ABSTRACT

Title of Document: HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRACTICES THAT INCREASE GRADUATION RATES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

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Research indicates there are significant differences in the academic performance of minorities and whites, particularly at the high school level. On average, Latino and African American high school students read and perform math on the same level as 13-year-old white students and trail their white peers by an average of 20 test points on math and reading assessments (Wiltz, 2012; Education Week, 2011; Education Trust, 2003). White and Asian students are still twice as likely as Black and Hispanic students to take classes that are considered academically challenging. Fewer than 10% of African American students participated in rigorous courses in 2009 (Education Week, 2011; NCES, 2009). Moreover, data show 54% of African Americans graduate from high school, compared with more than 75% of white and Asian students. Educational disparities are especially apparent between African American males and other groups regarding graduation rates. A report by the U.S. Department of Education (2013) shows that graduation rates are at their highest with 76.8% graduation rate in 1973 compared to 81% graduation rate in 2012(NCES, 2009, NCES, 2013). Despite this increase, one million students failed to graduate in 2013 most of whom were minorities (Richmond, 2013). The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2012) documented that in public education, of all ethnic/racial or gender groups, African American males have been least likely to secure a diploma four years after beginning high school.

Few studies have explored the practices of school-based leaders at high school which have significant success in improving the graduation rates of African American males. The current study seeks to explore practices that school-based leaders perceive have positive effects on graduation rates of African American males.

The major research questions guiding this study were: (1) What practices do school-based leaders use to improve the high school graduation rates of African American males? (A) Are there other strategies school-based leaders might consider implementing to continue raising the graduation rates for African American males?

Using qualitative methods and an ethnographic case study design, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six high school-based leaders-- two principals, two assistant principals, one guidance counselor and one alternative-1 teacher. Findings revealed seven major themes and three minor themes. Major themes included: student/teacher relationship, mentoring programs, academic support, making school connections, data monitoring/assessment, teacher expectations and teacher professional development. Minor themes were comprised of: student self-esteem, parent involvement and funding for programs.

HIGH SCHOOL LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PRACTICES THAT INCREASE GRADUATION RATES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

by

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DEDICATION

I thank God Almighty for His grace, mercy and strength to complete this work. To my mother, BS, who loved me and sacrificed to help me, always believing that I could earn this degree.

Special thanks to my family and friends PC and PA, who supported and encouraged me during the time I worked to complete this project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, data on academic achievement have given unprecedented insight into the strengths and weaknesses of public education. According to the data, there is a significant disparity in the academic performance of different racial and ethnic student groups. Commonly referred to as the achievement gap, the greatest disparities in student education show up in students' grades, standardized test scores, course selection, dropout rates, and college completion rates (Education Week, 2011).

Research indicates there are significant differences in the academic performance of minorities and Whites, particularly at the high school level. On average, Latino and African American high school seniors read and perform math on the same level as 13-year-old White students and trail their White peers by an average of 20 test points on math and reading assessments (Wiltz, 2012; Education Week, 2011; Education Trust, 2003). White and Asian students are still twice as likely as Black and Hispanic students to take classes that are considered academically challenging. Fewer than 10% of African American students participated in rigorous courses in 2009 (Education Week, 2011; NCES, 2009). Moreover, data show 54% of African Americans graduate from high school, compared with more than 75% of White and Asian students.

A large disparity also exists between the performance of African American students and students of other ethnicities on the SAT and ACT college admission tests. Designed to predict how well students will do in college, the SAT tests students' aptitude in reading, math, and writing. Similarly, the ACT includes four subjects, English, math, reading comprehension, and science. Although colleges and universities in the United States examine various components of a student's application for college admission, the SAT and ACT tests still play an important part in the acceptance process.

During the late 1980s, Claude Steele, a social psychologist at the University of Michigan, discovered a disturbing trend regarding African American students who had taken the SAT and ACT. At every level, African American students got lower scores than white students, even though they entered college with the same set of skills (Winerman, 2011). An examination of SAT scores for African American males shows they score lower than white males in critical reading, mathematics, and writing (ETS, 2013). According to a report by the Council of Great City Schools (2010), African American males' SAT critical reasoning scores are 104 points lower on average, 120 points lower in math, and 99 points lower in writing than their white male counterparts (Gabriel, 2010). In 2013, the College Board published demographic information on college-bound seniors that shows African American males still lag behind their White, Asian, Hispanic/Latino and Native American peers.

Educational disparities are especially apparent between African American males and other groups regarding graduation rates. A report by the U.S. Department of Education (2013) shows that African American male graduation rates are at their highest with 76.8% graduation rate in 1973 compared to 81% graduation rate in 2012(NCES, 2009, NCES, 2013). Despite this increase, one million students failed to graduate in 2013 most of whom were minorities (Richmond, 2013). The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2012) documented that in public education, of all ethnic/racial or gender groups, African American males have been least likely to secure a diploma four years after beginning high school. In 2009-12 the Schott Foundation also reported data on graduation rates for 38 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia that revealed black males have the lowest graduation rates between Black, Latino, White, and male and female students. The report further found that African American males have a 47% graduation rate, which is 28% below that of white males. In another state-by-state analysis, Weldon (2014) found that in 10 states, the graduation gap for African American males exceeds 30%. Only in Utah, Vermont, Idaho and Maine, where there are small Black populations, are Black males more likely to graduate from high school than their white counterparts (Schott, 2012). Weldon's study further finds that when black males are given access to schools and resources similar to white males, their performance improves. According to Gamble-Hilton (2012), in today's economy, it is imperative that African American males earn at least a high school diploma to pursue post-secondary skills to "enhance their opportunities for obtaining employment in a competitive market" (p. 20).

Dropping out of high school has a serious and lasting negative impact on individual students. According to the U.S. Census (2013) the national median household income for 2012 was $51,371. The average high school dropout can expect to earn an annual income of $20,241, or about 39% of the national average, $10,386 less than the typical high school graduate and $36,424 less than someone with a bachelor's degree (Breslow, 2012). Finding a job is more difficult for a high school dropout. In August 2012, high school dropouts experienced an unemployment rate of 12%, compared with a national unemployment rate of 8.1%.
The difficulties for high school dropouts do not end there. According to the Department of Education (2011), those individuals between the ages of 18 and 24 are twice as likely as college graduates to live in poverty. The poverty rate for dropouts is 30.8%, while those with a bachelor's degree experience a 13.5% poverty rate. Not only is the poverty rate high for high school dropouts, the rate of incarceration for those dropouts ages 16-24 is 63 times higher than that of a college graduate. Research from Northeastern University revealed that compared with a

high school graduate, a dropout will cost taxpayers an average of $292,000over a lifetime for costs over a lifetime for costs associated with incarceration and lower tax contributions (Sum et al., 2009; Breslow, 2012).

Young Black male dropouts face additional obstacles and a bleak economic future (Sum et al., 2007). Eleven percent of African American men over 20 are unemployed compared to White males who have a 4.4 % unemployment rated (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). The Schott Foundation (2010) reported that over the last 25 years, the social, economic, and educational outcomes of African American men have been more systematically devastating than any other racial/ethnic group or gender.

For this nation to compete in the global economy, it must improve the educational attainment of all students. The American Psychological Association (APA) writes: “A high dropout rate diminishes the pool of qualified people from diverse backgrounds who will enter the professional and political ranks that make important public policy decisions,” (APA, 2012, p. 1). To amend this devastating trend, school officials, educational researchers, politicians, and other key stakeholders must work to reduce the achievement gap.

Background and Problem Statement

Former U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige and Elaine Witty wrote that the Black-White achievement gap is the primary barrier for African American students. (Paige, 2010) Murphy (2009) wrote:

> The term “achievement gap” is used to describe differences in learning among specified groups of students. More specifically, it refers to differences in academic achievement between socioeconomically advantaged White and Asian students, and their

> minority and socioeconomically disadvantaged peers. It is also widely used to capture efforts to reduce these learning differentials (p. 3).

The phrase achievement gap dates back to a 1963 article in “The Nation”, which Gerald Walker reported on the two-year educational gap between low-income Black students at Lincoln Elementary School in Englewood, New Jersey, and higher-income White students in other elementary schools in the state’s school districts (Salmonowicz, 2009). Findings from Walker’s report suggest that the students of lower-economic status who attended the predominately Black Lincoln Elementary School (98%) were educationally two years behind those of other elementary schools. The report suggests that racial concentration, socioeconomic status, and quality of education contribute to the problem of the achievement gap (Walker, 1963). A short time later, Coleman (1966) used the phrase “gap in achievement” to describe the discrepancy between the performance of White and minority students. The Coleman Report was mandated by the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to disclose the unequal educational opportunities for children of different races, colors, and national origins (Coleman, 1966). The report, also known as the Equity of Educational Opportunity Study (EEOS), was an example of a social survey that could be used as an instrument to create national policy. Unlike Walker’s study, which focused on one town in New Jersey, EEOS was a national survey report that made regional comparisons of differences in student achievement, teacher quality, student characteristics, socioeconomic levels, and their effect on achievement. The EEOS concluded that disadvantaged African American students learn better in well-integrated classrooms (Coleman, 1966). As a result of the conclusion, students were bused to other schools to achieve racial balance. However, in 1975, a new study by Coleman concluded that bussing had failed because it had prompted “White flight” as Whites fled to the suburbs, eliminating the opportunity to create racial balance in schools.

