals are positively related to student achievement, student attitudes, and social behavior” (p. 67). Cotton (2003) found that principals in high-achieving schools were effective in numerous critical areas such as safe and orderly school environment; setting vision and goals focused on high levels of student learning; setting high expectations for student achievement; conducting classroom observation and giving feedback to teachers; creating professional development opportunities and resources; monitoring student progress and sharing findings; fostering a positive and supportive school climate; communicating and interaction; parent–community outreach and involvement; shared leadership– decision making and staff empowerment; realizing high levels of student learning; establishing a norm of continuous improvement; fostering discussion of instructional issues; using student data for program improvement; and encouraging effective role modeling (Cotton, 2003). Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) asserted that effective school leaders exerted influence through four critical behaviors—building vision and setting direction,

understanding and developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the teaching and learning program.

Social Cognitive Theory

At the core of this study is the theoretical foundation of the self-efficacy theory. This theory is derived from Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986, 1997, 2000). This multi-directional theory suggests that individual actions and choices are affected by behavioral, environmental, and interpersonal factors; individuals take an active role in making things happen. Bandura (1986) calls this "human agency." With human agency, individuals possess self-beliefs that enable them to exercise a measure of control over their thoughts and actions (Bandura, 1986). "What people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave" (Bandura, 1986, p. 25). Behaviorists began to think of behavior a result of an interaction between the environment and the person and not just a passive response. In fact, Skinner believed that "human behavior is shaped and controlled by environmental contingencies" (Bandura, 1997). Recognizing the importance of cognitive and social dimensions to behaviorist positions, Bandura developed what was then termed as social learning theory, which acknowledged behavioral, personal, and environmental factors as determinants of each other (Bandura 1977).

The importance of the social cognitive theory to this study is that it supports the notion that individuals are able to exercise control over their behaviors and their environments. Striving for control over their life circumstances permeates almost everything people do, because it can secure them innumerable personal and social benefits (Bandura, 1995).

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy refers to what one believes one can do, regardless of the skills possessed. Theorists have defined self-efficacy as a sense of confidence regarding the performance of a specific task (Bandura, 1986). Bandura is the most renowned researcher with regard to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977a, 1977b, 1988, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2000). According to Bandura, one's expectations about cause and effect result from experience; the most powerful efficacy beliefs are situation-specific. Pajares and Kranzler (1995) affirm self-efficacy to be highly predictive of behavior. Learning, choice making, and motivation are affected by one's self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1995). The individuals with high self-efficacy view challenges as opportunities to master rather than dangers to avoid. Theorists suggest that people with high self-efficacy approach tasks differently from those with low self-efficacy. Individuals with high self-efficacy tend to demonstrate a greater inherent interest, set more challenging goals, recover confidence quickly after failure, and attribute failure to insufficient effort (Bandura, 1988, p. 286). Nevertheless, it should be noted that "self-efficacy beliefs are context-specific" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, p. 573).

The four primary sources of self-efficacy are mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1977b). First, mastery experience is the most influential source of efficacy and is defined as past successes and failure that have a direct impact on an individual's self-efficacy. Successful experiences at a specific task are associated with an increase in self-efficacy for similar situations in the future (Bandura, 1997). Contrarily, recurrent failures and self-doubt decrease self-efficacy (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Second, vicarious experience or modeling is an

additional source of self-efficacy. Watching someone else succeed or fail has an impact on an individual's self-efficacy (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Bandura (1997) suggested that the more skilled is the model, the greater is its impact on individual self-efficacy. Third, verbal persuasion is a very influential source of self-efficacy. Verbal persuasion relates to reinforcing the idea that one is capable of completing a task. Verbal persuasion has limited influence, unless the verbal acknowledgments are realistic (Bandura, 1997). Fourth, self-efficacy is related to physiological or emotional state. Individuals will make judgments about anticipated performance based on positive arousal such as excitement and enthusiasm and on negative factors such as fear, fatigue, stress, and anxiety (Hoy and Miskel, 2008, p.158). In fact, negative emotions can decrease an individual's self-efficacy (Bruning, Schraw, Norby, & Ronning, 2004). However, Bandura (1997) suggested that if one is given appropriate coping skills, self-efficacy can be enhanced.

Bandura (1995) discussed the four sources of self-efficacy and the four major processes through which efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning—cognitive, motivational, affective, and selection. These processes ascertain ways in which self-efficacy beliefs affect one's psychological well-being and functioning. The higher priority that one gives to these beliefs, the higher the goals one sets and the more committed he or she is to obtaining the goal (Bandura, 1989). Regarding the cognitive processes, Bandura (1995) stated that most courses of action are organized initially in thought. Bandura (1989) indicated that when confronted with difficult problems, high self-efficacy individuals devote large amounts of cognitive resources to mastering the situation, whereas individuals with low self-efficacy tend to spend cognitive resources worrying about the negative outcomes. It is through cognitive processes that outcomes

are visualized. Individuals with a high sense of efficacy for a specific situation are more likely to visualize successful outcomes to challenging situations, whereas individuals with a low sense of efficacy are more likely to visualize negative outcomes. Additionally, individuals who consistently visualize successful outcomes may experience enhanced performance in the future (Bandura, 1989).

The second process discussed by Bandura is the motivational process. The motivational process is composed of self-efficacy as a form of regulation. Bandura (1986) identifies three theories associated with cognitive motivation—attribution theory, expectancy-value theory, and goal theory. Self-efficacy is related to attribution in that individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs will attribute failures to a lack of individual effort or factors beyond his or her control. Individuals with low self-efficacy beliefs internalize the failure and view the failure as a lack of personal ability. Regarding the expectancy-value theory, individuals act on what they expect to occur and to the degree they value the outcome; expectations are based partially on the capability beliefs of the individual. As a result, self-efficacy plays an important role in the goals that one sets based on his or her own perceptions of ability. Regarding the goal theory as it relates to the motivational process, self-efficacy beliefs play an important role in the regulation of motivation and action. Bandura (1986) contends that motivation is contingent on one's interpretation of his or her performance in relation to an internalized standard for the self.

Bandura's third process of efficacy that regulates human functioning is the affective process. This process is associated with the coping strategies that one develops to handle the stress and depression that may be experienced as a result of threatening or difficult situations. Such difficult situations include one's ability to exercise control over

disturbing thoughts, and how one can minimize anxiety by providing behavioral support to change the situation (Bandura, 2000). Bandura's fourth process of efficacy, the selection process, relates to the choices individuals make to pursue goals and engage in activities; it also relates to their level of engagement. According to Bandura (1995), self-efficacy beliefs help one to shape his or her environments through the career paths he or she chooses. The better prepared you are for your chosen profession, the more persistent you remain as you face obstacles.

Self-Efficacy in Several Contexts

Self-efficacy research has been abundantly applied to a variety of settings. While the paradigm of self-efficacy is grounded in social cognitive theory, the most abundant applications regarding the academic setting include areas of student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy and as well as collective teacher efficacy. One area with limited research yet seems to be principal efficacy. The research compiled from student, teacher, and collective efficacy studies has established a theoretical foundation for principal self-efficacy research (Hoy & Miskel, 2008). Student self-efficacy beliefs have been shown to be important mediators of many types of achievement behaviors. Self-efficacy influences what choices are made, the amount of effort that is put forth, and how the individual feels about his or her ability to succeed. Bandura (1997) indicates that people with a high sense of self-efficacy often approach difficult tasks in ways that are different from the ways an individual with low sense of self-efficacy would approach the same tasks. Like student efficacy, the literature on teacher efficacy is abundant. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) define teacher efficacy as a teacher's beliefs in his or her own capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific task in a

particular context. The literature in the area of teacher efficacy has revealed that teacher efficacy beliefs are associated with improved student performance in a number of ways. Dellinger et al. (2008) discussed that teacher efficacy beliefs were useful in distinguishing between effective and noneffective schools. The teacher's sense of efficacy is developed and enhanced by mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological states (Bandudura, 1997; Woolfolk-Hoy, 2004). Goodard, Hoy, and Woolfolk-Hoy (2000) suggest that the aforementioned sources of efficacy beliefs can influence not only individual efficacy beliefs but also collective efficacy beliefs. Collective teacher efficacy is defined as shared perception of teachers in a school that collective efforts can have an impact on student achievement and school culture (Hoy & Miskel, 2008)

Collective Efficacy

Perceived collective efficacy is a construct derived from the social cognitive theory that represents the level of confidence a group exudes in its capability to organize and execute the tasks required to reach a desired attainment (Goddard, LoGerfo, Hoy, 2004). The research in the area of collective teacher efficacy has provided evidence that collective efficacy is associated with improved student achievement (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2000). A key assumption of social cognitive theory concerns the existence of purposeful choices that groups make in light of their perceptions of collective capability to reach given goals; this is known as organizational agency. Such an agency is evidenced when leadership teams decide to engage in activities that support specific school goals, such as a plan to increase student achievement by adopting a more rigorous curriculum.

Without a strong sense of self, people are effortlessly overwhelmed by hardships in attempts to change their lives for the better through collective effort. A group with members plagued by self-doubts about their capabilities to perform their roles would achieve little. A strong sense of personal efficacy to manage one's life circumstances and to have a hand in effecting societal changes contributes substantially to perceived collective efficacy to shape society's social future (Bandura, 2002; Fernandez-Ballesteros, Diez-Nicolas, Caprara, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2002). Additionally, a high sense of social and empathic efficacy promotes prosocialness, as expressed in cooperativeness, helpfulness, and sharing (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2001; Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Pastorelli, & Regalia, 2001). A group, of course, operates through the behavior of its members; the position of perceived collective efficacy resides in the minds of group members.

Collective efficacy perceptions develop in groups through four sources of efficacy belief-shaping information—mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective stating (Goddard, LoGerfo, Hoy, 2004; Bandura, 1997). In an era of increased accountability, perceived collective efficacy is critical to explaining how well students perform on the mandatory assessments of achievement for which high schools are held accountable by the state (Goddard, LoGerfo, Hoy, 2004). Goddard and Skrla (2006) stated that collective teacher efficacy encourages student achievement by promoting a school culture that is characterized by persistent effort toward school improvement. Additionally, collective efficacy was enhanced when teachers believed that they were able to enlist administrative support, influence decision making, and control

classroom instruction (Ware & Kitsantas, 2007). With this, it is believed that the social cognitive level can be applied to the administrative level.

Principal Efficacy

Research in the area of measuring principals' sense of self-efficacy has been limited; those that exist have been quantitative in nature and the instruments used proved insufficient in stability and reliability (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Though Bandura (2001) has made a number of recommendations for the construction of self-efficacy measures, Hillman (1986) provides the earliest measure of principals' self-efficacy through presenting principals with 16 situations and asking them to determine the probable cause for the outcome. Imants and DeBradbander (1996) developed a principal efficacy measure that assessed perceived self-efficacy. Dimmock and Hattie (1996) used vignettes categorized in six areas of principal functioning. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) conducted three studies in search of a valid and reliable measure to capture principals' sense of efficacy; only one with reasonable success was adapted from a measure of teacher efficacy developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001).

A principal's sense of efficacy is defined as the principal's judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, 2005). To determine the level of a principal's sense of efficacy, Tshannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) developed an instrument that follows Bandura's guidelines for self-efficacy scale construction—the Principal Sense of Efficacy Scale (PSES). The scale comprised three primary factors—a principal's sense of efficacy for instructional leadership, managerial leadership, and moral leadership. With this, the researchers were able to suggest that principals may be

able to have an impact on school effectiveness and that principals with strong self-efficacy beliefs are better able to cultivate a higher sense of efficacy in the teachers, resulting in stronger motivation and improved performance of not only teachers but also, indirectly, students (Tshannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004).

Additional studies regarding principal efficacy sought to establish the relationship between principal efficacy and student achievement; Aderhold (2005) researched the relationship between principal efficacy and reading achievement in elementary school students in South Dakota. Lehman (2007) researched the relationship between principal efficacy and reading achievement in elementary students in Wisconsin, and Santamaria (2008) researched the relationship between principal efficacy and *No Child Left Behind* status. Though the area of principal efficacy research is emerging, the literature is limited to quantitative methods. A gap in the literature occurs when addressing the topic of principal efficacy from a qualitative method perspective. Assessing what is taking place in schools without measuring a principal's self-efficacy beliefs was not found. This researcher was interested in discovering what principals believe about their ability to facilitate change in their schools; more specifically, principals' belief in their ability to promote graduation of African American males.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of four components of graduation success for African American males, the pathways to graduation success, *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, instructional leadership, and the social cognitive theory as a theoretical framework. The pathway to graduation success was viewed through four lenses: the mindset of African American males, learning communities, curriculum engagement, and

mentorship. The literature examined academic success patterns of African American males, primarily at the secondary level. Since states are required to disaggregate student achievement data and hold schools accountable for subgroups so that no child is left behind, the NCLB Act was reviewed in depth. With the determination to reform America's schools, NCLB requires that every child demonstrate proficiency on state-defined education standards by the end of the 2014 school year. Additionally, the importance of the school administrator was explained. The review of literature revealed a strong relation between specific principal practices and student achievement. The literature also suggested that, in effective schools, the principal has clear vision for the school and communicates that vision to teachers, students, and the community; establishes a warm climate in the school; has enthusiasm for change; uses participatory management and shared decision making; and focuses on the needs of teachers and all students. An overview of the social cognitive theory noted previous studies regarding self-efficacy with respect to student efficacy, teacher efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, and principal efficacy. This study will expand on the previous research regarding principal efficacy and indicators of school effectiveness. This was accomplished by qualitatively studying how the self-efficacy beliefs of principals in three economically disadvantaged high schools promote graduation of African American males.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study investigates the self-efficacy beliefs of principals in three economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates. Though Bandura (2001) has made a number of recommendations for the construction of self-efficacy measures, this study did not measure the strength and level of the self-efficacy beliefs of principals. This chapter provides a description of the methodology for this study. It includes the research questions, research design, selection of the population, information related to participants and sample, data collection, and data analysis procedures.