From all indications, the “achievement gap” is a matter of race and class. A decades-old gap in academic achievement persists between minority, disadvantaged students, and their White counterparts. Despite recent improvements, the achievement gap between African American students and their white counterparts continues to be one of the most important issues in education today. This inequity is even more prevalent for African American males, who are twice as likely to be held back in elementary school, three times as likely to be suspended from school, half as likely to graduate from high school or college, and are consistently underemployed or unemployed (PBS.org, 2014; Schott, 2013). Research shows that even when African American males are given the same academic and economic resources as their peers, they are likely to fall short of their counterparts in every measure of academic success. The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) has taken the severity of this problem a step further by acknowledging that African American males have been labeled as violent, uneducated, uneducable, drug addicted, malevolent, defiant, deficient, recalcitrant, hostile, ungovernable, immoral, and amoral (MSDE, 2006).

African American males deal with a plethora of issues that affect their academic performance in grades K-12 (Noguera, 2003). There are several in-school-related factors that impact the academic achievement of African American males. Elements such as teacher expectations/perceptions, teacher quality, limited school resources, and lack of a culturally responsive curriculum have been noted to affect the educational outcomes of African American males (White, 209). Additional research indicates that a wide variety of factors outside the classroom also impact African American male achievement: socioeconomic status, nutrition, self-esteem issues, parent involvement, teacher expectation/perception, teacher quality, lack of culturally response instruction, and limited funding school resources (Case & Katz, 1991;

Spicker, Southern, & Davis, 1987). Thus, programs aimed at reducing the achievement gap cannot solely focus on academics. There must be a holistic approach to address the many and difficult issues affecting the academic achievement and educational outcomes of African American males.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

There has been positive news from schools that have demonstrated significant success in improving the graduation rate of African American males. Dover High School (pseudonym), located in a county in Maryland was the subject of this report. Dover High has a student population of 1963. The Black student population is 469 of which 243 are males. The school offers a real example of a high school that has improved the graduation rate of African American males. From 2011-2013, African American male graduation rates have been 89.7%, 91.67% and 91.04% respectively. However, the strategies this school used to attain its success previously have not been explored. This study examined the school's approach to bridging the achievement gap to make recommendations. This study will employ qualitative interviewing so school-based leaders can share strategies they believe might help raise the number of African American males graduating high school. Principals, assistant principals, department chairpersons, coaches, and advisors of extracurricular activities at this school could serve as excellent resources regarding strategies that have proven to be successful in addressing the achievement gap. These successful strategies could then be replicated, and new strategies might be created to promote continuous growth in improving graduation rates for African American males more universally.

Research Question

The following question guided this study:

1. What practices do school-based leaders think improve the high school graduation rates of African American males?

Sub Question

A. Are there other strategies school-based leaders might consider implementing to continue raising the graduation rate for African American males?

Significance of the Study

The problem of the achievement gap is not a new phenomenon, but rather it has been an issue in the field of education for years. The research documenting the achievement gap is plentiful, with most reports focusing on African American males' high dropout rates, low enrollment in advanced courses, and overrepresentation in special education courses (NAACP, 2009; NCES, 2010; ASCD, 2005; NEA, 2011).

Research by the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2012) reveals that African American males have a 47% national graduation rate, which is nearly 28% below White males. The Schott Foundation has also documented that Black males have been the least likely racial and gender group to obtain a high school diploma in four years after starting high school. John Jackson, president and CEO of the Schott Foundation, suggests that the gap between the number of African American males who obtain a high school diploma and their White counterparts is so dismal because of the lack educational resources in schools with high African American populations (NPR, 2010). Jackson (2010) maintains that unless all schools are funded to provide such resources as early childhood education, hire qualified teachers, and offer college-bound curriculum and year-round schooling for those who are behind to recover, the situation will not improve. If states do not provide adequate resources and equal access to education for all children, the current educational situation for African American males is a harbinger of worse things to come.

Other researchers and writers have investigated data on the enrollment and college graduation rates of African American males Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2006; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014; America's Wire, 2010; National Black Achievement Study, 2012. These sources reveal that the number of African American students enrolled in colleges has increased. However, the number of African American students who graduate from college is at a low 42%, which is 20% below white college students (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2006). In 2007, President Barack Obama made a compelling statement regarding the plight of African American males: "We have more Black men in prison than we have in our colleges" (American Council on Education, 2012). While this statement is no longer true, African American men still face enormous challenges in accessing and completing their post-secondary education (Kim & Griffin, 2011; Frazier & Rhoden, 2011; Cambridge College, 2014; Palmer, 2010).

Studies on African Americans in post-secondary education reveal another troubling quandary. Fewer African American males enroll in post-secondary education than African American females. Verdugo and Henderson (2011) suggest this gender gap in enrollment may be caused by such factors as higher dropout rates for African American males, lack of attainment, lack of financial support, and incarceration. Not only is there an enrollment crisis in African American males in post-secondary education, but also in retention and degree completion rates (Cambridge College, 2014). The lack of African American male college enrollment has prompted scholars in the field to work tirelessly to provide information to aid educators, policymakers, and stakeholders in their quest to increase the success of African American males in K-12 and post-secondary education.

Research from Levine, Jackson, Tale, and Moore (2008) suggests that African American males experience the poorest educational outcomes in terms of the baccalaureate degrees earned in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics). By increasing the access to and successful completion of degrees in STEM disciplines, African American males will be better able to compete economically both nationally and internationally, while improving their economic outcomes (Levine et al., 2007). Studies on the topic provide guidance for school and community leaders in developing plans and programs that encourage and assist African American males through high school and college graduation.

There is much evidence in the literature that reiterates the seriousness of the issue of African American male dropout and graduation rates. Studies and reports serve to remind American educational leadership of the urgent need for creating alternative programs, schools, and other necessary responses to address school dropout rates, particularly addressing the devastating dropout rates and their effects for African American males.

However, few scholars have examined the experiences of high-achieving black males once they enter and complete college (Britt & Griffin, 2013; Griffin, 2013; Murphy, 2013). Additionally, little research has been conducted on high-achieving African American male high school students or the school systems in which they are enrolled. As opposed to examining the issues that lead to low academic achievement, this study sought to examine factors that improve educational outcomes for African American males.

Delimitations

The sample size for this study is delimited to one Maryland county school district and one high school within the district.

Limitations

This study is working under the following limitations:

1. The knowledge of the site-level administrator may be limited by the number of years of experience at the site being studied.
2. Personal bias, personal interest in questionnaire findings, and personal interest in school perceptions may impact the validity of the survey results.

Study Assumptions

In designing and carrying out this study, it was assumed that school principals, assistant principals, department chairs, and advisors of school activities were the most knowledgeable professionals in the school building with regards to strategies being implemented at their schools. It is assumed that all school leaders participating in this study will answer all questions truthfully and provide reliable information in response to all interview questions.

Definition of Terms

To ensure the reader has the same understanding as the author, the following terms are being defined. Although there are variations in the meaning of these terms, the definitions provided below should be used as they relate to the specific context of the study.

Achievement Gap – The significant and persistent disparities in the academic performance, educational attainment, or test scores between different groups of students (National Education Association (NEA)/Glossary of Education Reform, 2013).

African American –An ethnic group of citizens of the United States with ancestry from the continent of Africa, also known as Blacks and Negroes.

Best Practice –Strategies, activities, or techniques used in a classroom or school setting that have consistently shown positive results in improving student achievement. The practices can be new or refined programs relevant to student improvement.

Graduation Rate – The percentage of students who graduate from secondary school with a regular diploma in the standard number of years (four-year cohort rate). (Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), 1965).

Hispanic – Ethnic group that traces its origins to the continent of South America or to Spain, Mexico, Cuba, or other Spanish-speaking countries. The terms Latino and Hispanic are used interchangeably.

School-based Leaders Those individuals in schools who mobilize people to behave and believe in a shared vision that results in high achievement for each student. Principals, assistant principals, school specialists, and teachers all share in school leadership.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one detailed the problem and the context associated with this study. Following this section, I outlined my research purpose and listed my research questions. This was followed by an overview of the research design, the significance of the study, and the key concepts and definitions.

Chapter two further develops the ideals touched upon in the theoretical framework through a review of current literature. Highlighting each of the salient points, the review included a general history of the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board* and its relationship to the achievement gap, as well as a review of the achievement gap. Literature that focuses on teacher expectations, self-esteem and identity, mentors, parental involvement, and culturally responsive curriculum as the topics relate to African American male achievement was examined. The chapter closed out with a review of literature on the institutional practices and models that have been used to promote the success of African American males and a summation of the key findings presented in the literature.

Chapter three details the methodology and procedures I used to gather the data. I begin the chapter with an overview of the qualitative approaches that will be used in the study. This section is followed by a description of the research site, research sample, the sampling criterion, and a description of the steps that were taken to ensure the protection of human subjects. The next section describes the three modes of data collection, the process of data analysis, and efforts to maintain quality and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the role of the researcher and the limitations of the study. This is followed by chapter 4, which reviews the findings from the study. Information from the interviews are synthesized in seven major themes and three minor themes. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the findings and a discussion of how the findings relate to current literature. Finally, conclusions are presented as well as recommendations for the study site.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

For the past few decades, educational reformers have continually tried to address inequality in American schools. One significant issue in American education that has received more attention than any other problem is that of inequality among different socioeconomic and demographic groups (Gamoran, 2001). On May 17, 1954, the United States Supreme Court made a landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. In the *Brown* case, African American students won the right to attend schools traditionally reserved for Whites. The decision concluded that the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees equal rights and civil liberties for all Americans. The Supreme Court ruled that the "separate but equal" doctrine that was used to segregate society was inherently unequal (Brown v. Board, 1954).