Research Design

For this study, the researcher utilized qualitative research methods because these methods are best to examine information that is fundamentally interpretive and emergent rather than tightly prefigured (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative methods are linked to a constructivist theory of knowledge because qualitative methods tend to focus on understanding experiences from the point of view of those who live them. Rudestam and Newton (2007, p. 35) define constructivism as the epistemology associated with the view that what people may consider objective knowledge and truth is a result of perspective. Additionally, qualitative research implies an emphasis on processes and meaning over measure of quantity, intensity, and frequency (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Race-based epistemological approaches are important analytic lenses, particularly within qualitative research, because they offer the opportunity to challenge dominant ideology, provide transdisciplinary modes of inquiry, and suggest a space for insider accounts of their

experiences (Howard, 2008; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). A qualitative approach for this body of research is best regarding the researcher's ability to collect participant meaning(s), focus on a single concept [phenomenon], study the context of the participant, validate the accuracy of findings, and make interpretations of the data (Creswell, 2003).

Research in the area of measuring principals' sense of self-efficacy has been limited; those that exist have been quantitative in nature and the instruments used proved insufficient in stability and reliability (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Hillman (1986) provided the earliest measure of principals' self-efficacy through presenting principals with 16 situations and asking them to determine the probable cause for the outcome. Imants and DeBradbander (1996) developed a principal-efficacy measure that assessed perceived self-efficacy. Dimmock and Hattie (1996) used vignettes categorized in six areas of principal functioning. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) conducted three studies in search of a valid and reliable measure to capture principals' sense of efficacy; only one with reasonable success was adapted from a measure of teacher efficacy developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk (2001).

The research questions seek to have participants express their personal efficacy and core beliefs; a strong sense of personal efficacy is important to success. Self-efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes.

Self-efficacy under the construct of the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2002) indicates that "factors serve as guides and motivators are rooted in the core belief that one

has the power to produce desired effects by one's actions, otherwise one has little incentive to act in the face of difficulties" (p. 269).

The underlying assumptions in qualitative inquiry are that social experiences are given meaning by the participants and that their responses to questions about their beliefs, behavior, and effects are valid as evidence of their existence and nature of the phenomena (Maxwell, 1996). To accommodate a variety of disciplinary perspectives, the researcher chose the case-study method; the study fit the criteria of a case study outlined by several researchers (Yin, 2003; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1988). Yin (2003) indicated that a multiple case design is more compelling and should serve a specified purpose within the overall scope of inquiry. The case should a) predict similar results (literal replication) or b) predict contrasting results for predictable reasons (theoretical replication). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) indicated that a case study should a) begin as a funnel and first be "wide," b) have sources of data unique to chosen topic, c) have collected data continually modified and specified, and d) have data collection constrict to very specific characteristics. Stake (1995) indicated that a case study should have particularization, not generalization; the researcher should know a) how the case differs from others (emphasis on understanding of the case) and b) how the case is unique (implies knowledge about the case). Merriam (1988) indicated that the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be.

Rationale for Case Study

The researcher was interested in a process; therefore, the case study is an appropriate research design. Process as a focus for case study research can be viewed in two ways—monitoring and causal explanation (Merriam, 1998).

“Monitoring entails describing the context and population of the study, discovering the extent to which the treatment has been implemented, providing immediate feedback of a formative type, and the like, while causal explanation involves discovering or confirming the process by which the treatment had the effect that it did” (Merriam, 1998, p. 33; Reichardt and Cook, 1979, p. 21).

The researcher’s decision to focus on a qualitative case study research design stemmed from the researcher’s interest in insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing. Qualitative case studies are characterized as particularistic—focused on a particular situation or phenomenon, descriptive—complete literal description of the happening, and heuristic—illuminating the reader’s understanding of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998).

A “case” is a bounded system delimited by the object of the study (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this study, the case is defined based on the conceptual framework. The purpose of this study is to interpret how principals’ perceived self-efficacy beliefs surrounding positive perception of school, congenial relationships, and a safe school environment impact the academic success of African American males in economically disadvantaged high schools. The phenomenon studied was African American male graduation, the economically disadvantaged high

school served as the boundary of the case, the unit of analysis was principal self-efficacy beliefs; this study focused on three cases.

Research Questions

The research questions were derived from extensive examination of the related research. Since the quantity of economically disadvantaged high schools with exemplary graduation rates for African American males is significant in the district studied, the researcher sought to capture the impact of principal self-efficacy beliefs on three schools that best meet the criteria for the study. The criteria for studying each school are discussed later in this chapter. The following research questions guide the current study:

- 1) What are the perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates?
- 2) What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding their ability to promote graduation success of African American males in their economically disadvantaged high schools?
- 3) What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding teaching strategies and student learning in order to sustain increased graduation rates among African American males?
- 4) What self-efficacy beliefs impact leadership practices?

Participants

The researcher used purposeful sampling to ensure that the participants selected could provide the detailed information needed for rich case studies (McMillian, 2004; Gall, Gall & Borg, 2003). Three principals of economically disadvantaged high schools in

a suburban-urban school district in Maryland were selected as participants for this study. Though a total of 10 principals were identified as potential participants, the three that emerged as highest performing based on criteria explained in the sample selection section of this study and the two-year trend data provided by Maryland State Department of Education's MDReportCard, were selected. Participants have certification in administration and supervision at the secondary level. Additionally, participants have been the administrative leaders in their current high school for a minimum of four consecutive years.

Sampling Frame

Sample Selection

The study focused on a unique sampling of high school principals in the Darnell County Public Schools system (DCPS); a pseudonym for a suburban school district in Maryland. The district is one of the most diverse school systems in the United States, with students representing more than 168 countries and speaking 143 languages. The district website was examined to gain information used in selection criteria. First, the 25 comprehensive high schools in DCPS were rank-ordered based on the overall percentage of students participating in the Free and Reduced-price Meals System (FARMS) for the 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 school years. The 10 most economically disadvantaged high schools were arranged by “current” FARMS as well as by “ever” FARMS, with FARMS rates spanning from 28.0% to 61.1% for “current” FARMS and 46.2% to 82.5% for “ever” FARMS. Second, to distinguish further, high schools were selected based on an analysis of disaggregated data—the racial, cultural, and ethnic demographics of each high

school. Those with a combined African American and Hispanic population of greater than 60% were ranked-ordered in a descending manner. Next, the researcher assessed the remaining 10 schools' aggregated graduation rate; those above the state average of 76.8% were sorted further. The ranked high schools demonstrated a two-year consistency of disaggregated African American male graduation rates above the Maryland state average of 57.0%. High schools were then prioritized according to the highest FARMS population data, as compared with the highest disaggregated graduation rates of African American male students. Finally, a key distinguishing characteristic for school selection was the tenure of the principal. A minimum of four concurrent years as principal of the selected high school was a requirement. Of the 10 eligible high schools, the principals of the top 3 high schools that met the aforementioned criteria were selected for inclusion in the study—high schools A, B, and C.

In the event that administrators of the three selected high schools meeting the criteria would decline to participate in the study, the researcher collected 10 comparable schools with very similar demographics to include in the study.

Access

After selecting three qualifying economically disadvantaged high schools, contact was made with the district's research office. Permission to conduct the study was sought from the research office, after approval from the Institutional Research Board (IRB). The study involved principal interviews, upon the research office's approval. DCPS has a committee interested in African American male academic achievement and works closely with the supervisor of Diversity Initiatives. A meeting with the supervisor of Diversity

Initiatives was held and a letter of support accompanied the researcher's efforts in the county. Additionally, the Board of Education (BOE) for DCPS has a vested interest in the graduation rates of African American males in the county. The Board has implemented a directive to DCPS to provide multi-year trend data related specifically to the graduation rates of African American males.

The researcher contacted each selected high school principal and provided a description of the study. A request for permission to interview the principal for the study accompanied the description (Appendix C). Because the study indicates that each selected high school is exemplary amongst several other high schools regarding graduation rates and aligns with the district's initiative to address the issue of academic success of African American males, the researcher believed that each principal would be positive about participating in the study. Upon agreement, the researcher scheduled a preliminary meeting with the principal to further discuss the study as well as discuss and agree on data-collection techniques during the primary interview, which was scheduled within a two-week window. At that time, the researcher requested that the participant sign the consent form (Appendix D). The researcher discussed what would be required of the principal in terms of time for the interview(s). The researcher then assured the principal that when reporting the findings, his or her name would not be used.

The researcher acknowledged that a professional relationship with all high schools of DCPS (including schools A, B, and C) existed but would not be a factor in the objective collection of data for the study.

Informed Consent

Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form upon introduction to the study (Appendix D). They were informed that their participation was voluntary and they could opt out of the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefit. Additionally, participants were informed that their primary interview would be recorded.

Confidentiality

Participants were informed that the results of the research study might be published but that their identities would remain confidential and their names would not be disclosed to any outside party. Additionally, participants were informed that there were no foreseeable risks to them. They were informed that pseudonyms for school district, schools, and principals would be used to ensure confidentiality.

Schools at a Glance

Three high schools that met the uncompromising requirements were selected—School A, School B, and School C.

School A: The racial composition of High School A was 27.3% African American, 36.9% Hispanic, 23.7 % White, 9.4% Asian, and 2.7 % other. The percentage of students who ever received FARMS for the years examined in this study was 60.5%. The overall graduation rate was 86.8%. The graduation rate for African American males was 87.3%; 30.0 percentage points above the state and 35.3 percentage points above the national average. The

principal of High School A (*Principal A*) is an African American female who has held the lead administrative position consistently for the past six years.

School B: The racial composition of School B was 29.3% African American, 40.0% Hispanic, 21.9% White, 5.8% Asian, and 3.0% other. The ever FARMS rate was 63.5%. The overall graduation rate was 82.9%. The graduation rate for African American males was 87.7%; 25.9 percentage points above the state and 30.9 percentage points above the national average. The principal of High School B (*Principal B*) was an African American male who has held the lead administrative position for the past 10 consecutive years.

School C: The racial composition of School C was approximately 22.5% African American, 58.5% Hispanic, 8.0% White, 10% Asian, and 1% other. The ever FARMS rate was 82.1%. The overall graduation rate was 84.5%. The graduation rate for African American males was 87.5%; 30.5 percentage points above the state and 35.5 percentage points above the national average. The principal of High School C (*Principal C*) was a White male who has held the lead administrative position consecutively for the past seven years.

Instrumentation

Two instruments developed by the researcher were used to collect the data for this study—the principal preliminary interview questionnaire (Appendix A) and the principal primary interview questions (Appendix B). The preliminary interview questionnaire was the first method of collecting data from principals and provided the researcher with detailed background information; participants were asked to reply to a list of demographic items. These items included participant's gender, age, ethnicity, highest degree earned, number of years as an educator, number of years in administration, and number of years in present school. The primary interview questions were the second method of data gathering from principals. Interview questions for this instrument are designed to delve into the beliefs of participants about their ability to lead, impact others, and effect change.

Research questions conducive to ascertaining participants' self-efficacy beliefs were used to develop the interview questions. The interview questions were also based on findings from the literature that addressed self-efficacy beliefs.

Data Collection

With the role of the principal as academic leader increasingly defined in terms of academic achievement, a principal's sense of efficacy played a critical role in meeting the expectations. This study did not quantify each principal's sense of self-efficacy but sought to describe each principal's belief in his or her ability to promote graduation of African American males in their economically disadvantaged high schools. The interview is the main road to multiple realities (Stake, 1995). This study relied on interviews from

three principals that led economically disadvantaged comprehensive high schools with African American male graduation rates above the national and state averages. The researcher also collected applicable documents that reinforced principals' interview responses about their beliefs and strategies affiliated with promoting graduation, particularly for African American males.

Interviews

The purpose of the study was to assess how principals' perceived self-efficacy beliefs surrounding three key components—positive perception of school, congenial relationships, and a safe school environment of three high school principals in three economically disadvantaged high school campuses impact the academic achievement of African American males. Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them (Merriam, 1998). Based on the fact that the researcher “wants to find out what is in someone else's mind,” (Patton, 1990 p. 278), each principal was interviewed according to the semi-structured format.

The interview format was the main source of data collection for the study. The semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to develop questions that elicit specific information desired from all respondents (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, the semi-structured interview also allowed the researcher to develop a list of open-ended questions.

All primary principal interviews were conducted at each principal's home school or a location of their choosing. Interviews were recorded with the consent of each principal and spanned a total of 1 to 1.5 hours. The researcher transcribed all interviews

using Microsoft Word and took copious notes to increase the validity of the data. Transcriptions were stored in the researcher's database as well as on the researcher's password-protected global sky drive.

Document Analysis

While the preliminary and primary interviews were the main source of collecting data, several documents also were collected and examined. The researcher obtained each school's improvement plan and website information in order to ascertain what strategies align to meet the graduation needs of African American males. For additional background information, Maryland state assessment information for each school also was obtained by the researcher. This information allowed the researcher to identify the level of proficiency that African American males achieve on the Maryland state assessments. The aforementioned information was obtained by the researcher before each participant's primary interview began. Each school's plans for special activities, academies, and/or programs were requested during the participant's primary interview. This information also was used to ascertain the participants' self-efficacy beliefs.

Data Analysis

The researcher used the Creswell (1998) Data-Analysis Spiral as a tool to guide the data- analysis process: collecting relevant documents, managing material acquired in the collection process, reading available information critically, and representing the analyzed data. The researcher manually analyzed and managed the data. Bloomberg, L & Volpe, M. (2008) suggested that this process would allow the researcher to see visual displays of the data as the researcher moved through the analysis process. The researcher

was concerned about the limitation of the mechanical handling of data and felt more comfortable using charts (Berg, 2004; Merriam, 2009). The researcher used coding as the categorizing strategy. Coding occurs at two levels—identifying information about the data and interpretive constructs related to analysis (Merriam, 1998). Codes are considered labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study; Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to this as descriptive coding while Beazley (2007) called this buckets. A preliminary list of codes was created by the researcher prior to data collection, as suggested by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1994). The preliminary list included three broad categories—sources of self-efficacy, impact on teaching and learning, and leadership. The researcher gained a general sense of meanings from the concepts by sorting through all interview responses and aligning responses with each research question. A color-coding system was created to align data question by question based on responses. The analytical process used to establish an organizational trail was derived from the content of the responses contained in each category (Creswell, 2008).