However, despite these changes in legal segregation, segregated schools still exist in the 21st century. This segregation has created high-poverty minority schools in large city school districts. Soparito and Sohoni (2007) found that Black and Hispanic students attend public schools in which most of the children are below the poverty line, unlike their White counterparts who attend public schools in which most of the children are above the poverty line. Research indicates that 60% of Black and Hispanic students attend high-poverty schools (defined as more than 50% poor), whereas only 18% of White students and 30% of Asian students attend high-poverty schools (Orfield & Lee, 2005). Black and Hispanic students are also more likely to attend city schools. The 24 largest central cities (with 4.5 million students) have an enrollment that is more than 70% Black and Hispanic. In 20 of these districts, the student population is 90%

Black (Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012). As a result, there is a growing trend of deepening segregation in schools for African American and Latino students (Orfield & Lee, 2005).

Several key factors for this study are interrelated: the achievement gap, parental involvement, teacher expectations, self-esteem and identity, culturally responsive curriculum, and mentors. This study will examine these factors to better understand the need for support services to improve graduation rates among African American males in high school. The study further examined what school leaders can do to improve the success rates of African American males.

The following chapter includes a review of literature relevant to the current study. This section will begin with an overview of the achievement gap and the educational inequalities African American males face. This will be followed by a survey of literature on factors that contribute to the academic achievement of African American high school students.

The Achievement Gap

The "achievement gap" commonly refers to the differences among demographic groups on state and national academic tests (Ladson-Billings, 2006). According to the Governor's Association (2005), the achievement gap is a matter of race and class. Many scholars have spent a great deal of time investigating poor, African American, Latino, American Indian, and Asian immigrant students in major metropolitan school systems (Bankston & Caladas, 1996; Coleman, et al., 1968; Logan, 2012; Orfield & Lee, 2005). However, few remedies have been provided to solve the problem of low student achievement.

Stiefel, Schwartz, and Chellham (2008) suggest the achievement gap between white and non-white school children is greatest between racially segregated schools. Segregation continues to be a major obstacle to educational equality for minority children and a source for the gap in academic achievement (Logan et al., 2012).

A school's racial composition is strongly related to class composition. In the Coleman Report (1966), it was evident that racial isolation of Black children in majority minority schools was associated with lower academic achievement. However, Coleman attributed low academic performance among race to be a result of socioeconomic differences. White schools tended to enroll students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds; therefore those schools' academic performance was better than that of predominantly minority schools (Coleman Report, 1966). A contemporary study of this same magnitude found that the concentration of poverty within a school is negatively associated with student performance, even after controlling for a student's own family background (Swanson & Chaplain, 2003). Scholars have primarily shown this gap using standardized test scores and dropout rates, but data regarding enrollment in gifted and advanced placement classes provide insight to the achievement gap as well. Traditionally, African Americans do not perform as well on standardized tests when compared with whites.

Another relevant factor to both race and class is the location of schools. Swanson and Schneider (2008) found that high school graduation rates are 15% lower in urban schools as compared with those in the suburbs. In 12 cities, nine of which are in the Northeast and Midwest, the city-suburban graduation gap exceeds 25% (Grey, 2008). In a study by Hochschild and Scovronick (2000), urban schools were more likely than suburban schools to have inadequate funding and resources as well as fewer qualified teachers as compared with suburban schools. Therefore, the discussion on the achievement gap needs to determine how to get adequate funding, resources, and highly qualified teachers into urban, socioeconomically disadvantaged schools (Chaplain, 2002).

Parental Involvement

Research has shown that parental involvement in students' academic lives is one variable that has important potential for promoting their academic achievement (Smith & Hausafus, 1998). Studies have traditionally focused on the reasons African American students fail in school rather than factors that determine their success (Taylor, Hinton, & Wilson, 1995; Hill & Craft, 2003; Outman & Midgley, 1999). To truly foster academic success among African American students and close the achievement gap, education stakeholders need to examine the positive role that parental involvement plays in the academic achievement of African American high school males. An examination of the current literature on the importance of parental involvement will be discussed.

Parental involvement is multifaceted and has a variety of meanings. According to Fan and Chen (2001), parent involvement represents different parental behaviors and practices, parents' communication with children about school, parents' participation in school activities, parents' communications with teachers about their children, and parental rules imposed at home that are related to education. Epstein (1995) created a six-dimensional theoretical framework that accounts for the different levels or types of school-related parental involvement: (1) assisting parents in child-rearing skills, (2) sending communications for school to home, (3) involving parents in school volunteer opportunities, (4) involving parents in home-based learning, (5) involving parents in school decision making, and (6) involving parents in school-community collaborations. Upon further examination of the research, it is apparent that parental involvement is a broad concept that encompasses a variety of activities. Jeynes (2007) concludes that parental involvement is simply parental participation in their children's educational processes and experiences. Jeynes' inquiry of parental involvement explores whether parental involvement can really improve the educational outcomes of urban children.

Most of the educational studies that have investigated parental involvement are primarily based on samplings of white students (Yan, 1999). There are limited studies that consider the ways in which African American families promote successful school achievement and experiences. A study Yan (1999) conducted suggests families play a key role in students' school success. The relationship between parents and children in regards to the amount of time children spend with their parents and the effort parents make to provide a positive and healthy environment for their children is known as social capital. Yan also used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 to examine the role of parental involvement in promoting academic success among African American students. Success was defined as the completion of high school and enrollment in a postsecondary education institution. Yan concluded that middle-class Black parents were more likely to intervene in their children's school experience than poorer black parents. Black families with higher levels of parental education and family income were found to have higher levels of parental contact with schools and more parent-child discussions at home (Hill & Craft, 2003; Yan, 1999). This means schools need to have effective strategies and programs that aim to make social capital available for all students to enhance academic success and close the achievement gap.

In a study on parental influences and academic outcomes for African American students, parenting style and parental involvement significantly predicted positive academic outcomes (Taylor et al., 1995). The study focused on several factors that determine success in school. Parenting styles were classified into three categories: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. Authoritarian parents have high demands and low responsiveness to their child. In contrast, the permissive parent is overly nurturing and tolerates misbehavior with few consequences. Both authoritarian and permissive children have lower cognitive competence (Taylor et al., 1995). In contrast to authoritarian and permissive parents are authoritative parents. These parents expect mature behavior, firmly enforce rules and consequences, encourage independence, and communicate with their children. Authoritative parenting has been shown to have a positive impact on grades and student achievement across all ethnic groups (Bodovski & Youn, 2010). Although studies by LeMonda et al. (2008) and Dewar (2013) have shown African American parents tend to be more authoritarian than other ethnic groups, the results of the study by Bodovski and Youn (2010) suggests that this parenting style may actually help African American students who live in areas of higher poverty to survive. Rigid control and high expectations of obedience may be appropriate for some African American students (Steinberg et al., 1992; Taylor et al., 1995).

Parental involvement was also shown to be an important contributor to academic outcomes. Parents who were frequently involved with their child were included in the study sample. Parents who worked on a project with their child, talked with their child, and spent time in leisure activities away from home (picnics, movies, sports, etc.) indicated parental involvement. The importance of spending time with children promotes positive school and academic outcomes (Stewart, 2007; Bodovski & Youn, 2010). For African American students, particularly those in the inner city, home and school environments can be inconsistent (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005). It has been determined that integrating home and school for African American students is successful in increasing academic success (Hill & Craft, 2003; Outman & Midgley, 1999; Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2005). However, further studies need to be completed to address factors that contribute to positive school outcomes for African American students in economically disadvantaged schools.

Teacher Expectations

Since the late 1980s, the plight of young African American males has been discussed and debated. There are alarming homicide rates (as both victims and perpetrators), disproportionate representation in the criminal justice system, as well as last-place ranking on multiple measures of educational performance and attainment (Garibaldi, 1992). In his work with the New Orleans public school system, Garibaldi (1992), worked on a committee to examine why African American males were rarely honor roll recipients and why they represented academic failure in school retention, suspension, expulsion, and attendance, participation in co-curricular activities, grade attainment, and academic achievement. It was determined that systematic solutions were needed to motivate, encourage, and reinforce young African American men to perform well in the classroom and reverse the negative trends associated with this demographic.

In a survey of more than 2,000 African American male students in New Orleans, 95% reported they expected to graduate from high school. Unfortunately, 40% believed their teachers did not set high enough goals for them, and 60% suggested their teachers needed to push them harder. However, when 318 teachers were asked if their African American male students would go to college, six out of 10 teachers responded in a negative way. Sixty percent of those teachers were in elementary schools; 70% had 10 or more years of experience; and 65% were African American (Garibaldi, 1995). Schools and teachers must have high expectations and intellectual aspirations for young African American males. The negative perceptions must be replaced with hope and belief, encouragement, and positive support (Lucas & Villegas, 2007). Teachers need to communicate with parents about their child's strengths and weaknesses. This will also help to increase parental involvement in high school.

Somers, Owens, and Piliawsky (2008) conducted a study to examine factors related to the academic success of African American ninth-graders in a large urban high school in the Midwest. The purpose was to examine the role of various sources of social support in the educational attitudes and behaviors and academic achievement among these students. The results of the study revealed that social support from teachers was significantly correlated with these students' ninth-grade point averages. The findings suggest that teacher relationships with students can have a positive association with better grades and academic success.

Roderick (2003) investigated why the high school years are a time of decline in student motivation and engagement. The perception is that African American males are most likely to turn away from school and form peer groups that discourage them from working hard and succeeding. What is known is that African American males living in urban areas have the poorest rates of high school completion (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Spurgeon & Myers, 2008; Orr, 2003). In an executive summary by Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006), it was revealed that nearly one-half of all African Americans fail to graduate from high school. Many students abandon high school with less than two years to earn their diploma. Low expectations from teachers and the lack of teacher engagement were major reasons respondents gave for leaving school (Bridgeland et al., 2006). The low expectations held by the teachers contrasted with the high expectations the respondents had for themselves. The lack of challenge contributed to student boredom and other problems such as school attendance (Bridgeland et al., 2006). Nonetheless, expectations that teachers have for their students affect both student achievement and high school graduation rates.

Young black males in a K-12 educational setting are taught almost exclusively by white women who have low expectations for these students' academic success and high expectations for their disruptive behavior (Harper, 2009). The low expectations that African American males encounter at a young age follow them into the postsecondary setting. They often find themselves unprepared and overwhelmed by the academic rigor (Harper, 2009). In research literature, there has been little attention given to solving the educational problem of teacher apathy, disinterest, and low expectations for African American males in the K-12 setting. To increase graduation rates among African American males in economically disadvantaged high schools, more studies need to be conducted to examine the role of teacher expectations and what happens to students who experience teachers with high expectations and student involvement.

Self-Esteem and Identity

Fries-Britt (as cited in Harper, 2009) describes the images of Black men in American society as being confined to environments shaped by drugs, crime, athletics, and academic failure. The field of education has contributed to this negative portrayal by the disproportionate amount of research that focuses on the problems of achievement in the large urban school districts many African American students attend. Many African American students are aware of society's stereotypes and images of their group. Steele (1995) describes this as stereotype threat:

> There is a social-psychological predicament that can arise from widely known negative stereotypes about one's group. The existence of such a stereotype means that anything one does or any of one's features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps in one's own eyes. We call this predicament *stereotype threat* and argue that it is experienced, essentially, as a self-evaluative threat (p. 797).

Stereotype threat often occurs when negative group stereotypes are obvious in a particular situation or context. Whenever African American students perform a scholastic or intellectual task, they face the threat of conforming or being judged by a negative societal stereotype regarding their group's intellectual ability. This threat may interfere with these students' intellectual functioning. Stereotype threat appears to undermine academic achievement in two ways. First, it can impair performance by creating anxiety. For example, having to indicate one's race on a test booklet for a standardized test or emphasizing that a test is a measure of ability can be stressful for some African American students (Steele, 1995; Aronson et al., 2001). The second way stereotype threat appears to undermine achievement is through "disidentification," which is when a student disengages from achievement and underperforms. Over time chronic disengagement may lead a student to misidentify completely from school (Steele, 1995; Aronson, Fried, & Good, 2001). Both responses to stereotype threat can critically affect self-esteem, identity, and achievement.

A recent two-year study by Altschul, Oyserman, and Bybee, Celious (2006) examined racial-ethnic identity in mid-adolescent youth. African American and Latino youth were randomly selected from three low-income, urban schools. Hypotheses to promote academic achievement were based on the Oyserman, Gant, and Ager (1995) tripartite model of racial-ethnic identity (REI): (1) feeling connected to one's racial-ethnic group (Connectedness), (2) being aware that others may not value the in-group (Awareness of Racism), and (3) feeling that one's in-group is characterized by academic attainment (Embedded Achievement) (Altschul et al., 2006). This study suggested that REI may either promote or undermine academic achievement depending on whether content of REI is positive or negative with regard to academics (Altschul et al., 2006).

At the center of REI is a positive sense of in-group belonging or pride in the history, traditions, and ways of being in one's group. The discussion of race is prevalent in American society. By middle childhood, adolescents are likely to know which racial or ethnic group they belong to and will be motivated to feel a positive sense of in-group belonging. This awareness is likely to contribute to their in-group or the feeling that racial-ethnic group membership is important to their identity. In contrast, if a child does not relate to or identify with his or her racial-ethnic group, he or she may not feel the need to act in ways that are similar to in-group values (Oyserman, Brickman, Bybee, & Celious, 2006; Altschul et al., 2006). This has been termed REI Connectedness.

Adolescents must deal with how out-group members view their group. This component of REI has been termed awareness of racism, awareness of others' prejudice, or public regard. REI Awareness of Racism may help to buffer youth from racism, prejudice, and negative stereotypes about academic achievement and attainment. Without REI Awareness of Racism, negative academic feedback might otherwise reduce the achievements of youth (Oyserman, Harrison, & Bybee, 2001; Oyserman & Destin, 2010; Altschul et al., 2006; Bandura & Locke, 2003).

REI Embedded Achievement is the belief that achievement is an in-group identifier, a part of being a good in-group member, and the related sense that achievement of some in-group members helps other in-group member succeed (Altschul et al., 2006). When REI Embedded Achievement, REI Connectedness, and REI Awareness of Racism are combined, they can provide a needed buffer against negative messages about the likelihood of success for poor and minority youths by incorporating school and achievement as a positive in-group characteristic (Oyserman et al., 1995; Bandura & Locke, 2003). The tripartite model of REI has been used to predict academic outcomes (engagement, involvement, effort, grades) among African American youth. Youth who are high in all three REI components have positive academic outcomes. The findings suggest that REI-based preventive interventions could positively influence low-income youth (Altschul et al., 2006).

In a study about the relationship between racial identity and academic attainment among African American adolescents, a multidimensional model of racial identity (MMRI) was used to focus on three aspects of racial identity: the importance of race (centrality), group affect (private regard), and perceptions of societal beliefs (public regard) (Chavous et al., 2003). Racial centrality refers to the importance of group identification and perceptions of similarity to other African Americans. Private regard is an individual's beliefs about his or her group and the way in which he or she feels good about being African American. This is known as group pride. Finally, public regard is an individual's perception of the positive and negative societal views about his or her group. Public regard can also be interpreted as understanding the social and structural barriers established for one's group.

The findings of this study show several interrelationships among racial identity and academic achievement. It was found that having high centrality, strong group pride (private regard), and positive beliefs about society's views on African Americans (public regard) were related to more positive academic beliefs. Furthermore, students who perceive positive societal views about African Americans show stronger attachment for school. Students in this group most often had completed high school and attended college. In contrast, youth who felt the most negative about their group had the worst academic attitudes, and they completed high school and attended college at the lowest rates. This group had low private regard, low public regard, and low centrality (Chavous et al., 2003). This study suggests that in order to influence the achievement of African American youth and increase graduation rates, programs and interventions have to be created that allow for students' examination of racial identity and belief systems.

Part of the identity process in adolescence is re-assessing one's stance with regard to one's racial-ethnic group: How connected does one feel to the group, to what extent is this group valued or devalued in larger society, and how do in-group members value engagement with schooling? Youth who feel devalued by society may begin to devalue important aspects of life, such as education. If they feel as though society expects them to fare poorly academically, then they will perform poorly. This awareness from society has negative academic outcomes for some at-risk youth. However, when schools and teachers publicly value and recognize the successful academic experiences of young African American men, it simultaneously raises their self-concept, self-esteem, and academic confidence (Garibaldi, 1992). Schools and teachers need to protect students who perform at or above average from being ostracized, ridiculed, or belittled by their peers. Similarly, negative peer pressure seems to diminish a student's ability to succeed academically. Community, parents, schools, and teachers must do more to reduce the societal stressors that affect high-achieving African American students.

Culturally Responsive Curriculum

Successfully teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially students from historically marginalized groups, involves a new pedagogy that is grounded in an understanding of the role of culture and language in learning (Lucas & Villegas, 2007). It is important for teachers to understand the specific and unique qualities of the African American experience. Moreover, to prepare teachers to succeed with African American students, teachers, as well as teacher educators, must recognize the ways race and racism negatively affect African American students and their ability to succeed in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

In 2010 in Newark Tech High School in New Jersey, 88% of the student body tested proficient in math; 100% tested proficient in reading; and 100% graduated (NEA, 2011). Newark Tech teachers engage in culturally responsive curriculum and instruction that recognizes students' cultural backgrounds, home environments, and the impact of student experience on the teaching and learning process. Newark Tech principal Baruti Kafele credits the students' success with having a culturally responsive school:

> Instead of worrying about the achievement gap, educators focus on the learning gap (the reasons individual students aren't learning rather than the metrics), the attitude gap (the gap between students who believe in themselves and those who don't), the opportunity gap (students who have access to a great public school versus those who don't), and the relevance gap (lessons that students can apply to their daily lives versus lessons that are abstract and intangible (Kafele, 2013, p. 2).