Further assessment found reoccurring and applicable broad concepts. The researcher sought to further identify and describe patterns and themes from the perspective of the participants, then attempted to understand and explain the emerging themes (Creswell, 2003; Agar, 1980). Data were tallied (see table 3) to capture emerging patterns and themes in order to gain an understanding of the inquiries; relationships to each research question were made. The researcher found that the key concepts that emerged became the new core broad categories and thus restructured the broad categories into four core themes—student support, policy implementation, teacher training, and

data. The systematic process of analyzing the textual data allowed the researcher to develop codes that addressed the theoretical perspective. Utilization of the data-reduction process revealed further differentiated subcategories. These emerging subcategories became subthemes. Data were further categorized to align with the four sources of efficacy—mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states.

According to Miles and Huberman (1994) qualitative data analysis should consist of three components—data reduction, data display and conclusion, drawing, and verification. The researcher used the research questions to guide the development of preliminary codes in order to facilitate data reduction. Core themes stemming from principals' beliefs were used— student support, policy implementation, teacher training, and data. The researcher maintained Microsoft Excel spreadsheets and created charts that displayed participants' coded responses. The researcher verified and ensured validity through the provision of detailed descriptions and through the triangulation of data to convey findings. Triangulation was obtained through the use of multiple sources of data, such as the preliminary questionnaire, the primary interview, a review of Schools at a Glance reports for each participating high school, MD Report Card assessments, and school and county website information. The documents were collected to verify and support participants' responses.

The audit trail of the strategies used within this study has increased the transferability for future researchers studying the phenomenon of self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools. The audit trail details the process used by the research and has numerous benefits (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Describing

decisions taken to arrive at certain judgments during data analysis enhances transparency (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The audit trail strategies used by the researcher included the following:

- 1) Conduct interviews
- 2) Write notes during interviews
- 3) Transcribe interviews
- 4) Manually analyze and manage data
- 5) Code each interview
- 6) Use notes to re-code data
- 7) Assess codes to align with research questions.

The researcher used peer debriefing in order to enhance the accuracy of findings (Creswell, 2003, 2007). A colleague with more than 27 years of executive-level leadership in the area of education and who has participated in more than 10 dissertation committee defense sessions reviewed data collected. The colleague posed questions that facilitated the researcher's thinking about the relevance of participants' responses as they related to the research questions. The colleague suggested that the researcher further align the patterns of responses related to the four developing research themes. In addition to peer debriefing, the researcher used an external auditor (Creswell, 2003), who provided an assessment of the qualitative data collected.

Human Participants and Ethics Precautions

Human participant and ethical precautions were considered. Steps were taken to ensure that the confidentiality of each participant was protected, as described in the Data Collection section of chapter 3. The list of participants and the corresponding codes was

separated from the data and locked in a secure location. Data was destroyed at the end of the study. Permission to complete the study was sought from the University of Maryland's Office of Human Research Institutional Review Board.

Limitations

The study was conducted with the following limitations:

- 1) The results are limited to the self-reported belief statements of the principals selected for the study.
- 2) The results are limited by the self-disclosure of participants.
- 3) The results are limited by the possibility of multiple responses from a single participant

Summary

The multi-case study was designed to include in-depth interviews to gain further understanding of the self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates. Amongst the three cases, the researcher used within-case analysis followed by cross-case analysis. Within-case analysis allowed the researcher to gain familiarity with data and preliminary theory generation. Cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to look beyond the initial impressions and improve the likelihood of accurate and reliable theory close fit with the data (Huberman & Miles, 2002). The emerging themes and the findings of the study are presented in chapters 4 and 5.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter presents the analysis of data collected through the two-phase interview process that each participant completed in this study—the preliminary questionnaire and the primary interview. This qualitative case study was designed to examine the self-efficacy beliefs of three high school principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high graduation rates for African American males. Describing the perception of each principal's self-efficacy beliefs regarding African American male academic achievement and graduation was the focus of the investigation. The researcher was interested in discovering what principals believe about their ability to facilitate change in their schools, more specifically, principals' belief in their ability to promote graduation of African American males.

Efficacy beliefs are developed through individual cognitive processes that weigh the influence of efficacy-shaping information obtained through four sources—mastery experience (past performance), vicarious experience (interpretation of own ability compared with another), social persuasion (encouragement feedback from others), and affective states (interpretation of emotions). A principal's sense of efficacy is defined as the principal's judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004, 2005). A principal's sense of efficacy and his or her perceived capability to lead is necessary, particularly with regard to goal

achievement in the areas of instructional leadership, administrative leadership, and moral leadership. Tshannen-Moran & Gareis (2004) suggests that principals may be able to have an impact on not only school effectiveness but that principals with strong self-efficacy beliefs are better able to cultivate a higher sense of efficacy in the teachers, resulting in stronger motivation and improved performance of not only teachers but also, indirectly, students.

Chapter 4 includes descriptions of each of the three high school principals, each of the three high schools, and an in-depth analysis of data collected from audio-recorded primary interview sessions. The collection of data occurred in two phases: Phase 1 of the interview process contained five multi-part, open-ended questions (see Appendix A) while Phase 2 of the interview process contained five multi-part questions (see Appendix B) specifically aligned to the research questions.

Case Descriptions

Three principals of economically disadvantaged high schools provided data for this case study. The participants in this study were selected based on a sampling strategy outlined in chapter 3. The primary interview session began with a review of the study's purpose and the participants' role in the study, addressing any questions, obtaining the completed preliminary background questionnaire, and obtaining a signed informed consent form noting an agreement to participate in the study by recorded interview. The descriptive information for the participants' demographics is detailed in Table 1. One of three participants was female and two were male. Two of the participants were African American and one was White. The participants' education was reported as all having

both a bachelor's and master's of education while two of the three had doctorate-level degrees. Both African American participants had doctorate degrees.

Table 1

Attributes of the Three Principals in the Study

Attributes	Principal A	Principal B	Principal C
Gender	Female	Male	Male
Ethnicity	African American	African American	White
Highest degree earned	Doctorate	Doctorate	Master's
Years as a teacher	10	15	7
Years as an administrator	21	21	13
Years at current high school	6	10	6

Table 2 provides an overview of the demographics of the three high schools that the study participants lead. The following narrative tells the story of each school and details the self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates.

Table 2

School Demographics

School Demographics			
	Principal A's High School A	Principal B's High School B	Principal C's High School C
Enrollment	2000+	1400+	1180+
African American (%)	27.3	29.3	22.5
Hispanic (%)	36.9	40.0	58.5
White (%)	23.7	21.9	8
Asian (%)	9.4	5.8	10
Other (%)	2.7	3.0	1

Principal A

The principal of High School A (*Principal A*) is an African American female who has held the lead administrative position consistently for the past six years. Prior to coming to Darnell County Public Schools, she served as a principal in other school districts for nine years. Self-described as an excellent student who was academically in the top 10% of her graduating class during her comprehensive high school years, Principal A was a teacher and curriculum writer for 10 years prior to entering administration.

High School A has an aggregated enrollment of more than 2,000 students, which has increased steadily for the past three years. The current Free and Reduced-price Meals

System (FARMS) rate is 36.5%, while the percentage of students who ever received FARMS for the years examined in this study is 60.5%. The racial composition of High School A is 27.3% African American, 36.9% Hispanic, 23.7 % White, 9.4% Asian, and 2.7 % other. The overall graduation rate is 86.8%, while the graduation rate for African American males is 87.3%. Among professional staff of 18.2% African American, 73.6% White, 5% Hispanic, and 3.2% other; 83.7% of the professional staff has myriad years of experience, ranging from a minimum of 5 years to more than 15 years in education. Nearly 90% of all School A's classes are taught by highly qualified teachers. School A has consistently met Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for African Americans from 2008–2011; overall AYP has been met for the past two of three consecutive years. School A has more than 13 career academies and/or support programs.

Though the level and strength of self-efficacy was not measured in this study, Principal A expressed a very strong belief in her ability to evoke change and elicit a desired outcome in accordance with African American male academic and graduation success. Principal A's efficacy beliefs stem from 21 years of experience as an administrative leader. One focus of Principal A's goal to ensure academic and graduation success was to establish a leadership team that understood the purpose and utilization of data. She believed that as principal she must make sure that [the leadership team] understood that there was an expectation that data were analyzed on a weekly basis to monitor student graduation as a whole. Additionally, Principal A explained that the depth of analysis of data included disaggregation of race groups in order to place specific supports in place for all students. When Principal A was asked to explain her belief about her ability to ensure graduation success for African American males, she explained

that, as the lead administrator, she put programs and strategies in place and outlined expectations; that under her leadership programs specific to African American males have been put in place. Principal A discussed that not only is there a large population of African American males in her high school but there is also a large population of African students with specific and unique needs. Special emphasis with staff has been communicated through professional development regarding addressing the needs of that immigrant population. Principal A's belief in communicating with family and parent representatives about the supports and strategies in place to help their children be successful was a priority. Moreover, Principal A indicated a strong belief that under her leadership, a positive school culture, and an inclusive community were essential to academic success and must be demonstrated by the entire adult staff—from the building service and cafeteria team to all professional staff. Principal A expressed a strong student-focused directive behind her belief in the ability to cultivate an environment of high academics for all cultures. Aware of her school's demographics and respectful of diversity, Principal A believed in setting expectations about school culture and climate with her staff so that students and parents feel that they are treated as fairly as all other backgrounds. Another proponent of Principal A's student-focused directive behind her belief in her ability to promote success was her strong belief in implementing the reinforcement of positive teacher rapport, mentorship, and curricular connection and engagement with her staff as instrumental to African American male academic and graduation success. Additionally, for professional staff, Principal A implemented time in the work day for Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to share best practices for

better curricular engagement and development of background knowledge strategies in order to positively affect student learning.

Principal B

The principal of High School B (*Principal B*) is an African American male who has held the lead administrative position for the past 10 years. He served as a principal in other districts for six years prior to coming to High School B. Self-described as a very good student during his comprehensive high school years, Principal B was inspired to become an educator by a high school teacher. A teacher for 15 years prior to entering administration, the desire to move ahead professionally inspired Principal B's decision to enter the realm of principal leadership.

High School B was constructed before 1960 and was modernized in 2004. The aggregated enrollment of 1,421 students has increased consistently for the past three years. The current FARMS rate is 36.8%, while the ever FARMS rate is 63.5%. The racial composition of School B is 29.3% African American, 40.0% Hispanic, 21.9% White, 5.8% Asian, and 3.0% other. The overall graduation rate is 82.9%, while the graduation rate for African American males is 87.7%. The professional staff consists of 35.6% African American, 51.9% White, 6.7% Hispanic, and 5.8% other; 80.6% of the professional staff has myriad years of experience, ranging from a minimum of 5 years to more than 15 years in education. Ninety-four percent of School B's classes are taught by highly qualified teachers. School B has met AYP for the African American population for the past three consecutive years and has more than eight career academy programs.

Principal B had a strong belief in his ability to evoke change and elicit a desired outcome in accordance with African American male academic and graduation success by “concentrating efforts on the individual student.” He indicated that his core values center on the idea that educators have to look at African American males in particular as individuals, isolate them from the group as a whole, and develop specific strategies and interventions in order to connect with the student and with the student’s family. Principal B’s efficacy beliefs stem from 21 years of experience, successful or otherwise, as an administrative leader. He believed that focusing on the individual student allows an administrative team to develop specific strategies and interventions that can be used to connect with the student and his family. Principal B indicated that, as the instructional leader, his sense of efficacy was heightened when he experienced success with implementation of unconventional policies. To address a problem that disproportionately affected African American males, Principal B eliminated the district’s controversial “loss of credit” policy in his high school. The loss of credit policy holds students accountable to a certain amount of seat hours, regardless of their grades in the class. Principal B indicated that he believes that teachers must challenge and engage students as well as make curricular connections. If this is done, students will come to their classes. Principal B indicated that, as the instructional leader, he must make sure that teachers understand the need for relevancy and the ability to show connection. When asked to assess his beliefs about teacher rapport with the African American male, Principal B indicated that relationship is the bottom-line; in fact he defined the need for relationship with the African American males in his school as “critical.” “What I have found is that African American males who have the strongest relationships with teachers are the most

successful.” Principal B spoke with conviction when he described how the African American males, particularly at High School B, who think and believe that a teacher is in their corner, show the greatest amount of success.

Principal C

The principal of High School C (*Principal C*) is a White male who has held the lead administrative position for the past seven years; he was a principal in other districts for six years prior to coming to High School C. Principal C taught in schools with student demographics ranging from high poverty urban to highly affluent suburban settings before coming to High School C. The desire to make a difference inspired his decision to move toward principal leadership.

High School C has an aggregated enrollment of 1,181 students, which has remained consistent for the past three years. The current FARMS rate is 61%, while the ever FARMS rate is 82.1%. The racial composition of School C is approximately 22.5% African American, 58.5% Hispanic, 8% White, 10% Asian, and 1% other. The overall graduation rate is 84.5%, with a graduation rate for African American males of 87.5%. With a professional staff of 22% African American, 64% White, 7.5% Hispanic, and 6.5% other, 86.8% of the professional staff has myriad years of experience ranging from a minimum of 5 years to more than 15 years in education. Based on High School C’s Schools at a Glance Report, more than 96% of the professional staff is highly qualified. Highly qualified indicates that a teacher has advanced professional certification and graduate-level college degree(s). High School C has met AYP for the past three years

and has more than eight career academy programs. High School C is recognized for several extremely rigorous and successful science-based career programs.

Principal C explained that he strongly believes that every student can learn to be successful and wants to be successful but that something must be holding students back if they are not being successful. Principal C's efficacy beliefs stem from 13 years of experience, successful or otherwise, as an administrative leader. When Principal C was asked to explain perceptions of his belief about his ability to ensure graduation success for African American males, he explained that he and his leadership team try to get African American males to understand that they have to work hard in order to be successful. The main focus of High School C is "nothing is by accident." When the leadership team speak to identified African American males, they equate the aforementioned message with successful sports stars. "Sports stars put in a lot of time on the practice field and the weight room, learning what it takes to be successful ... great students do the same thing." Principal C strongly explained that he must instill the belief in his students that they must have a personal belief that they can be great students. For that reason, Principal C focused on building rigorous career programs, building supports for students, training teachers, and building positive student relationships. In order to do this, Principal C provided professional development centered on race relations by lead researchers in the field of African American male studies. His staff then implemented strategies for success.