Villegas and Lucas (2007) have determined from their research the importance of having a culturally responsive curriculum. Their research summarizes six important qualities that professional development activities in schools need to adopt to respond effectively to a diverse student population: (1) understanding how learners construct knowledge, (2) learning about students' lives, (3) being socioculturally conscious, (4) holding affirming views on diversity, (5) using appropriate instructional strategies, and (6) advocating for all students. The findings suggest that this constructivist framework for culturally responsive curriculum would benefit all pre-service and current teachers who work in schools with a large minority population.

The first quality is to understand how learners construct knowledge. A culturally responsive teacher supports students' learning by helping them to link what they already know about a topic to what they need to learn about it. Students learn to think critically, become creative problem solvers, and develop skills for working collaboratively (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, 2007). All of these qualities are necessary for success in life and work.

Secondly, teachers also need to spend time learning about their students' lives. Teachers need to incorporate what they learn about their students into the learning process. This is essential for teachers to make learning relevant and engaging. Teachers who are socioculturally conscious do not rely on their own personal experiences to make sense of students' lives, but rather attempt to understand inequities in society and to be aware of the role these issues may have in their students' lives (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, 2007).

Affirming teachers respect cultural differences and believe all students are capable of learning. There are high academic expectations, and the teachers have faith in their students' abilities. This is accomplished by using appropriate instructional strategies that engage all students in learning for understanding (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, 2007). Lastly, teachers must advocate and work to make schools more equitable for all students. This is particularly important for teachers working in schools with traditionally marginalized students.

Another comprehensive approach to culturally responsive curriculum and education is termed "culturally relevant pedagogy." For six years, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) engaged in research with excellent teachers of African American students Ladson-Billings not only studied pedagogical excellence, but she also attempted to describe the idea of culturally relevant teaching in numerous studies over the years (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate

1995). There are three common beliefs about culturally relevant pedagogy: (1) academic achievement, (2) cultural competence, and (3) sociopolitical critique (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

The first belief of academic achievement is that when a culturally relevant teacher creates an academic environment that is exciting, students are expected to work hard, and students welcome the responsibility of working hard. Students must experience academic success (Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2005). The second belief is cultural competence. The culturally relevant teacher uses the curriculum content to reflect the students' cultures. Students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence (Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2005). The last belief is sociopolitical critique. The culturally relevant teacher recognizes that education is a process that can help students understand social and political structures in society. Students develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo (Ladson-Billings, 2000, 2005).

Teacher preparation programs should address the perspectives and concerns of African Americans (Ladson-Billings, 2000). This can be accomplished by allowing students in teacher preparation programs to discuss the issues of race and racism in society, mandating that they participate in field experiences in African American communities to gain a better understand of their culture, and increasing the number of African American faculty in teacher preparation programs (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2000, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Mentors

Relationships formed between supportive non-parental adults and youth are often referred to as mentoring relationships (Hurd, Sanchez, Zimmerman, & Caldwell, 2012). A mentor is a creatively productive person whose role includes teaching, counseling, and inspiring a student with similar interests (Grantham, 2004). There are formal mentors, who are assigned to youths through a mentoring program such as Big Brothers Big Sisters, and natural mentors, who are adults from adolescents' pre-existing social networks (Hurd et al., 2012). Any mentoring relationship is built on establishing mutual trust; using accurate and reliable information; setting reasonable goals, decisions, and options; challenging ideas, beliefs, and actions; providing intellectual, psychological, and emotional support; and encouraging the mentee's dreams (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts & Boyd, 2009).

According to MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, nearly 17.6 million young Americans need or want mentoring, but only 3 million are engaged in formal, high-quality mentoring relationships (Hodge-Williams, 2014). Not only is there a need for culturally responsive intervention programs, mentors are also needed to increase African American male students' academic achievement (Gordon et al., 2009). The literature on mentoring African American males suggests there is also a need to have mentoring programs that address motivational and racial identity dilemmas (Grantham, 2004; Hodge-Williams, 2014; Hurd et al., 2012; Gordon et al., 2010).

As discussed in a previous section of the literature review regarding self-esteem and identity, there is a growing body of literature documenting the heterogeneity in academic achievement among African American students and the factors that contribute to positive educational outcomes within this group. Racial identity has emerged as a construct that has been predictive of African American middle and late adolescents' academic outcomes (Altschul et al., 2006; Chavous et al., 2003; Oyserman et al., 2006; Hurd et al., 2012). African American adolescents who hold their racial group in high regard feel connected to others in the group, and they are aware of societal biases against them. For these young people, achieving in school may be seen as an opportunity to overcome society's negative stereotypes of their group (Hurd et al., 2012; Chavous et al., 2003). Specific to racial identity, it is possible that natural mentors can affect the racial identity development of African American adolescents by prompting their participation in the racial socialization process and by providing social support.

Racial socialization is how parents transmit information, values, and perspectives about ethnicity and race to their children (Hughes et al., 2006). Natural mentors, who are often extended kin or adults from an adolescents' neighborhood, also help shape the racial identity of adolescents through racial socialization. This happens when an adolescent feels connected to his or her natural mentor, and the mentor communicates positive values and perspectives about the African American culture to his or her mentee (Hurd et al., 2012). Consequently, the mentee's engagement in dialogue and activities regarding the African American culture contributes to a greater sense of pride.

Additionally, adolescents who feel supported by their mentor may have more opportunities to explore and develop their racial identities in comparison with adolescents with lower levels of support. Therefore, relationships with natural mentors may contribute to adolescents' racial identity development through the provision of social support (Hurd et al., 2012). Thus, supportive non-parental adults for African American adolescents contribute positively to adolescents' racial identity beliefs. For example, having a natural mentor who has strong beliefs in the importance of school will help advance a mentee's education. Having a natural mentor in high school may encourage older adolescents to achieve in school, which suggests that relationships with natural mentors may foster resilience among academically at-risk African American adolescents by promoting more positive racial identity beliefs and by strengthening their beliefs in the importance of school for future success (Hurd et al., 2012).

The Benjamin E. Mays Institute (BEMI) has established a mentoring program to counteract academic underachievement among adolescent black males. BEMI is Afro-centric, uses pro-social modeling, and emphasizes cultural strengths and pride and single-sex instruction in a dual-sex environment (Gorden et al., 2009). BEMI's main goal is to impact the intellectual, spiritual, physical, and social needs of the students served through mentoring. BEMI incorporates an Afro-centric worldview into its mentoring program. It is based on the paradigm of Sankofa (go back and forth), spirituality, Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Uhuru (freedom and social justice), and Maat (truth) (Gordon et al., 2009). This Afro-centric framework focuses on collectiveness and interactions with successful African American community members to nurture a sense of connectedness with others and provide educationally successful positive role models. Central to the efforts of BEMI is integrating positive male role models for students who participate in the program. It is believed that the Afro-centric program help foster African American boys' understanding of their cultural roots (Gordon et al., 2009).

In an investigation of BEMI, Gorden et al. (2009) examined the impact of the mentoring program on racial identity development, academic identification, and academic performance for African American, male eighth-grade students. The results of the study revealed that students in the BEMI program had significantly greater academic outcomes than their non-mentored peers, as based on standardized test scores and GPA. The researchers identified 16 implications for policy and practice based on this study. Seven of the suggestions can be generalized for educational settings with low graduation rates for African American males:

1. Any intervention or program focused on African American boys should consider proactive steps that connect the young men's self-identification with their academic success.

2. Interventions that seek to tie self-identification with academic success should also integrate strategies that reinforce these views at the peer, family, and community levels.

3. Interventions focused on increasing the success of African American boys should also seek to tie these interventions to culturally grounded strategies that are borne from their ethnic/racial group.

4. Schools should create a context where the academic success of African American male students is not only expected but celebrated and integrated into any intervention developed to support students.

5. From a cultural perspective, interventions need to consider and develop strategies that foster a sense of pride in African American young men, their culture, and the collective unity they experience.

6. Programs should consider how it actively develops support mechanisms for its participants that are consistently reinforced across the peer, school, home, and community settings.

7. Programs should work to create contexts where young men learn skills that support them being able to mentor and support one another in their academic pursuits (Gordon et al., 2009).

Mentors and mentoring programs that are looking for ways to address the motivational and racial identity dilemmas black males face in schools can use the BEMI model or another similar Afro-centric program. There are three other types of mentoring programs that Grantham (2004) mentions in his research on multicultural mentoring: (1) educational mentoring, (2) career mentoring, and (3) personal development mentoring. Educational or academic mentoring focuses on improving students' academic achievement. Career mentoring helps youths develop the skills needed to enter a career path. Lastly, personal development mentoring supports the personal, psychological, or social needs of a youth (Grantham, 2004). Although the literature on mentoring reveals there are various mentoring programs, the potential impact of mentors on students' lives is immeasurable.

Summary

This section reviewed the literature relevant to the study. It began by looking at the achievement gap and the educational inequalities African American males face. A review of how and why the achievement gap persists was also given. Literature was presented on the role of parental involvement and the academic achievement of African American males. A brief overview of teacher expectations of African American high school males was addressed. Findings on the impact of self-esteem and identity, culturally responsive curriculum, and mentors on African American high school males also were examined.

Chapter III

Methodology

The chapter presents a description of the research methods that were used to conduct this study. I began with the rationale for using qualitative methods and the case study approach. This was followed by a description of the research site and sampling strategies, as well as the procedures for data collection and analysis. Lastly, I described the methods for ensuring design quality.

Research Question

The following questions guided this study:

1. What practices do school-based leaders think improve the high school graduation rates of African American males?

Sub Question

A. Are there other strategies school-based leaders might consider implementing to continue raising the graduation rate for African American males?

Research Design and Methodology

Qualitative methodology was used to answer the research question for this study because data collection for this research required an interactive and humanistic approach. Wyse (2011) describes qualitative research as an exploratory research—used to gain understanding of underlying reasons, opinions and motivations. The qualitative research approach is appropriate for this study because it was my intent to gain a thorough understanding of school-based leaders' perspectives on what practices help contribute to high graduation rates among African American male students. Denizen and Lincoln (2011) describe qualitative research as being associated with specific types of data, usually involving words and images rather than numbers.

Qualitative research differs from other methodologies because its hypotheses are generated from the analysis of the data rather than stated at the onset (Silverman, 2011). Creswell (2006) advises the researcher, "The qualitative research design begins with philosophical assumptions that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study" (p. 15). Creswell also reminds researchers of the importance of bringing their own worldviews and paradigms to a research project, which will direct the conduct and writing of the study. Further, Creswell writes that qualitative research is conducted to study a subgroup of the population to discover variables, measure them, and hear the voices of participants.

Qualitative interviewing allows researchers to understand how participants make meaning of their lived experiences. Creswell (2006) describes four philosophical assumptions about qualitative research and the qualitative researcher:

1. The researcher was interested in understanding the meaning of different individuals' perspectives and experiences.
2. The researcher tried to get as close as possible to the participant to gain data on the research being conducted in the field.
3. The researcher gathered data through fieldwork, going to an outside setting to investigate the phenomena of the study.
4. Qualitative research used an inductive research strategy to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories, rather than testing existing theories.

Fieldwork completed in qualitative research provides a thorough understanding of participants' perspectives and lived experiences, which the researcher then used to construct meaning about the topic being investigated (Creswell, 2012).

The qualitative approach is appropriate for this study because I intended to gain a detailed understanding of the practices school-based leaders used to improve the graduation rates of African American males. By examining the practices of school-based leaders, it allowed them to tell their story in their own voices. The data collected from interviews will derive rich, thick descriptions of the perspectives of school-based leaders, which helped to build theory on the topic of improving African American male graduation rates.

Case Study Approach

A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its existing context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly defined (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A case is a choice of object to be studied. A case study is all-inclusive in nature with the objective of gaining a key understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of the participant. According to Farquhar (2012), "As case study usually involves a number of different data sources and methods, further insight are gained from considering the question from a multi-dimensional perspective" (p. 8). The case may be simple or complex, and it can investigate one or several cases. Because of the comprehensive nature of the case study method, many researchers choose this method to conduct research dealing with fairness in society.

Research shows that the high school graduation rate of African American males is improving in large part due to programs being created and resources being provided to support their high school completion (Schott, 2012). The particular focus of this study was on the best practices school-based leaders at a school located in Maryland used to promote the academic success of African American males. This study included in-depth interviews in its data collection. Qualitative inquiry allowed for a deeper examination of the issues and solutions the school-based leaders used to improve the academic performance of African American males at the study site. Due to its holistic nature, case study is a preferred research method to examine many of the issues related to social justice to gain a thorough understanding of the problems. Merriam (1998) affirms that research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the prospective of those being studied offers the greatest promise for making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education.

Research Site

In 2013, the state of Maryland set a new record for high school graduation (MDSE, 2013). The four-year cohort graduation rate reached 84.97% for 2013, compared with 83.57% in 2012 (MDSE, 2014). The most recent statistics published showed Maryland's state graduation rate for 2012 was 83.57% while the national graduation average was 80% (NCES, 2014). Additionally, in 2013, Maryland reported that 78.1% of African American males graduated high school, which is 10% higher than the national graduation rate for African American males (Schott, 2014).

Dover High School (pseudonym) is a high school located in Maryland and has an enrollment of 1,963 students. For 2013-2014, the school had 24% (469) African American students, of which 12% (243) were African American males (MDSE, 2014). The graduation rate for African American males at the school increased from 75.76% for school year 2008-2009 to 89.7% in 2009-2010 to 91.67% in 2010-2011 and 91.04% in school year 2012-2013, placing it above the national average graduation rate for three consecutive years.

The high school is located in a small town with a population of approximately 6,764 people. The prevalent race is White representing 89`% of the population. The remainder of the population is 8.64% African American, 4.04% Hispanic, 5.29% Asian and .43% Native American (US Census, 2013). A small number of residents (10%) do not hold high school diplomas. Of the remainder of the population, 52% hold high school diplomas; 29% have bachelors or associate degrees and 12% have graduate degrees (www.movoto.com). Household incomes in the town range from $30,000 to $150,000. Income is generated from employment at government installations, local hospitals, retail, manufacturing, public administration, education and construction. Dover's school population is replenished yearly by incoming freshmen from two middle schools in the area which have been designated as feeder schools by the Board of Education.

I selected Dover High School for this study because its African American male population has continued to show steady success in high school graduation rates. With this research, I sought to examine the best practices the school's leaders used to promote high school graduation rates of African American males.

Participants

For purposes of this study, school-based leaders were considered to be principals, assistant principals, counselors, and teachers. The principal and assistant principals have knowledge of employees who have been instrumental in promoting academic and graduation success of African American high school males. Therefore, these key administrators were asked to identify individuals at the school who have developed relationships with African American males and have worked to help improve their graduation rates. Principals and assistant principals were included in the group of participants interviewed for this study. Teachers are not always considered leaders. However because of the educational background, experience in relationship building with African American students, trust developed with administrative staff and counselors and his success in helping the administrative staff at Dover High improve the graduation rate of African American males, the previous principal and current principal include the Alternative 1 teacher as a part of their administrative team. The principal included the Alternative 1 teacher as a leader I would interview for this study.

Accountability for school achievement is at the forefront of school reform, and school-based leadership is key to achieving that goal (NASSP, 2009). The work of the principal, assistant principal, and other school-based leaders is said to be second only to teachers in their impact on student achievement (The Wallace Foundation, 2012). Waters, Marzano, and McNutty (2003) write that highly effective school leaders (principals, assistant principals, and teachers) help increase students' academic and test scores within one year. Moreover, absences and suspensions are decreased, and graduation rates are increased by the work of effective school-based leadership. School-based leaders set the conditions and expectations that lead to excellent instruction and encourage improved student achievement by implementing effectual strategies and plans that provide for student success (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2009). Because much of the research in school improvement supports the importance of school-based leadership, I used school principals, assistant principals, department chairpersons, and other school-based leaders who are actively involved in promoting academic achievement of African American male high school students.

Instrumentation and Procedure

I used a semi-structured interview with open-ended questions to create a fluid conversation with the participants. The open-ended interview served to collect perceptions regarding the best practices that contribute to improved high school graduation rates of African American males.

Prior to the interviews, participants were advised of the following information:

- I explained the reason for the school selection and the information that to be collected.
- Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were able to withdraw consent any time.
- Potential participants were asked to take part in a 45- to 60-minute in-person interview.
- Findings would be published and shared with the educational community.
- Original documents and recordings of interviews would be protected and would not be shared with others. They will be stored for three years and then destroyed.

Interview Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine the best practices school-based leaders use to help improve graduation rates among African American males. The researcher used a semi-structured interview where the interviewer and respondent were engaged in a formal interview. A list of questions and topics (guide) were used to guarantee that all topics were covered during the interview.

Standardized open-ended questions were used during the interview—the same opened ended question were asked of all respondents. This approach allows for faster analyses and comparison of the responses of the participants. Additionally, open-ended questions give the respondent the opportunity to express themselves. Examples of opened-ended questions might be “How do you feel about this program”? or “Tell me more about your responsibilities to the programs at your school which help to improve African American male graduation rates?" Actual interview questions that the researcher used are contained in Appendix E.

Summary

The case study design allowed me to explore the best practices school-based leaders used to improve the academic achievement and graduation rates of male African American high school students. I conducted interviews using open-ended questions with principals, assistant principals, and other school-based leaders who have been involved with programs, activities, and interventions that promote the successful academic improvement and graduation rates of African American high school males. I believe data collected from this study can be used to initiate programs, activities, and strategies at the middle school level that will transfer to the high school level and improve the academic achievement and graduation rates of African American male students.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Overview

The purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of practices school-based leaders in a Maryland high school employed to increase the graduation rates of African American males. The researcher used individual interviews to reveal the practices that leaders at Dover High School, a pseudonym adopted for the purpose of this study, were engaged in to increase African American male graduation rates. This chapter revealed the prevailing themes that emerged from the interviews to allow the researcher to recommend improvements the study site should consider to boost African American male graduation rates.

Research Question

The overarching question guiding this study was: What are the practices that increase the graduation rates of high school African American males? This perception was examined using respondents' answers to the following questions:

1. What practices do school-based leaders think improve the high school graduation rates of African American males?

Sub Question

A. Are there other strategies school-based leaders might consider implementing to continue raising the graduation rate for African American males?