Principal C explained perceptions of his efficacy through successes experienced as an administration. He discussed his strong belief in preparing students in High School C for college; hence, he developed the concept of having his own "home-grown

Advanced Placement student.” He begins in Grade 9 with targeted supports and a plan for students to transition from on-level courses to a more rigorous course load. Principal C explained that he expects that every student will take either an Advanced Placement course(s) and/or a college course(s) before graduating from High School C. Since his school was denied the funding to begin an Advancement program, he began his own with the support of the community.

Rationale for Presentation of Findings

Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments (Ross & Gray, 2006; Bandura, 1997). A principal’s sense of efficacy is a judgment of his or her capabilities to structure a particular course of action in order to produce desired outcomes in the school he or she leads (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004; Bandura 1997).

In the next section of this chapter, the research findings are presented. The principals in this study did not explicitly discuss sources of efficacy; instead each participant shared responses which reflected mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and affective states as they related to Research Questions 1 through 4. The researcher did not want to influence participant answers by asking questions that guided responses along a compartmentalized path of the four sources of efficacy. Instead, interview questions were developed to yield responses from participants that reflect their perception of self-efficacy—ability to evoke change based on a specific event or topic—related to leading African American males toward academic achievement and graduation success, through teaching strategies and student learning and leadership practices. The researcher sought to elicit an authentic and transparent response from

participants, and then align beliefs and experiences with the four categories of efficacy operationally defined by the researcher in chapter 1 of this study. Bandura (1986) asserted that self-efficacy beliefs have a significant effect on the choices that people make, the challenges they are willing to face, the level of effort they exert in facing challenges, and the persistence they demonstrate when challenges are particularly difficult. The researcher used aligned interview questions to collect data. Data collection and analysis provided the basis for addressing the following research questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates?
- 2) What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding their ability to promote graduation success of African American males in their economically disadvantaged high schools?
- 3) What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding teaching strategies and student learning in order to sustain increased graduation rates among African American males?
- 4) What self-efficacy beliefs impact leadership practices?

Self-Efficacy Findings Related to Research Questions 1 and 2

Individuals develop, maintain and update their self-efficacy beliefs through a constant process of intake, interpretation, and evaluation of four primary sources of information (Virga, 2012). The responses from research questions 1 and 2 resulted in overlapping experiences described by participants and are reported collectively.

- 1) What are the perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates?
- 2) What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding their ability to promote graduation success of African American males in their economically disadvantaged high schools?

Perceptions of Mastery Experiences

Mastery experiences are the most influential of the four sources of efficacy. These beliefs are defined by past success and failures. Successes build a robust belief in one's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Principal A:

- I believe that working with my leadership team to access data and address concerns in order to develop a plan of success for [African American male] students. The leadership team reviews data through root-cause analysis and addresses the issues. From attendance problems to the number of minority students in on-level and AP classes, I believe in attacking a problem early and putting supports in place; we've had success.
- My role as principal is to make sure that everybody understands that it is an expectation [that we look at data] and monitoring our graduation as a whole. But then digging down in the data and disaggregating it and making sure that the supports are in place to

make sure that our students are not just graduating but that our students are preparing for the next level.

- I have established a collaborative problem-solving team (CPS).
The CPS team meets weekly and addresses students who are not doing well. A specific counselor is designated to address the needs of students who have failed specific courses and/or specific state-mandated examinations for graduation; goals are set, and a plan is put in place.

Principal B:

- In my particular case, I have been at [High School B] for 10 years and I have seen five classes graduate. I have specifically followed two classes from 9th to 12th grade; I start with the students in the ninth grade as their administrator, I [matriculate] with them to the 10th grade, I [matriculate] with them to the 11th grade, I [matriculate] with them to the 12th grade, and I graduate them! So I get to know them for four years; their strengths, their weaknesses. I get to work with their families in proposing plans that will work for them. This is done by all of my administrators.
- [High School B] has had a couple of after-school mentoring programs but just implemented a new after-school program geared toward courageous young men. We started that program with a summer institute sponsored by many sponsors. Young African American and Latino males went through a series of workshops

dealing with study skills, financial literacy, managing anger, and behavior. I know the program is working because we have had no problems out of any of the participants so far this year.

Principal C:

- There's no reason why our students shouldn't graduate. What [the leadership team] has noticed is that we must keep kids on track and keep them moving along. For this reason, I have implemented and strongly believe in the "high school plus" course after the scheduled school day. This program captures ninth graders who haven't passed certain state-mandated examinations and courses required for graduation; also, a ninth grade academy was established to help watch students closely.
- I have established meetings with my administrative team to assess the needs of students that are already potentially falling behind during the first quarter of the school year. The ninth grade year is critical but the 10th grade year is just as critical. So, we have individual meetings with each student, get them extra help and supports through high school plus, and communicate our plan with their parents for home support as well.
- I've approved many after-school mentoring programs because I've found that instant connections are made.

Perceptions of Vicarious Experiences

Vicarious experiences impact efficacy beliefs through observing others who have success or fail at specific tasks. Bandura (1997) contends that even those who are highly self-assured will raise their efficacy beliefs if models teach them even better ways of doing things. Each principal shared vicarious experiences:

Principal A:

- Our students are preparing for the next level; just being a role model myself and talking to students about them going to college; letting them know about misperceptions of having to have a 3.5[gpa] or 3.0[gpa] to get into college.
- It is my role as principal to set a tone to the entire staff that we have high expectations for our students and that it's our job as educators to make sure that our students are prepared.
- [Observing] the relentless effort of the leadership team, inclusive of teachers, counselors, and administrators, to develop plans of success for with low achieving students in order to keep them on track, engaged, and interested in attending and graduating from high school.
- Observing teachers in professional learning communities where teachers are able to talk about what works with students, what doesn't work, and coming up with strategies.

Principal B:

- [Observing] the success of students on the cusp of failing actually matriculating from ninth grade to graduation with the supports of an individualized strategic and supportive plan.
- [Observing] African American male students develop positive relationships with teachers and believing that the teacher believes in them and will push them to succeed.
- I have seen two African American males in the last two years graduate in three years. They were both troubled in the ninth grade...and then I worked out a plan that they were going to graduate in three years. One is in a four year college and the other is in community college.
- Observing the benefits of community partnerships and mentorship programs; especially seeing an increase in confidence and school performance through the participation of mentorship programs for African American males.

Principal C:

- Observing the success of students transitioning from an on-level to an honors and Advanced Placement student through the assistance of a strategic and supportive plan.
- I've observed that if you walk around High School C after school, you will [observe] quite a few students behaving in a very

appropriate way. My idea is that everyone should be here, it's a safe place. It's a place where there are many adults that care about them. Where as long as they behave and act in an appropriate manner then they are welcome here...and I think they get that. Because we do kick them out and we are very clear on why we are kicking them out if they are acting in an inappropriate way.

Perceptions of Social Persuasion Experiences

Social persuasion experiences impact efficacy through an individual receiving meaningful encouragement or discouragement reinforcement from others. This component of self-efficacy is very influential and reinforces the idea that one is capable of completing a task. The perception principals possess regarding their capacity to master specific activities can be influenced verbally. Successful social persuasion is measured by perceived self-improvement on the behalf of those being influenced. The researcher focused on social persuasion as a dyadic behavior through which leaders can influence followers and vice versa. Specifically, the role of social persuasion's influence on actions and self-regulation was captured. Bandura (1989) stated "...people's perceptions of their efficacy influence the types of anticipatory scenarios that they construct and reiterate. Those who have a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides for performance and they cognitively rehearse good solutions to potential problems" (p. 1176). Each principal shared social persuasion experiences:

Principal A:

- Specifically when my [leadership team] looks at data, we poignantly discuss and analyze most areas [where] our African American and Hispanic students are lagging behind our White students. So, we focus our discussion specifically on making sure we have supports in place for students.
- We believe in our students, not just one group but we believe in all of our students and push them to succeed. We have a theme at our school called, “We Believe” and we talk about three things all the time—getting our kids to graduate from high school, preparing them for whatever their dreams are, and preparing them for whatever they want to do after graduation.

Principal B:

- High School B’s leadership team has persuasive and supportive discussion with students’ families in proposing plans and interventions for students. And when need be, I intervene with academic programs, plans, and schedules.
- I believe that following students from ninth to graduating and dialoguing with students is key to our success and our high graduation rate for African American males. It’s because there is a connection.

- I have communicated a huge incentive for students to graduate early. I am looking at that as a possible way to move some of my less motivated African American males to graduate in three years.

Principal C:

- The students who end up giving up and dropping out are the ones who by the time they are 17 or 18 years old and only have 10 total credits [towards high school graduation] get discouraged. So, in analyzing data [the leadership team] has continually discussed helping students get to their junior year on time with the amount of credits they need, then we get them to graduate.
- I try to give students what they want and what they need to feel included in High School C. For example, I had a discussion with student who wanted a step team here at High School C. The important thing to students is that we are listening to them. So, to show students that we do hear them, I worked with an outside department and they came and developed a step team here at High School C. If you are going to teach students, then they have to believe that you care about them... and that you hear them.
- Conversations and professional development activities with staff regarding practicing progressive measures affiliated with race

relations and diversity, and having staff implement strategies for success.

Perceptions of Affective States

Affective states experiences encompass physiological and emotional factors the can affect individuals' belief about their efficacy. These experiences refer to perceptions of levels of excitement or stress concerning leadership tasks that are interpreted as the principals' ability to function effectively. Principals described the affective states experienced as the lead administrator in their schools and the way the varied interactions, already described as contributing to mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, and social persuasion, also contributed to affective states. Each participant shared affective states experiences:

Principal A:

- I get frustrated when I see students getting disconnected from school and frustrated with school. I can't put my finger on it but, if we provide supports early then we can fix it.
- We have a positive culture at High School A and I am proud when the culture and climate is conducive to learning and the expectation that all can succeed is expressed by the entire community; the message has been established that High School A is a safe place for learning.

Principal B:

- It really frustrates me to see students with their head on desk during instruction; especially if the teacher allows it to happen. I expect to see students engaged during instruction.
- I appreciate when [African American male] students demonstrate the belief that they have a personal belief that they can be a great student. This from the mentorship programs, teacher relationships, and relevance in the curriculum High School B has provided under my leadership.

Principal C:

- It annoys me when funding requests from the district were denied even though there were proven data to show need for supports and resources in order to sustain academic success for the target population. It motivates me to seek funds from community stakeholders and continue with my plan.
- Frustration when confronted with African American male students who have bought into the notion that they are not academic, and believe that people who are successful are born that way.

Self-Efficacy Findings Related to Research Question 3

What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding teaching strategies and student learning in order to sustain increased graduation rates among African American males?

Perceptions of Mastery Experiences

Principal A:

- I work with counselors to review our Advanced Placement courses and increase the number of students taking advanced courses.

Really zooming in on those kinds of things, getting more minority students in advanced classes and increasing the number of students taking honors classes. We make sure that all of our minority students are not dumped into on-level classes.
- My leadership team and I work with our middle schools. We have two feeder middle schools to partner with our after-school program geared toward African American male support, and its working. It's working with our whole cluster and saying [to the students] that these are the expectations [when you get to high school].
- [The leadership team] and I identified a gap in background knowledge and noticed it impacted student learning. So, we focused our [attention] on our teachers; making sure that they incorporate background knowledge and build on background knowledge in instruction. This is good instruction regardless of whether you have Latino or African American students in a class.
- I've worked with city representatives to put supports in place to fund the position of the young man who sponsors our mentorship program. That's working. It takes a village.

Principal B:

- One of the things I do is mini observations of teachers. The purpose is for me to not necessarily observe the teacher but to observe the [actions of the] student. Observe student engagement and observe how the teachers engage the student. I follow up with the teacher, the expectation is an explanation and planning of how [he or she is] going to engage the student so that the next time I observe, I don't have to deal with that question again.
- Relationship building is critical and is very important. In dealing with some issues, [I] have to be flexible with how [I] deal with the individual student in order to provide opportunities to be educated in a manner that does not turn them off, or cause them to become disengaged and unmotivated.

Principal C:

- I'm all about the relevancy of curriculum, that's why I'm a believer in the academy system here at High School C. I meet with academy [leaders] and they give the administrative [leaders] a presentation about what they are going to do for the year. How are [courses] connecting to the real world? How is what is being taught in the classroom relevant to [students'] lives?
- When I meet with parents and I meet with students, I talk about our job here at school is to open as many doors as possible. But,

unfortunately by [students] not doing well [they] are closing the door right behind them. So we have to make sure that we keep the doors open in order [for students] to be successful.

- My belief is that unless [students] are really applying the knowledge, [students] are doing nothing but regurgitating facts. And if you are only regurgitating facts, you really haven't learned anything. High School C is really focusing in on project-based learning. We make sure that what students are doing in the classroom and what they are learning is applied.

Perceptions of Vicarious Experiences Shared by Principals

Principal A:

- I have noticed that background knowledge certainly impacts our students' learning. Our students sometimes have not been exposed to enough.
- I've had to go to our city to say, "Continue to fund this position!" I've had our African American males speak at the city meeting to say, "We need to continue having the mentoring program at High School A." Because the organization serves our 100 young men. Addressing things from every which way helps.
- I've seen the mentoring, leadership, and the discipline that [students] get; ...getting students involved. Helping our college bound students gain access to college through our college institute

program. High School A has expanded in this area. We've had so many students benefit from the structure of our leadership program.

Principal B:

- What I have found is that African American males who have the strongest relationships with teachers are the most successful. The African American male in particular who thinks and believes that a teacher is really on [his] side and in [his] corner will show the greatest amount of success. I've seen that when an African American male feels that the teacher is not on [his] side and does not support [him], [he] gets totally turned off [from the class] and shuts down.
- I've seen our teachers volunteer to support the graduation efforts of students on the graduation target list. The teacher works with the student, administrator, and family to get the child through; acting as a mentor. If the teacher has him in the class, [the teacher] will help [the student] in that class and also in his other classes by constantly reminding [him] that this is what [he] needs to do. Reminding the student that the teacher is working with [him] to get through this together.

Principal C:

- Observing the success of the Advancement Program in other districts then modeling that success and developing their own Advancement Program. The Advancement Program is a college readiness system designed to increase school-wide learning and performance. The Advancement Program accelerates student learning, uses research-based methods of effective instruction, provides meaningful and motivational professional learning, and acts as a catalyst for systemic reform and change.
- I've observed the success of professional development workshops where staff members partake in sessions with topics such as progressive race relation and diversity training. This has helped with relationship building.

Perceptions of Social Persuasion Experiences

Principal B:

- One of the things as the instructional leader is that whenever I observe teachers, I have a post-observation conference. I discuss the need for relevancy for students, discuss connections to the concept, and discuss if they are taking the connections student make seriously... even if it's far- fetched and doesn't make any sense to them; it may be relevant to the student.

- I discuss with my teachers that from a critical thinking standpoint, [students] should be able to share with [teachers] why a particular concept is relevant in the way in which they articulate it... and then it becomes an “ah-ha” moment for [students] and perhaps for the teacher. The teacher never thought of the concept in the manner that the student explained... so it becomes a two-fold educational purpose. It educates not only the student but it educates the teacher.
- By the time I come in for another 5x5 observation of a teacher’s classroom, the teacher knows that I am going to ask the same question again, “Are students engaged?” So, they make sure that I see more student engagement and participation, more opportunities for critical thinking on the part of the students so that the curriculum becomes relevant to them.
- I impress upon the teacher the importance of the connection with family. If the student is not performing, we have to make the connection [with the family]. If the teacher does not make the connection with the family and the child is not passing the class, the teacher knows that they have to provide make-up work for the student...because I am not going to get into an argument about that topic. Parents know the policy, “If my student falls two letter grades the teacher is supposed to contact me and I was never contacted!” My teachers know what is expected.

Principal C:

- I have conversations with students and try to get them to understand that they have to work hard in order to be successful. One of the main points that we put in place at High School C is that nothing is by accident and it takes a lot of hard work and effort.
- We brought in a Hispanic speaker from Los Angeles who was in a gang, and he talked about what it took to become very successful, what it took to get there, and where he is today. We are doing the same thing with our African American males, bringing in successful African American males to talk to the about what it took in order for them to be successful; cultural connections.
- I meet with teachers and have a discussion about how what they are doing in the classroom must be relevant to students' lives. I encourage teachers to get students to understand that what they are doing today does make a difference in what they will be doing later in life.
- The Engineering and Science academies validate for me that students have really learned the material frontwards and backwards and they are doing unbelievable projects... the students enjoy it.

Perceptions of Affective States

Principal A:

- Getting students involved gets me excited. Say for instance a student wants to play football, we help him reach his goal because if that's what's going to keep him involved and that's going to get him to graduation. We've done a lot of little things that add up to make [their goals] happen and get them across that stage. It gets me excited just thinking about it.
- I get frustrated when teachers don't pick up on the fact that there is a reason that students aren't achieving. If we don't have teachers that attack that [mindset] right away, then I believe that leads to student disconnection.

Principal B:

- What I find most interesting is when I find that teachers are unwilling to go down that path with the students particularly with African American males, it completely turns them off. It frustrates me to see their thoughts and their feelings being discounted and not being important; relevancy of curriculum is not important to them and they don't want to learn anymore because it doesn't relate to them. Therefore, somebody has blocked that door for them.

- So, if I go into a classroom and I see African American males that are sitting with their heads down on the desk and not engaged at all I really get upset. I then make a notation in my observation for the teacher.
- I feel personally responsible for students who are in my cohort because I've been with them for four years; they are like my children and I've got to see them through, see them across that stage... and then you're done and you can move them onto society but, they often come back for guidance, advice, assistance, and direction on what to do after high school.

Principal C:

- Last year for the first time since I've been at High School C, our males outperformed our females. Usually our females outperform our males. We looked at that and we looked at the gender and tried to figure that out... how we can get our males to perform at a higher level; especially since the higher percentage of our school is male. This was a tremendous accomplishment.
- When I came to High School C, I was shocked my first year when students would come to me with straight Es and they were bright students! The students were like, "Well, I don't like that teacher". That's how they were getting back at the teacher. They didn't really see their future. They didn't make the connection. Rapport is huge.

Self-Efficacy Findings Related to Research Question 4

Research Question 4 for this study asked, “What self-efficacy beliefs impact leadership practices?” Each principal recalled mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion experiences, and experiences of affective states when asked to describe perceptions of their self-efficacy beliefs as the instruction leader of an economically disadvantaged high school with high African American male graduation rates. The participants shared detailed examples of varied experiences that impacted their leadership practices during their tenure as principal at their current high school.

When asked to describe experiences and actions that participants believe contributed to their successful leadership, the responses focused on three important aspects—leadership continuity, student support and community partnerships, and strategic decision making. The most prevalent experiences expressed by the participants were described as mastery experiences. This aligns with research that explains that mastery experiences are the most influential sources of efficacy and are defined as past successes and/or failures that have a direct impact on an individual’s self-efficacy. None of the three participants shared a failed experience that could be categorized as a mastery experience.

Leadership Continuity

Each of the three principals discussed the importance of their leadership tenure at their respective schools and the significance of their leadership teams. The responses of each participant regarding leadership continuity were best shared by Principal A.

- Principal A: “Prior to me coming to High School A there had been turnover of principal leadership every two years. Having been at High School A for six years, I think it is hard to have continuation of programs and supports, expectations, and instruction. I work closely with my administration team at establishing and communicating the expectations and the focus [of our school]. Our leadership team focuses on instruction, we review data and we discuss root-cause analysis. We look at why students are not doing well on the SAT and the ACT and the whole college piece.”
“Having continuity in leadership contributes to our success. Not just at High School A but in our whole cluster, we haven’t had much turnover in leadership...and that helps.”

Working with a strong leadership team provided further mastery experiences for each participant. Principals A and C discussed how hiring strong professional staff was instrumental. Each discussed strategic hiring practices as best described by Principal C.

- Principal C: “Another thing I’ve done is hire male teachers and more minority teachers. For the first time in High School C since I’ve been here, our male students have outperformed our females!”
With hiring more minority professionals, Principal C also noted the success of relationship building. “One of the things that when I came here I experienced right away was the need for relationship building with our teachers and our students. We have spent three

years talking about relationship building and studying courageous conversations about race and things like that. As a school, we really delved into the race and relationship building to make sure that we recognized what we were doing with our students and how we interacted with our students. This made a difference.”

Student and Community Focused Support

The data collected revealed that principals were instructional leaders who had high expectations for themselves and all staff. Participants emphasized the fact that students were their top priority. Ensuring that students had access to supports and resources was a repeated response from each participant. Experiences discussed by principals ranged from an individual plan of success or the intervention of support programs before, during, and/or after school to several after-school mentorship programs. Principals reflected their top priority—student learning.

- Principal A: My role as principal is to make sure that everyone understands that there is an expectation that supports are in place for students. Our students are not just graduating, but our students are preparing for the next level. I consider myself a role model and clarify misconceptions that students may have about getting into college. I send a message to my entire staff, not just teachers but counselors, the college-career counselor, security, and custodians that we develop a culture of graduating and college going. My role

as principal is to set a tone that we have high expectations for our students, we believe in them. We make sure that students know how to capture credits; we have specific programs for target populations, special mentorship programs, and more math supports.

- Principal B: I get to work with students' families in proposing plans that will work for them. At times, I intervene with the students' academic schedule. I impress upon teachers the importance of that connection with the family. The bottom line is relationship; it's connecting with that student and connecting with that family.
- Principal C: I've found that once students fall behind, they get discouraged and it's very difficult to get them caught up. So, in looking at data I've created an academy for ninth graders to support students who fall behind. We get them in for extra help, extra support, communicate with parents, have individual one-on-one meetings to keep them moving along. Also, I really am focusing in on project-based learning and making sure that what students are doing in the classroom and what they are learning is applied. I have corporate partners, after-school clubs like robotics and engineering, and several mentoring clubs and programs to support students.

Strategic Decision Making

Two of the three principals, Principal A and Principal C, routinely discussed data-driven decision making as impacting leadership. They shared experiences of routinely meeting with leadership teams to assess data before initiating a course of action designed to support student achievement. They shared a strong belief in making informed decisions about the varied programs, expectations from teachers, culture, and supports in their high schools.

- Principal A: I put things in the forefront and set the culture and the climate at High School A that certain things are important. Keeping track of our data and monitoring where our students are is important. Analyzing our data and monitoring our graduation as a whole as well as digging down into the data and disaggregating it to make sure supports are in place is important. Sending a message to my entire staff that we expect to develop a culture of graduating students is important. Setting a positive school culture and climate where the entire community, even our stakeholders, knows that we have a tone of decency at High School A and that “We Believe” in our students, “We Believe” in our Purpose, and “We Believe” in our school.
- Principal C: I look closely at data concerning our achievement gap. I take a lot of pride in the fact that it is very important for us to compete with the “affluent” schools and that all of our students should be competing at that level. When I set goals, I set goals not

only by the school data but, I disaggregate the data by race and ethnicity. I do this to make sure that everyone is brought to the same expectation. I try to make sure that everyone is reaching these goals... that we are not leaving one group behind. One thing I've done is hire male teachers and more minority teachers to support our climate. The climate of our school is huge! The whole school has a part in getting the students to feel like they belong here; that this is a safe place and a place of learning. I've expressed to staff that we must focus on literacy and student engagement. I've implemented a policy where it is expected that teachers are available to students twice a week during lunch. The effort is successful and eligibility went up! Everything went up last year, eligibility, SAT, ACT, and all major targets!... just by getting students in the classroom and getting them supports.

Principal B discussed the fact that strategic decision making did not always follow the status quo but sometimes had to challenge the normal state of things. If a policy, initiated by the county, did not match the needs of his students he initiated an alternative.

Principal B: Of course one main goal of mine is to try to keep students in school and keep them free of trouble; that's a main goal. The other data I look at is the higher number of suspensions from schools of our African American and Hispanic males. So, what I had to do is bend the rules a little bit in order to create an

environment in which [students] can prosper and grow. Some situations may call for suspension but, instead of a suspension going on a student's record for minor things, I deal with it flexibly. I believe you have to be flexible and deal with the individual student in order to provide the opportunities to be educated and in a manner that does not turn the student off. Additionally, I've made decisions about our graduation target list, which is a list of 50 some-odd students that were technically retained from 11th and 12th grade because they didn't have the necessary credits to be promoted. I request teachers to volunteer to support the graduation efforts of students on the target list. The job of the teacher is to act as a mentor and work with the student, administration, and the family to get the student through to graduation.

Summary

Three principals described experiences and beliefs which were categorized by the researcher into the four applicable components of self-efficacy—mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective states. Principal A has been the instructional leader of High School A for 6 years. High School A's student population is 60.5% Ever FARMS and 64.2% African American and Hispanic. Principal A expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy through evidence of her expectation that data are analyzed in order to support students. She explained that, as the lead administrator, she put programs and strategies in place and outlined expectations. Moreover, Principal A indicated a strong belief that, under her leadership, a positive school culture and an

inclusive community was essential to academic success and must be demonstrated by the entire adult staff.

Principal B has been the instructional leader of High School B for 10 years. High School B's student population is 63.5% Ever FARMS and 69.3% African American and Hispanic. Principal B expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy through evidence of his belief in concentrating efforts on the individual student. He shared myriad experiences that demonstrated his core values which center on the idea that educators have to look at African American males in particular as individuals, isolate them from the group as a whole, and develop specific strategies and interventions in order to connect with the student and with the student's family.

Principal C has been the instructional leader of High School C for 6 years. High School C's student population is 82.1% Ever FARMS and 81.0% African American and Hispanic. Principal C expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy through evidence of strong belief that he must instill the belief in his students that they must have personal belief that they can be great students. For that reason, Principal C focused on building rigorous career programs, building supports for students, training teachers, and building positive student relationships.

Cross-Case Findings

The exploration of the perceptions of principals' self-efficacy beliefs regarding African American male academic achievement and graduation success began with principals responding to phase 2 of the interview process; five multipart questions aligned to the four research questions (see Appendix B). The information from the recorded

interview was analyzed by the researcher for emergent themes based on the analysis and interpretation of qualitative research by Creswell (2003). Analysis of the data revealed four categories that participants referenced recurrently throughout the interview process. Using the established color code system, each participant's pertinent response was placed with a corresponding research question. Similar topics were compiled into large general categories designated as core themes and specific interrelated concepts that emerged within the core themes were designated as subthemes.

Table 3 represents the core and sub-core theme categories. The four identified core themes were student supports, policy implementation, teacher training, and data-based decision making. The rationale for identifying core themes was derived from the content of the responses contained in the category. Each subtheme reflected the participants' perceptions of their ability as a principal to structure a particular course of action regarding African American male graduation success. Within the student supports core theme were the subthemes of leadership continuity, relationships, and specified strategies. Within the policy implementation core theme were the subthemes of culture and climate, early intervention, and hiring. Within the teacher training core theme were the subthemes of rapport and curriculum. Within the data core theme were the subthemes of community partnerships, taking action, and communication.

Table 3

Identified Subthemes Related to Core Themes

Core Theme	Subtheme	Subtheme	Subtheme
Student Support	Specified Strategies	Relationships	Leadership Continuity
Policy Implementation	Culture/Climate	Intervention	Hiring
Teacher Training	Rapport	Curriculum <i>Connections</i> <i>Engagement</i>	
Data-Based Decisions	Community Partnerships	Taking Action	Communication

Table 4 represents the percentage of tallied responses which correspond with the four established core themes.