The data analysis began by identifying the characteristics of the school-based leaders who participated in the study (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Gender	Race	Years in Education	Years in Current Position
Dept. Chairperson Guidance	Male	White	6	5
Alt-1 Education Teacher/Advocate	Male	African American	20	4
Assistant Principal 1	Female	White	14	7
Assistant Principal 2	Female	White	13	5
Principal 1	Female	White	23	6 years as Assistant Principal 2 months (Principal)
Principal 2*	Female	White	36	11 2 Months (Director of Instruction)

**The former principal of Dover High was promoted in January 2015 (two months earlier) after 36 years in education (11 years as principal at Dover). The researcher believed the input of the former principal was essential because the new principal had been on the job two months.*

The researcher interviewed six participants, of which two were males, and four were females; six were school-based leaders; two were female principals, and two were female assistant principals; one was a male Alternative 1 teacher; and one was a guidance counselor. Table 1 indicates all participants' position or title, gender, race, number of years of education experience, and number of years in that position. On average, the participants had been in the field of education for nearly 19 years.

As indicated in the chart above, at the time of this interview process, the principal of Dover High had been appointed only two months earlier. The former principal was promoted to the position of Director of Instruction at the board of education. She held the position of principal at Dover for 11 years prior to her promotion. . She had a vision for the school which included but was not limited to developing positive relationships between staff and students, promoting academic success for students, creating a positive environment for parent involvement and creating positive relationships between students and school.

In order to bring her vision to fruition, the former principal introduced a number of changes to the school environment. She reduced teachers' instructional loads or changed their positions to allow them time to reach out to students and parents. Activities and programs were created and changes were made to address the needs of the students—i.e. mentor programs were created, classes were sometimes changed when needed, redo proficiency program was initiated. The programs and activities introduced at Dover High by the former principal assisted all students at the school. However, the former principal believed that African American males were in a strange position, and some of the programs created at Dover High were created specifically for to improve African American male academic achievement, graduation rates and make a school connection.

Discussion of the Data

Data for this study were collected from the six participants using six open-ended interview questions. The questions were developed based on the review of the relevant literature. The semi-structured interviews lasted no longer than one hour; took place in a location in the school, which was safe; and were conducted at a time after work hours that was convenient for the participants. Locations and times of the interviews were meant to encourage the participants to share as much data as possible. The researcher led the interview process by asking the participants guided questions that produced relevant data on the topic of practices leading to increased African American male graduation rates. Responses to the interview questions were audio recorded, and the researcher transcribed the data from the audio recordings precisely. The results of the study were captured and arranged into a chart to pinpoint specific themes that correspond to the research questions from the study. Data from the participants' responses are summarized in the chart below:

Table 2

Themes Identified in Dover High School-Based Leader Interviews

Theme	Guidance Counselor	Alt. 1 Teacher	Asst. Prin. 1	Asst. Prin. 2	Principal 1	Principal 2
Student/Teacher Relationships	x	x	x	x	x	x
Mentoring Programs	x	x	x	x	x	x
Academic Support	x	x	x	x	x	x
Making School Connections	x	x	x	x	x	x
Data Monitoring/ Assessment	x		x	x	x	x
Student Self-Esteem			x	x	x	x
Teacher High Expectations of Students	x	x	x		x	x
Parent Involvement	x	x				x
Funding for Programs		x		x		x
Teacher Professional Development		x	x	x	x	x

Participants' Interview Reponses

Research Question: What practices do school-based leaders think improve the high school graduation rates of African American males?

The one-on-one interviews with each study participant were conducted using a series of interview questions (see Appendix E). Participants in the study are identified by their title followed by a number (Principal 1, Principal 2, etc.) in instances when more than one person in the same position was interviewed. Each participant was asked the same interview questions about how they worked to improve African American male high school graduation rates. Several common themes emerged, including student/teacher relationships, mentoring programs, academic support, making school connections, data monitoring and assessment, and teacher professional development. The researcher these identified prominent themes by summarizing the participants' responses to interview questions.

Student-Teacher Relationships

In relating the practices that increase high school graduation rates for African American males, all of the participants felt that student/teacher relationships were important and effective. Participants indicated that when students develop relationships with teachers or other school personnel, student performance increases. The guidance counselor stated, "The way to get buy-in from at-risk students is to identify them and develop a relationship with them." The Alternative I teacher agreed with the importance of student-teacher, saying:

> I am able to develop relationships with students because they see I can meet them at their level. I am able to identify with their struggles. I sometimes pull African American males from class to talk to them. I am sympathetic and empathetic with the boys. Having a listening ear is important. I see improvement from students.

Principal 1, Principal 2, and Assistant Principal 1 all reiterated the importance of establishing relationships with students. Assistant Principal 1 indicated:

> I sought out connections with students by getting to know who they (students) were. Calling them by their first and last name is a huge commitment for me—getting to know the students. To know something about them helps build that relationship because I believe that is key to all students and helps them feel safe. … We see them for positive reasons as well [as for negative reasons], and we have an open-door policy as well so they start to seek us out when there are issues. We try to be proactive, and we have seen improvement in student achievement and graduation rates for African American males.

Mentoring Programs

When asked, "What are you doing that makes a difference in the graduation rate of African American males?" all six of the study participants said they felt the support of mentoring programs that had been created at the school were of significant value in raising the graduation rates for African American males. Assistant Principal 1 responded to the question by speaking of the importance of the Ninth Grade Mentoring Academy. Students are placed in the Ninth Grade Academy who are failing during the first interim period. Counselors and administrators meet with the students regularly to come up with a plan to help them raise their grades and build relationships with guidance and administrative staff.

> Looking at all students but focusing on African American males to make sure that they use their time wisely is crucial. I say African American males because, based on national statistics and here at Dover, they are most likely to fail in ninth grade first, and therefore, their rate of graduation decreases if they fall behind their ninth-grade year. They have become my focus. Through Ninth Grade Academy, I monitor their failing during the first

> interim, and those with three “E’s” [failing grades] or more are on my watch. We meet with them regularly with guidance counselors to start a plan.

The Alternative 1 (Alt 1) teacher spoke of starting mentoring groups himself specifically to support African American males:

> I am a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. Sometimes we have activities over the weekends for boys (usually African American) to attend. We also have a group of kids called the Gentlemen’s Club, and they mentor elementary-level males (usually African Americans). At the meeting we usually share stories about things in our lives that can help the boys.

While the Alt 1 teacher spoke most frequently about his personal work with African American males, he did not speak much of working with other staff members to improve African American male graduation rates. Principal 1, the guidance counselor, and Assistant Principals 1 and 2 all spoke of the importance of the Alt 1 teacher.

Principal 1 praised Alt 1 teacher’s work: “I am very lucky to have our Alt 1 teacher, and he’s African American. He can identify with the kids.” The guidance counselor spoke of how his department often relies on the Alt 1 teacher for direction:

> We sometimes ask our Alt 1 teacher to give students “pep talks” when we feel he can help a student feel better about a situation or improve a situation. We also ask his opinion about academic placement of a student when we are aware that he knows a student well.

Principal 1 also commented on the importance of having the Alt 1 teacher serve as a mentor to students with backgrounds similar to the teacher’s own:

> I realize that African American men mentoring African American young males is one of the most critical strategies to ensuring the successful development and maturation of young African American males. Since we only have five African Americans on the teaching staff, we use other adult males and females at the school who are willing to work as mentors with African American males to ensure their success.

Principal 2 mentioned that she felt the need for mentoring African American males was so significant she sought additional mentors outside the school:

> I recruited mentors from men's and women's clubs, churches, and fraternities and other organizations whose memberships were solely African American men. We held daily advisories where the teachers would make connections with students. The administration held different activities to model what they wanted teachers to do.

In-School Tutoring and Academic Support Programs

All of the school-based leaders interviewed felt that tutoring was necessary for most students, but particularly for African American males at the school. In-school tutoring was even more important because many of the African American students do not have transportation to get home if they stay after school or cannot stay after school because they sometimes have responsibilities which involve supporting their families immediately upon reaching home. Other programs that promote academic achievement and help increase graduation rates for African American males include Pride Hour (in-school tutoring offered), peer tutoring, Twilight School, and the school's academic redo policy. Each of these programs will be discussed more thoroughly below.

Pride Hour

All participants commented on the significance of Pride Hour. The school's Pride Hour is a one-hour segment that allows students to have lunch and get academic help or see counselors or coaches. Dover was the first high school in the county to employ this program. All teachers have some function in supporting Pride Hour. Participants estimated that 200-300 students benefit from Pride Hour which was introduced into the school about ten years ago. The Alt 1 teacher responded that Pride Hour has a positive impact on African American males in that:

> During this time I am able to help students by providing academic help so that African American males meet eligibility requirements by improving their grades so they are able to participate in sports or other eligibility-required activities. Having time to help African American males during school hours has helped many individuals who would not received help otherwise.

Principal 1 emphasized:

> Pride Hour is helpful for those students who are unable to stay after school. Often African American males have responsibilities at home or jobs and must go home on the bus and lack of transportation to stay after school. All this is supported by the Pride Hour.

Peer Tutoring

Assistant Principal 1 spoke about the school's peer tutoring program, which takes place during class time, stating the following:

> Tutors are in some classrooms such as Algebra II, where students may have trouble with concepts. Teachers have recommended students, even nontraditional students who have

> had success in the classroom and have good understanding of content, to be tutors in their classrooms. They don't have access to other student grades. Tutors are allowed to leave the classroom with a student to go to the media center or outside the classroom to work.