Table 4

Core Theme Responses

Core themes	No. of participants responding	Response (%)
Student Support	3	40
Policy Implementation	3	25
Teacher Training	3	20
Data Based Decisions	3	15

Each participant shared responses which reflected mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and affective states. These components of self-efficacy were categorized once the core themes and sub themes were established. The researcher did not want to influence responses by asking questions which guided responses along a compartmentalized path of the four sources of efficacy. Instead, interview questions were developed to ask participants about their belief about their ability to evoke change based on a specific event or topic related to African American males. The researcher sought to elicit an authentic and transparent response from participants and then align beliefs and experiences with the four categories of efficacy. Bandura (1986) asserted that self-efficacy beliefs have a significant effect on the choices that people make, the challenges they are willing to face, the effort they exert in facing challenges, and the persistence they demonstrate when challenges are particularly difficult. School principals have a significant impact on the academic achievement of their students (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1997). In the next section of this chapter, the cross-case findings are presented.

Student Support

The student support core theme emerged as participants shared mastery experience and vicarious experience examples when explaining their leadership roles. Interview questions 1, 3, and 4a were aligned to specifically emit responses that capture the essence of principal self-efficacy beliefs. The concentration of responses in this core theme exemplified the importance credited by participants.

Within the student support core theme, data were further concentrated to reflect subthemes and pertinent responses. Three emergent subthemes—leadership continuity, relationships, and specified strategies—proved most significant with recurrent responses referring to the aforementioned aligned interview questions. Of the three emergent subthemes, specified strategies pertaining to the needs of the African American male as an individual had the greatest coded repetitive response. The subthemes that represented each participant's intrinsic belief in his or her ability to evoke change as a principal were relationships and leadership continuity.

All principal strongly believed that they established strategies in their schools that specifically supported the achievement and graduation success of African American males. Strategies included developing teams of professional staff that identify and support students in jeopardy of failing, developing programs during the day such as high school plus and select academies which address students in need, strategic classroom observations from administrative staff which focus around student involvement and engagement, application of culturally sensitive research to address a target population, and role model mentors unique to the target population.

Because they were in the lead administrative position at their respective high schools for well over a graduation cycle of four years, each participant believed there was a direct connection to seeing their plans through to fruition. Each participant explained how continuity in leadership, from the principal to the assistant principals, instilled trust from staff, students, parents, and community partners that they cared about the community and were there to see things through. As best summarized by Principal A:

Having been at High School A for 6 years makes a difference. Prior to me coming to High School A they had principal turnover every two years. So, I think it's hard to have a continuation of programs, supports, expectations, and instructions. I work with my leadership team to establish expectations and focus on instruction. We've established supports throughout the entire school day and beyond, including after school and on Saturdays. We haven't had much turnover in leadership in my cluster and that helps; we work well together. Our grade-level teams work together and focus on student-centered issues as well as best practices for success ...since I've been here. We've talked about and I expect positive relationships with students. I've implemented a student support period to help students get extra help and make up work; this makes a difference. Students were getting too many zeroes!...that equals failure! The support period supports students during the school day.

Principal C shared a unique student support experience created for African American students at High School C. Principal C explained, "Some of our African American students tutor at Elementary School C, one of our feeder elementary schools. This benefits our high school students as much as it benefits the elementary student. We've found that our students benefit because it helps the African American males see themselves in a different light. So, now all of a sudden, they are the experts and they are the ones that the kids are looking up to. It gives them a sense of pride. We've found that their grades go up when they do the mentoring and tutoring."

Policy Implementation

The policy implementation theme emerged most prominently and most consistently when addressing interview questions 2, 3, 4a, 4b, 5a, and 5b, which aligned with research question 2. Three subthemes emerged within this core theme: culture and climate, intervention, and hiring. The responses in the three subthemes echoed participants' beliefs as they reflected on their ability to ensure graduation success, the root cause of African American male low performance, and factors impacting the education experience for African American males.

Of the three subthemes that emerged for research question 2, culture and climate and intervention had an equal number of recurrent coded responses from participants and were reiterated more prevalently than the hiring subtheme. The subthemes contained responses from all three participants in the study; each reported his or her belief in implementing policies that targeted a mindset of success. Principal A stated the following:

“Because our African American males have been a group that needs different kinds of supports, we’ve put some classes in place for students who’ve failed a ninth grade course.” “We work with the ninth grade because it’s so critical that kids get stuck and we’ve worked with our African American males that if they get stuck in the ninth grade and you don’t address it right away then it can become perpetual, but we have to give our kids hope...” We put things in place to give our kids hope.” “Somewhere at the elementary level where our young [African American] men fall behind in reading and math ...that if we don’t catch those

things at a younger level and really put some extensive supports in place, then I think that is where we have seen some of the struggle.”

Many of the responses of the participants expressed their belief that the individual student must be addressed and the specific needs of that student be aligned. Principal B stated the following:

“My core values center around the whole idea that we have to look at African American males in particular as individuals and isolate them from the group as a whole.” “...and so we concentrate our efforts on the individual child, on the individual students; then you can come up with specific strategies and interventions that you can use in order to connect with the student and connect with his family.” “I start with the students in the ninth grade and get to know them for 4 years; proposing plans that will work for them...interventions that we may need ...and times when I need to intervene with academic programs, plans, schedule.” “All that is done by me as the grade-level administrator; it’s done by all of my administrators.” Principal C stated the following:

“First I believe that every student can learn, ...be successful, and wants to be successful but, something is holding them back if they are not being successful.”

“So, it’s my belief that we need to provide all the resources that we can to enable them to be successful; for some that’s after-school supports or lunch-time supports...it’s to find out what’s holding them back and to find a target support that will reach them... and finding who the students are on an individual basis.”

“Ninth grade year is critical so we have a ninth grade academy to help watch kids.

We have meetings with students who are already potentially falling behind and now we are going to round them up and have individual meetings with them and capture them now instead of waiting.”

The subtheme culture and climate was infused repeatedly throughout the interview process; it coded equally as relevant as the intervention subtheme. Each of the three participants discussed implementing policies demonstrating the established and expected culture of their high schools. Principal C expressed the opinion that climate has a huge impact on student success. “I think that if students don’t feel comfortable with coming to school then that impacts attendance; attendance rate has more to do with climate and culture of the school than it does anything else.”

Principal A stated, “We know we must have a climate where people believe in our kids and that people understand that our kids come from varied backgrounds, family structures, economic situations... and so just educating our staff and having a climate where everyone is expected to make kids feel connected.” “We put processes in place ...this is a safe place, there are expectations for behavior, there are expectations for dress... we have established that this is an educational environment.”

Principal B discussed the school environment as being a safe place, but believed it was even more than that. When addressing data he examined the number of suspensions and found that the African American and Latino males were highest. “In order to create an environment in which [African American males] can prosper and grow, I’ve implemented a policy which is an alternate to suspension.” He went on to state “...in dealing with some of these issues you have to be flexible in how to deal with the

individual...back to the individual child again.” Principal B believed opportunities need to be provided to African American males that do not turn them off in order to prevent them from being disengaged and unmotivated.”

Though relevant, the subtheme “hiring” was mentioned less frequently than the other two subthemes found within the policy implementation core theme. Each of the three participants discussed intentionally hiring minority male professional staff to purposefully expose African American males to like professionals. As summarized by Principal A:

“One thing that I have done is hire more African American males; there are more African American males in the school than when I became principal.” Principal A further explained, “Several African American male professionals have been placed in key positions to assist with the mentoring process and really advise and push students to do what they are capable of doing.”

Principal B explained, “I questioned how my staff could get our males to perform at a higher level, especially since the highest percentage of our school is male. One thing that I have done is hire male teachers and more minority teachers. Coincidentally, last year for the first time in High School C’s history since I’ve been here, our males outperformed our females.”

Teacher Training

Within the core theme of teacher training, which arose from compiled and aligned data pertaining to research question 3, were two subthemes: rapport and curriculum.

Participants discussed that, while they may implement policies to be enforced, they do

not actually teach curriculum to students. As the instructional leader of their high schools, each principal explained his or her belief in the utmost significance of the relationship between student and teacher. They all believe that they need to set expectations and provide professional development for staff to deal with their diverse high school populations, especially the African American male population.

All three participants explained that they believe that students must feel connected to the school and therefore must be engaged. Each principal explained that students who were connected were more likely to graduate. Each principal also explained that teachers must outline expectations as well as ensure support for students, pick up on the fact that a student is not achieving, and not let complacency happen, because it leads to disconnection.

Principal B stated the following:

“Relationship building is critical and is very important. What I have found is that African American males in particular who think and believe that a teacher is really on their side and in their corner show the greatest amount of success. The African American male who feels that the teacher is not on his side and does not support him gets totally turned off and shuts off. What I find most interesting is when I find that teachers are unwilling to go down the path with the students, particularly with African American males, it completely turns them off. So, then they see their thoughts and their feelings as being discounted and not being important; somebody has blocked that door for them.”

Principal C stated the following:

“I came from a high school with different demographics where everyone was going to college and knew it from birth; they didn’t need relationships. My first year here I was shocked when smart kids would come to me with straight E’s and they were like, “...well I don’t like the teacher.” That’s how they were getting back at the teacher; they didn’t really see their future, didn’t make the connection that they were hurting themselves. I believe that my role is getting teachers to understand that because... if [teachers] don’t like [students], they know how to turn [students] off and they know how to get students to fail. It’s getting teachers to understand that they can use the relationship in a real positive way to get kids to do what they would like them to do and to get them to be successful. There is no bigger answer to success here at High School C than the relationship piece.”

Each participant believed that teacher rapport could make or break students’ success. This could be done through enabling as well; feeling sorry for the underachieving student and watering down the expectations. Principal C said, “Some teacher will say that they are sorry for them, so they don’t challenge them; so then, they are really hurting them.” Principal A stated, “We’ve done professional development, we’ve instituted Professional Learning Communities (PLC) so teachers are able to talk about what works with students, what doesn’t work, and come together to come up with strategies.”

As responses were coded regarding African American male student learning, the second subtheme curriculum could be further aligned to include connections and

engagement. The perceptions of each participant proved similar with regard to connection and engagement to curriculum for the African American male. Each participant described how, if students were connected to coursework, success in the course increased. Teachers are asked how their instruction connects with the real world and how it connects with the students' world. Principal C stated, "My belief is that, unless you are really applying the knowledge, you are doing nothing but regurgitating facts and then they really haven't learned anything." Principal C further explained, "We really are focusing in on project-based learning; making sure that what students are doing in the classroom and what they are learning is applied." Each participant discussed exposing students to the college experience and has implemented a college institute component to their curriculum, where students can earn college credits while in high school. Each participant also discussed varied career programs of study with curriculum that directly provides opportunities for students to work in the career field while in high school as well as earn national certification. High School A leads the county with the number of students entered in the college institute programs as well as the number of programs of study for students in a comprehensive high school. Participants believed that, from a critical-thinking standpoint, African American males should be able to share with teachers why a particular concept is relevant in the way in which the African American male articulates it; right or wrong. Participants believed that this validates students and sparks interest.

Data-Based Decisions

Within the core theme of data-based decisions, which arose from compiled and aligned data pertaining to research question 4, were three subthemes: community

partnerships, taking action, and communication. Contents in the community partnerships subtheme included the idea that, as lead administrator of a high school, it takes more than one administrator to bring about success. Participants mentioned they need, not only an in-school community of partners such as their lead administrative team, resource teachers, and counselors, but also partnerships with affiliates such as the county's recreational department, the county's central office departments, county National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), local community colleges, sponsors of several major national mentorship organizations, and local feeder middle schools.

The taking action subtheme contained an equal number of responses as the community partnership subtheme. The content of the taking action subtheme indicated that principals actively identify select areas of need pertaining to African American males and other populations, retrieve data, establish teams to analyze data, implement strategies, and evaluate progress. Principal A stated, "Specifically, when we are looking at data, we are looking generally at most areas where our African American students and our Hispanic students are lagging behind our White students." Principal A further explained, "We are looking at our data and monitoring our graduation data as a whole but then digging down and disaggregating it." Principal C said, "We look at closing the achievement gap and take a lot of pride in the fact that it's very important for us to compete with the successful suburban schools. Additionally, "We set goals not only by school but by race and ethnicity."

Contents in the communication subtheme included the idea that information and expectations need to be presented to the appropriate audience in the appropriate manner.

Participants discussed how developing a vision and mission for the school is one thing. If it is just sitting on a wall and no one knows what it means or what it represents, then it is not effective. As summarized by Principal A:

“My role as principal is to make sure that everybody understands that there is an expectation that there is a theme of “We Believe.” We talk about three things all the time... we believe in our students, we believe in our school, and we believe in our purpose. Sometimes there is a misconception about getting into college. I send a message to my entire staff, including teachers, counselors, and college-career counselors, about making sure that we develop a culture of graduating and a culture of college-going.”

Results and Conclusions

Data were assessed through a process of organizing descriptive wording, refining, coding, pattern matching, and categorizing information into core themes and subthemes. Core themes and subthemes emerged about perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of three principals of economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high graduation rates for African American males. The researcher transcribed each participant interview verbatim; then self-coded a large quantity of contextual data. The focus of qualitative research is on participants’ perceptions and experiences, and the way they make sense of their lives (Creswell, 2003). Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is the participants’ realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). The coding process produced 358 coded references, which the researcher quantified into percentages of responses supporting the identification of patterns and themes. The researcher categorized references using

similarities of words, phrases, and concepts and placed them into core themes and subthemes within each core theme. Questions from the primary interview were aligned to the research questions and to the identified thematic categories. Core themes and subthemes were identified for each research question as aligned with responses.

Within the sequential order of subthemes, which are based on participant frequency and repetition of response, the four core thematic categories were arranged under the research questions. Content of the subthemes in each core theme facilitated an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the participants. Figure 1 is a graphic display of the sequential representation of the research questions, core theme categories, and subthemes.

Research Question 1 contained one core theme cluster with codes divided into three subthemes representing 40% of the total contribution to the data analysis. The contents of this core theme cluster provided information from participant experiences and their personal reflections on what they deemed essential to encouraging African American males. The student support core theme was further divided into subthemes, specified strategies, relationships, and leadership continuity.

Research Question 2 contained one core theme cluster with codes divided into three subthemes representing 25% of the total contribution of the data analysis. The contents of this core theme cluster provided information from participants about their beliefs regarding specific expectations and implementations established by them and their teams to promote graduation success for African American males. The policy implementation core theme was further divided into subthemes, culture/climate, intervention, and hiring practices.

Research Question 3 contained one core theme cluster with codes divided into two subthemes representing 20% of the total contribution of the data analysis. The contents of this core theme cluster provided information from participants about their beliefs regarding the influence of teachers on African American males and what ability participants have as instructional leaders to evoke exemplary instruction. The teacher training core theme was further divided into subthemes, rapport, and curriculum. The curriculum subtheme was further divided into two elements: connection and engagement.

Research Question 4 contained one core theme cluster with codes divided into three subthemes representing 15% of the total contribution of the data analysis. The contents of this core theme cluster provided information from participants about their beliefs regarding ideal which impact decisions, influences, and supports. The data core theme was divided into three subthemes, community partnerships, taking action, and communication.

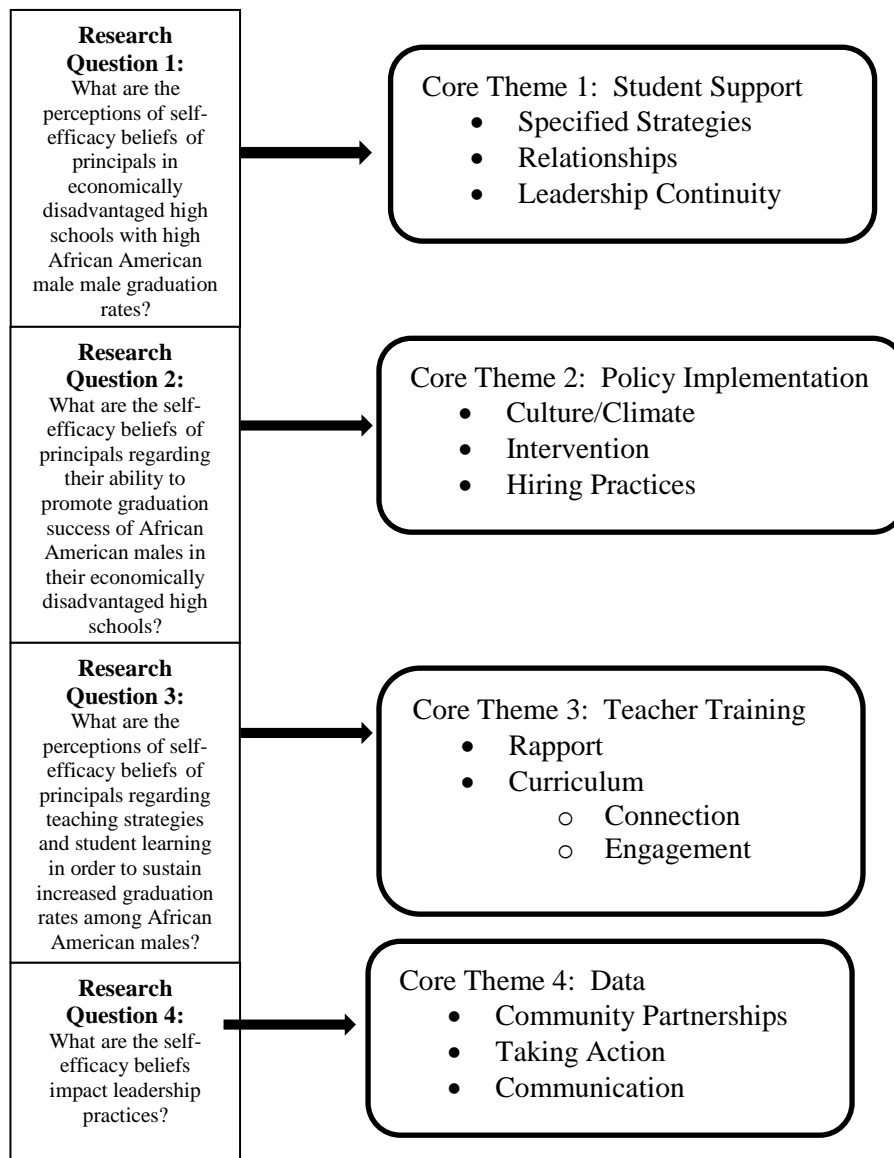


Figure 1. Sequential arrangement of research questions, core theme categories, and subthemes.

Summary

Chapter 4 began with an explanation of the purpose and a review of the research questions established for this qualitative case study. The procedures taken for data collection, explanation of participants' roles, and protecting confidentiality and

anonymity were presented. An explanation of the data-collection process, which included the audio-recorded face-to-face interview as well as a discussion on the data analysis was presented. The case description section of the chapter included background information on the participants, each participant's unique perspective, and each high school's demographic information. The participants confirmed that their sense of self-efficacy was significantly influenced by mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and affective states, as identified by Bandura (1977). In several instances, the principals' mastery experiences reinforced their belief in their own capabilities; each had led their school to exceptional levels of African American male academic and graduation success. Within the cross case findings section was a discussion on the emergent core and subthemes, as aligned with principals' efficacy beliefs pertaining to the academic and graduation success of African American males. The results and conclusion section included a summary of the analysis and the connections of the analysis to the research questions.

Chapter 4 contents accentuated the self-efficacy beliefs of high school principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates. The contents highlighted participants' beliefs about their ability to promote graduation success in African American males, their beliefs about teaching strategies and student learning in order to sustain increased graduation rates among African American males, and what they believe impacts leadership practices. The responses from the participants provided insights about their view of their leadership and an understanding of their perspective within the context of leading the effort of successfully graduating African American males.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This study described the perceptions of the self-efficacy beliefs of three high school principals of economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high graduation rates for African American males. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of each principal's self-efficacy beliefs regarding African American male academic achievement and graduation. This chapter is organized into the following sections: research summary, summary of findings, recommendations for future research, recommendations for policy and practice, and conclusion.

Research Summary

Context for the Study

This study took place in the Darnell County School Public School System, a public school system with one of the highest graduation rates for African American males in the United States. In spite of the aforementioned accolade, Darnell County's graduation gap between African American males and White males was 22 percentage points for 2011. The district's strategic plan recognized that there was more work to be done to eliminate the achievement gap—plans to lead systemic change in the renewing of its efforts to ensure equity and excellence for all students so that academic success is not predictable by race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, language proficiency or disability. Several principals took it upon themselves to implement a plan of action to ensure success for all students.

Research Problem

The principal is characterized as the chief executive officer who assumes the ultimate responsibility for the success of the school (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001). The accountability demands to shrink the achievement gap require attention to issues of leadership conceptualization and practice (Adams & Kirst, 1999). Research shows that, from one generation to the next, equitable access to high-performing public educational systems can break down the barriers to success and change the future trajectory of historically disadvantaged students (Schott 50 State Report, 2010). Today's young African American males are in a state of crisis; educated African American males are an endangered species. Significant research has focused on factors that have a positive impact on academic achievement and ultimately the graduation rates of African American males—positive school-related growth experiences, emphasis on teacher-student relationships, didactic learning, and emotional support (Toldson, 2011). Few studies have examined the impact that principal leadership beliefs have on the graduation of African American males. Exposure to principals with a strong sense of efficacy in their leadership skills may inspire African American males to achieve. Therefore, it is practical that this study would add to the understanding of administrative leadership seeking solutions to producing high graduation rates for African American males.

To address this void in the research, the researcher conducted a study of principals with high graduation rates for African American males. This inquiry was informed by existing research, reviewed in chapter 2, which confirms that many leadership behaviors and traits of principals have a positive relationship to student achievement, student attitudes, and social behavior. The researcher sought to contribute to district practices and

the research on principal self-efficacy by identifying specific experiences and actions that develop a strong sense of self-efficacy in principals.

Research Questions

This qualitative case study explored the following research questions to provide the structure for data collection and analysis:

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates?

Research Question 2

What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding their ability to promote graduation success of African American males in their economically disadvantaged high schools?

Research Question 3

What are the self-efficacy beliefs of principals regarding teaching strategies and student learning in order to sustain increased graduation rates among African American males?

Research Question 4

What self-efficacy beliefs impact leadership practices?

Research Methods

The experiences of three high school principals were examined in this multi-case study to describe the perceptions of their self-efficacy beliefs and determine how they promoted high African American male academic achievement and graduation within their schools. Chapter 3 explained the research design and methods employed in this study, and chapter 4 provided a background of the principals, a description of the schools, and a detailed summary of the data collected. The principals were selected using a sampling process described in chapter 3. The researcher conducted in-person interviews, which followed an interview protocol. The researcher recorded, transcribed, and analyzed the interviews, looking for themes in the qualitative data. This analysis produced findings regarding the principals' perceptions of self-efficacy beliefs.

Summary of Findings

Study Participants

Three principals described experiences and beliefs, which were categorized by the researcher into the four applicable components of self-efficacy: mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective states. Principal A has been the instructional leader of High School A for 6 years. High School A's student population is 60.5% Ever FARMS and 64.2% African American and Hispanic. Principal A expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy through evidence of her expectation that data are analyzed in order to support students. She explained that as the lead administrator she put programs and strategies in place and outlined expectations. Moreover, Principal A indicated a strong belief that, under her leadership, a positive school culture and an inclusive

community were essential to academic success and must be demonstrated by the entire adult staff.

Principal B has been the instructional leader of High School B for 10 years. High School B's student population is 63.5% Ever FARMS and 69.3% African American and Hispanic. Principal B expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy through evidence of his belief of concentrating efforts on the individual student. He shared myriad experiences that demonstrated his core values, which center on the idea that educators have to look at [African American males in particular as] individuals, isolate them from the group as a whole, and develop specific strategies and interventions in order to connect with the student and with the student's family.

Principal C has been the instructional leader of High School B for 6 years. High School C's student population is 82.1% Ever FARMS and 81.0% African American and Hispanic. Principal C expressed a strong sense of self-efficacy through evidence of strong belief that he instills the belief in his students that *they* must have a personal belief that they can be a great student. For that reason, Principal C focused on building rigorous career programs, building supports for students, training teachers, and building positive student relationships.

Principal Self-Efficacy

Each principal affirmed that his or her self-efficacy beliefs were considerably influenced by mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and affective states. The following findings are based on the interviews with three high school

principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates.

Finding #1: The researcher found that each principal aligned accounts of experiencing mastery with instructional leadership, leadership continuity, student-focused support, and strategic decision making; these experiences reinforced principals' beliefs in their abilities evoke change.

Finding #2: The researcher found that principals related valued vicarious experience to them being a role model for students, staff, students' family members, and community stakeholders to exhibit expectations and school culture and climate. This belief especially aligned with witnessing successful and positive student rapport. Principals further shared that vicariously experiencing the success of the target population strengthened their beliefs in their ability to lead, which thus became the catalyst for them to implement additional plans of action.

Finding #3: The researcher found that social persuasion experiences that were an encouragement to principals were affiliated with collaborative communication between the principal and his or her leadership teams regarding supports and encouragement to students and their families; collaborative communication with teachers regarding instruction and student engagement, especially through cultural connection; and collaborative conversations with community stakeholders regarding supporting students and school programs.

Finding #4: The researcher found that experiences of affective states were far less communicated by principals than any of the other three components of self-efficacy.

Experiences that reaped frustration seemed to fuel principals' course of action; causing principals to seek alternative measures to fulfilling their intended goals. Discussions of other frustrating affective states experiences developed from witnessing disengaged and disconnected students. This also fueled a course of action from participants. Positive affective states experiences derived from principals observing the success of a plan of action pertaining to program implementation, professional development of teachers, and student engagement and achievement.

Discussion of findings: Principal self-efficacy beliefs as they relate to African American male achievement and graduation success

Finding #1: Student support. Bandura's theory of triadic causation states that human agency occurs within a dynamic interplay among three components: behavior, internal personal factors, and the external environment (Bandura 1997). The principals reflected a strong sense of efficacy with regard to their own personal factors and the impact on their behaviors; specifically supporting African American male students with academic and graduation success.

The principals in this study felt that inclusive support strategies that focus primarily on the needs of the individual student are best to use when dealing with African American male students. Their comments were indicative of a strong sense of efficacy in their ability to carry out responsibilities as a principal, and they triumphantly accepted the demands and stressors of leading their schools. The findings of this study revealed that all of the principals interviewed established programs specifically designed for African American males and established teams of professional staff designated to identify

students in jeopardy of falling behind. One principal established this in the ninth-grade year. Professional staff identified barriers to success for students; developed and implemented a plan; communicated that plan with the students' support team of teachers, parents, and administrators; and evaluated the plan throughout the students' high school tenure. Students fail to graduate when a plan to graduate is not developed or systematically communicated. System communication between home and school includes continuous discussion of plans. The absence of such plans may communicate unintended messages about college readiness and abilities (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2009). Principals reemphasized their belief in supporting African American males, both individually and as a group, with specific mentorship programs, both during and after school. Principals expressed that their long tenure as lead administrator availed them to seeing [things] come to fruition. This communicated to the high school community that the administrative leaders believed in the students and were committed to seeing [things] through.

Finding # 2: Policy implementation. All principals emphasized their belief in the importance of establishing a culture of respect and “believing in” the ability and achievement of African American males in order to promote graduation success. This aligns with Toldson, (2008, 2009, 2010), which found that high-achieving Black male students had a positive perception of school, had congenial relationships with teachers, and felt safe in the school environment. All principals discussed several experiences, both frustrating and successful, that strengthened their beliefs about their ability to evoke change; especially with the African American male population. Mastery experiences included successes they had achieved with implementing policies and seeing positive

results, such as developing professional learning communities for staff, developing unconventional policies to address the needs of African American males and prevent barriers to graduation, developing after-school programs, developing mentorship programs, and working with the leadership team to assess data and address concerns in order to develop plans of success.

The theme that emerged when principals were asked about their beliefs regarding their ability to promote graduation success of African American males was their ability to establish, implement, and reinforce policy specifically geared toward keeping African American males on track for graduation. This finding aligns with Felner (2007), which noted that higher levels of implementation intensity and fidelity were important to getting major gains in achievement and adjustment among more socially and economically disadvantaged students. Students often rise to the level of expectations set by the adults around them.

Each principal believed in providing a culturally sensitive environment through professional learning communities and professional development of professional staff; including a positive mindset of staff toward support and “buy-in” regarding African American male graduation success. This aligns with Lindsey et. al (2005), which noted that culturally proficient leaders influenced others to make changes in their values, beliefs, and attitudes about students to transform relationships, interactions, and behaviors.

Each principal established unique early-intervention strategies to interrupt the potential of “falling behind” the county’s required academic progression toward

graduation. In addition, and regarding state mandated examinations, each principal established early-intervention programs and strategies to address and remediate low-performing students. Interventions included teams of professional staff to identify low-performing students and develop a plan of action for the pathway to graduation. Also, programs within and after the school day were established to ensure that the needs of all students were being met. Knowing that some of their African American male students may have bought into the idea of a “Cult of Anti-intellectualism,” where African American males resent intellectual pursuits for the fear of “acting White” and not being accepted by peers (Fordham, 2008; Smalls, 2007; Ogbu, 2003; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), each principal conscientiously established hiring practices to reflect the demographics of their school; particularly increasing the number of African American male teachers. The principals believed that this exposure to other African American males in leadership/teaching roles would benefit their African American male students. In this case, principals shared how their beliefs had been enhanced by observing the interactions and strategies of mentors with African American males in their schools’ mentorship programs. These experiences are described by Bandura as vicarious experiences. The principals viewed these as very valuable experiences that caused them to revise their own approach to adopt the strategies being demonstrated. Thus, the self-efficacy gained in the vicarious experience was reinforced and strengthened by an associated mastery experience.

Finding # 3: Teacher training. The principals’ perceptions of their beliefs about their role regarding teaching strategies and student learning in order to sustain increased graduation rates among African American males revealed the importance of teacher

rapport and the engagement and connection associated with curriculum. Principals reported how affective states had influenced their self-efficacy. Emotional arousal usually has a negative effect on a person's self-efficacy, yet high achievers view arousal as an energizing facilitator (Bandura, 1997). As principals discussed their frustrations with observing the disengagement of students during instruction, especially African American males students, it was apparent that there had been a noteworthy emotional element in the experiences. Instead of relenting and avoiding the situations, they addressed their frustrations by implementing a plan of action for administrative teams during classroom observation and expectations for curriculum instruction. The success of the implemented plans reinforced their self-efficacy. Their comments reflected a belief that, if they could address such significant situations, they could address other disadvantageous situations for African American males in their schools. The myriad learning situations described by the principals started with vicarious experiences then continued with verbal persuasion. Once the principals put the plan into action and achieved a mastery experience, their self-efficacy was reinforced and strengthened.

The value of teacher rapport was one of the most significant factors that principals noted had an impact on African American male success. The principals indicated that African American males responded positively to reassurances and encouragement from teachers. They found that when African American male students developed supportive relationships with their teachers, they would work hard to meet these teachers' expectations. Therefore, principals consistently expressed to their professional staff the importance of being culturally sensitive and establishing a supportive rapport with all students, particularly with African American males. Black male students that were

academically successful perceived their teachers to be respectful people who treated them like they mattered and built up their strengths, instead of making them feel bad about their weaknesses (Toldson, 2008, 2009, 2010). Principals exposed their staff to professional development and research related to underrepresented populations and ethnic groups. Not only did the principals discuss the significance of teacher rapport, they also disseminated the expectation of support and encouragement to all adult staff in their schools.

The principals explained the importance of encouraging staff to establish classrooms that engage students. All of the leaders in the study discussed the importance of having a strong curriculum as well as strong delivery of the curriculum. They explained how they expect their teachers to assess and connect background knowledge as well as real-world applications.-Each principal had a significant number of career-based programs of study in their school, which aligned with the students' career interests as well as with the state's graduation requirements. Several programs of study resulted in students obtaining college credits and nationally recognized industry certifications. Other programs culminated with exclusive internships at well-known corporations. Toldson (2008, 2009, 2010) noted that Black males need to believe that school work is relevant and that learning is important to their future.

Finding #4: Data-Based Decision. When answering interview questions designed to conjure a response associated with participants' beliefs about matters that impact leadership practices, the principals studied repeatedly discussed the need to communicate their vision to staff, students, parents, their county's central office administration, and their neighboring community to assess data and involve partnerships. During the

interviews, the principals provided comments about their “on-the-job” experiences. The principals saw the most value in the opportunities to experience mastery experiences through completing effective and impactful tasks, thus increasing their self-efficacy. With the repeated explanation that it takes more than the principal to bring a vision to fruition, each of the three principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high graduation rates for African American males indicated that they seek effective and impactful partnerships with local organizations outside of the school. These select organizations support the high school in many ways, including funding school initiatives and student scholarships, offering internships, and providing meaningful mentorship activities and events. The success or failure of strategies developed to assist African American males rested with the school leadership’s ability to organize various community stakeholders and effectively communicate the needs (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006).

Successful principal leadership involved setting directions, developing people, and redesigning the organization Leithwood and Riehl (2005-stuberfield). Each of the principals in this study emphasized the importance of retrieving and analyzing their schools’ data. Each participant established teams of professional staff to not only assess school data but put a plan into action for each student in need; data-driven initiatives were addressed weekly.

Implication for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have several implications for policy and practice. They suggest that policy makers restructure leadership development programs to include the review of efficacy-developing practices. The principal is viewed as one who monitors and evaluates student progress, emphasizes student achievement, sets clear goals, has knowledge of instructional practices employed by teachers, protects instructional time, and maintains high visibility (Leithwood & Riehl; 2005, Beck & Murphy, 1993, DeBevoise, 1984; Edmonds, 1979; Edmonda, 1982; Hallinger, 1992, Hallinger & Murphy 1985; Hoy & Miskel, 2001; Sweeney, 1982). Principals of today need to demonstrate mastery in a number of roles and under very challenging and stressful circumstances, including the demand on school systems to perform in a politically driven assessment-based paradigm. The findings from this study suggest that the three principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high graduation rates for African American males who participated in this study had a strong belief in their ability to evoke change, understood the needs of African American male students, and implemented strategic plans of action. Bandura confirms that self-efficacy beliefs play a vital role in how the individual approaches tasks, challenges, and stress-filled situations (Bandura, 1997). The participating principals stressed leadership continuity, strategic data-based decision making, individualized student support, policy implementation, and research aligned teacher training. The insights gained from this study indicate that the principals' perceptions of self-efficacy benefit from immersed efficacy-forming situations where mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal

persuasion, and affective states were reinforced. Specifically, the implications for practice from this study include the following:

Recommendation #1: Districts should provide principal leadership teams with collaborative time to research, evaluate, and develop best practices for student achievement.

Recommendation #2: Districts should to provide novice principals with mentors identified as having a strong sense of efficacy who seek to provide mastery, social persuasive, and vicarious experiences for their mentees.

Recommendation #3: Encourage designers of principal leadership programs to become familiar with the research on self-efficacy beliefs and the benefits to effective leadership.

Recommendation #4: Districts should identify principals with strong self-efficacy beliefs that are currently leading student achievement to establish best practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

Self-efficacy research has been abundantly applied to a variety of settings. While the paradigm of self-efficacy is grounded in social cognitive theory, the primary applications regarding the academic setting include areas of student self-efficacy and teacher self-efficacy as well as collective teacher efficacy. Principal self-efficacy is an emerging area that has made significant contributions to student success. The findings of this study have a number of implications for research. For this study, the researcher examined the self-efficacy beliefs of a small sample of principals in economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high graduation rates for African American males. The researcher then used qualitative case study methods to describe the

perceptions of each principal's self-efficacy beliefs regarding African American male academic achievement and graduation success.

The study was limited by the size of the sample and by its single-district focus. In order to add to the understanding of principal self-efficacy and to the understanding of administrative leadership seeking solutions to producing high graduation rates for African American males, suggestions for future research include the following:

Recommendation #1: Examine the perceptions of principal self-efficacy in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates on a larger scale, which includes a comparison of principals from several districts.

Recommendation #2: Examine the collective efficacy beliefs of the administration team in economically disadvantaged high schools with high African American male graduation rates.

Recommendation #3: Examine the similarities and differences in perceptions of principal self-efficacy beliefs in economically disadvantaged high schools with low African American male graduation rates and high African American male graduation rates.

Recommendation #4: Examine the relationship between principal self-efficacy and the level of college readiness of African American males in economically disadvantaged high school with high African American male graduation rates.

Conclusion

The findings that the researcher has reported in this dissertation reveal the self-efficacy beliefs of three high school principals in economically disadvantaged high

schools with high African American male graduation rates and the actions made to address student achievement. The justification for this study evolves from the importance of the school principal as the key agent for setting the tone and direction of the school (Tshannen-Moran & Gareis, 2005). Based on a review of the literature and the results of this study, several implications were proposed. The principals of three economically disadvantaged high schools with consistently high African American male graduation rates expressed a strong belief in their ability to evoke change in addition to their strong belief in their ability to impact all students, including African American males. Persons with a higher sense of self-efficacy are more willing to attempt challenging tasks, they exhibit more perseverance when faced with difficulty, and they demonstrate higher levels of performance (Bandura, 1993).

Appendix A: Principal Preliminary Interview Questions

Interviewee Code:

Date:

Directions: Please answer the following background questions and electronically submit your responses to the researcher at: rdillar1@umd.edu.

Background information:

1. What is your
 - a. Gender:
 - b. Ethnicity:
 - c. Highest degree earned:
2. As you reflect on your high school experience, describe the type of student you were academically? (*excellent, very good, average, below average, poor*) Describe.
3. How many years were you a teacher before entering administration?
4. What lead you to pursuing a career in:
 - a. Education?
 - b. Educational leadership?
5. How many years have you been a principal
 - a. At your current high school?
 - b. At other schools or school systems?

Appendix B: Principal Primary Interview Questions

Interviewee Code:

Date:

Time:

Location

Questions:

1. What are your beliefs about your role as a principal as it relates to overseeing African American male?
2. What are your beliefs about your ability to ensure graduation success for African American male students?
3. When test scores are disaggregated, African American males typically result lowest.
 - a. What are your beliefs about why this occurs?
 - b. What are your beliefs about the relevancy of curriculum upon learning for African American males?
 - c. How do you address “relevancy of curriculum” as an instructional leader?...from the prospective of teaching and learning?
 - d. What strategies, processes, or programs have you implemented to address this issue at your high school?
4. Your high school’s graduation rate for African American males is exemplary (above the State).
 - a. What do you believe you’ve done (as a leader) to contribute/influence this accomplishment?
 - b. What strategies, processes, or programs have you implemented to address this issue at your high school?
5. What are your beliefs about culture and climate as it relates to graduation success for African American males?
 - a. What are your beliefs about teacher rapport and the African American male student?
 - b. Describe the policies you’ve implemented which you believe influence success for the African American male.

Appendix C: Letter of Introduction

Dear Ms./Mrs./Dr. _____,

I am a doctoral candidate at The University of Maryland at College Park conducting research for my dissertation. I am seeking your help in collecting data concerning the self-efficacy beliefs of principals at economically disadvantaged high schools with high graduation rates of African American males in Montgomery County. The purpose of the research study is to investigate how self-efficacy beliefs of principals impact the graduation rates of African American males.

Your school is one of three high school campuses selected for this study because of your 2009–2010 and 2010–2011 lever graduation rates for African American male students. Participating principals will receive preliminary interview questions online and will be interviewed at a time and date convenient to their schedules.

The finding of this study may contribute to the body of knowledge on principal self-efficacy beliefs and graduation rates in economically disadvantaged high schools. Additionally, results from this study may assist schools with developing strategies to address the needs of their African American male population as it relates to graduation.

You will be asked to complete a form about general background and demographic data. You will also be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview consisting of 8 multi-sectioned questions, which will last approximately 1–1.5 hours. Your participation in this study is voluntary and presents no known risk(s). If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. The results of the research study will be published in a dissertation; however, the information will be kept confidential with pseudonyms used for principals, schools, and district. A brief explanation of the interview process will be provided to you. If you have additional question or concerns please do not hesitate to contact me at 240-xxx-xxxx.

Should you decide to participate in this study, please complete the informed consent form consisting of verbiage found in this letter. A copy of this form for your records may be provided to you per your request. Please respond to this letter within a week of receiving it, indicating your willingness to participate in this study.

Thank you in advance for your time and energy. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rhonda C. Dillard,
University of Maryland Doctoral Student
Work: 240-453-2486
Cell: 240-271-4092

Encl: Informed Consent form

Appendix D: Informed Consent

Dear _____,

My name is Rhonda Dillard and I am a student at the University of Maryland working on a Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership. I am conducting a research study entitled: Self Efficacy Beliefs of Principals in Economically Disadvantaged High Schools with High African American Male Graduation Rates. The purpose of the research study is to explore the self-efficacy beliefs of select principals at economically disadvantaged high schools with exemplary graduation rates for African American males.

Your voluntary participation will involve a two-step process. First, you will complete a brief questionnaire. The purpose for the questionnaire is to gather background information. The questionnaire will be administered via online communication through my University of Maryland email account. The second step of the process is to participate in a face-to-face interview. With your permission, this interview will be tape-recorded. Again, your participation in this study is voluntary. You can choose not to participate or to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty or loss of benefit to yourself. The results of the research study will be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be disclosed to any outside party. The findings from this study will be reported in form.

In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to you. Your name and personal information will not be used. Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit of your participation is knowledge that your leadership practices may be used to assist other leaders with the dilemma of increasing the graduation rate of African American males in their schools.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, you may contact me at 240-xxx-xxxx and rdillar1@umd.edu. As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decline to participate or withdraw from participation at any time without consequences.
2. Your identity will be kept confidential.
3. Rhonda Dillard, the researcher, has thoroughly explained the parameters of the research study and all of your questions and concerns have been addressed.
4. If the interviews are recorded, you must grant permission for the researcher, Rhonda Dillard, to digitally record the interview. You understand that the information from the recorded interview may be transcribed. The researcher will structure a coding process to assure that anonymity of your name is protected.
5. Data will be store in a secure and locked area. The data will be held for a period of three years, and then destroyed.

6. The research results will be used in a dissertation publication.
“By signing this form you acknowledge that you understand the nature of this study, the potential risks to you as a participant, and the means by which your identity will be kept confidential. Your signature on this form also indicates that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to voluntarily serve as a participant in the study described.”

Signature of the interviewee _____ Date

Signature of the researcher _____ Date

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