The program has been successful and particularly helpful for African American males and other students who might fallen behind. Research on the topic of peer tutoring shows improvement in social behavior, positive social interactions develop, academic performance improves, attitude toward task engagement improves for African American males (Dill and Boykin, 2000). Participants in the study noted similar improvements for African American males who are involved with a peer tutor at Dover High School, with African American males taking part in planning and being actively involved in activities involving the whole school.

Twilight School

Principals 1 and 2 and Assistant Principal 1 also cited Twilight School as a positive support for students, particularly African American students. Twilight School is a program that is employed in only two high schools in the county, one of which is Dover. Assistant Principal 1 stated:

> Twilight School is huge for recovering credits. It is different from night school because it happens right after school where students stay 2:15-3:45 p.m. attending class to recover credits. Courses offered in Twilight School are based on the needs of students so they can successfully complete courses and move to the next grade.

Twilight School is a second chance opportunity program geared toward first time 9th graders to assure that they get off to a successful start in high school. Seniors who expect to graduate in May can take the opportunity to repeat courses they have failed the first semester.

Redo Policy

Four of the participants spoke of the use of the redo or proficiency policy to help students maintain their grades. The county redo policy allows a student to have one opportunity to improve their grade in a qualifying assessment, assignment or activity which demonstrates knowledge of course content, skills or standards. To qualify, students must have completed the original assignment by the due date and attended re-teaching sessions facilitated by the teacher within five days of return of the assignment. Principal 1, Principal 2, Assistant Principal 1 and the guidance counselor felt that the redo policy was a benefit for students because it required them to participate in remediation prior to retaking a quiz or test. It is particularly helpful for African American males who do not have outside transportation home since work can be completed during Pride Hour. Principal 1 stated: “The redo policy has been in effect for seven years. Dover had a redo policy before the Board of Education instituted the redo policy. The practice has been successful.” Assistant Principal 1 added: “We don’t always get a redo in real life, but it benefits the students.”

Making a School Connection

The extent to which a school creates a stable, caring, engaging, and welcoming environment greatly affects whether a child will thrive. Each of the study participants spoke of the importance of students making a school connection by having high academic rigor and high expectations from teachers. They also stressed how important it is for students to know teachers care about their learning and about them as individuals to construct an environment where students make a connection and survive. The guidance counselor spoke of counselors making classroom visits through English and social studies classes to get access to all students. He said:

"This was done to try to make a connection for students to realistic school, and to let students know we are concerned about their learning and supporting them."

The Alt 1 teacher felt that: "Students become connected to school through positive relationships with teachers who are emphatic, manage their classroom well and encourage students to make decisions. African American males really need teacher support to connect. "

Principal 1 shared a story about six African American boys who had run-ins with teachers and had been sent to the office. They were not connected to the school in any meaningful way and were not doing well academically. Principal 1 had a conversation with the six boys and shared the following:

> I asked them why they were misbehaving, and they said they didn't know. I asked the boys what they needed to do to feel good about school and about coming to school. One of the boys suggested that they needed more activities that were interesting, that were fun for them. He said he wondered why we never had a staff-student basketball game. The group of boys called themselves "The Change Movement." The first thing they are going to do is to plan a staff-student basketball game for the school because I want to teach them that we can build community to become connected to the school.

Principal 2 felt that students feel connected to school when they feel that staff and administrators are caring and supportive. She said:

> I worked at getting my staff to believe in all students and particularly in African American students. My administrators were more like counselors, talking and listening to our students. I worked at trying to get teachers to see that these students are the best thing in their lives. I couldn't change their beliefs, but I can change their actions. A teacher's response to students is one important thing that helps students feel connected.

Assistant Principal 1 felt that students should be involved in school activities to help connect with the school, with one another, and with teachers and administrators. She said: "I try to make sure students are involved in extra-curricular activities whether it be athletics or a club to somehow make a connection to Dover High School." Assistant Principal 2 added: "Having involvement in the school through athletics and clubs connects students to school.

Data Monitoring and Assessment

The majority of the respondents in the study (83 percent) felt that monitoring data, such as grades and attendance, helps educators prevent students from falling off track for graduation. They also use these data to target interventions and support to students who need it most. The guidance counselor said:

> We have focus groups of 10 to 20 students who have done poorly. We meet with them intensively. We establish relationships with them and track data to be put in interventions that will support the students. It also helps with accountability with the students in the group.

Likewise, Assistant Principal 1 stated:

> We look at multiple data sources for incoming freshmen to be sure students are being properly placed in correct courses, being placed based on ability indicated by data sources and not tracked based on behavior or their race.

Assistant Principal 2 commented:

> I always look at data and have conversations with colleagues about structures in the school. I share data weekly and look at students in multiple groups—focus groups—and work closely with all student groups. The data-monitoring piece here at Dover started about four years ago. We look at grades and quarterly interim reports, and teachers'

> grade books are monitored to pick up on trends. African American, special education and FARMS students are monitored. We look at data to see if there are trends within grades as far as seeing if African American males are having problems with one teacher more than another; [we ask ourselves if] we are using instructional strategy that is helpful.

Principal 1 said:

> Prior to going into administration, I was a special educator. I've always looked at data to see how the special education students stacked up compared to other students. I look at data now—it's time for everybody to look at data. We've been looking at data here for several years now. That's what you have to do. You have to identify kids who are not making it. My kids who are on my list of demographics are kids of poverty, too. There are a lot of different factors, and you have to unpack all of that and dig deep to find out what is causing these kids not to be successful in school and meet as many of those needs as possible."

Principal 2 said, "We had to look at data to see how we could help these kids. Many of them are African American. Once we knew how to help students, I created positions that met the needs of the students. Then I hired people to fill those positions who wanted to help students."

Teacher Expectations of Students

Respondents repeatedly stated that they believe that teacher expectations are important to increase student achievement and graduation rates for African American males. Research indicates that minority students experience higher levels of stress in school because they are aware that if they do poorly in school, they are confirming a negative stereotype about their race (White, 2009). Teachers' attitudes and expectations affect student achievement. In schools which have high student achievement success rates, teachers have consistently had high expectation rates for all students (White, 2009). Students live up and down to teachers' expectations. Principal 2 explained:

> I knew that structures had to be put into place that supported our students. Teachers had to believe in our students and had to let them know that and show them a "can do" attitude. They had to show that they had high expectations for all students. I made a change in faculty to hire teachers who believed in all students.

Participants suggested that teachers must be careful not to develop lower expectations of minority students because of the way they are currently performing but look deep to see a students' potential to perform.

Professional Development for Teachers

Five of the six (83%) leaders at Dover High felt that professional development directed toward helping teachers differentiate their instruction to include culturally diverse learning styles would provide better opportunities for minority students to learn and succeed in school. In turn, we believed this would improve student performance and raise graduation rates for minority students, including African American males. The Alt 1 teacher commented, "Professional development would help teachers to reach out to students in a culturally responsive manner."

Assistant Principal 2 shared the following:

> To reach African American students, many White teachers think that you need to be the same color. This is not true. As a result of this thinking, a book study was organized here at Dover on *Courageous Conversations,* which had a positive effect on teachers.

Principal 1 said she has plans for professional development to help her staff:

> We have had professional development and talked about cultural proficiency for a long time in this county. It's not about talking about it. It's having the belief that every child, no matter where they come from, no matter what they look like—every child has potential. It's the mandate; it's the obligation of teachers to help move those students to see that potential. It's not about rules or policies or even curriculum. We are going to do some work to make this happen.

Principal 2 indicated that during her tenure, professional development was one of the strategies she frequently used to help change her staff's attitudes about students:

> I encouraged my staff to be visible and to talk with students to develop relationships, paying particular attention to African American males. We had lots of professional development on student-teacher relationships and showing teachers how to set things up in their instruction and classrooms that showed students that they were important in the teachers' lives.

Three additional themes were mentioned by a small number of the respondents in the study: student self-esteem, parent involvement and funding for programs. These themes are also discussed.

Student Self-Esteem

In a study by the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation (2008), results showed there is a relationship between African American male achievement and how they feel about themselves. Some school-based leaders reported that African American male students they tried to help initially resisted their help. Perhaps the students resisted because they were influenced by negative attitudes about African American males which have designated them as low-achievers who will never do well academically. The Alt 1 teacher said:

> African American males' morale and self-esteem here is lacking and student-teacher relationships were missing. Teachers needed to get involved with the African American males to help students change their thinking and help them believe in themselves. We must make ourselves accessible to our students to help them be successful.

Student-teacher relationships help build trust and increase student self-esteem which is needed to improve academic achievement.

Parent Involvement

Literature review indicates that parent involvement in African American male students' lives is one variable that has important potential for promoting their academic achievement and closing the achievement gap (Smith & Hausafus, 1998). Unfortunately, participants in the study shared that parent involvement is low at the school, and lowest for those students who need parent support most—African American males. School-based leaders strategized to bring parents to school to communicate the importance of parents' role in their students' achievement. Principal 2 shared her work to attract parents to school:

> We would schedule PTSO meetings and no parents would show up. We set up other activities in the evening for parents and they still would not come. I decided to set up Saturday Coffee for parents at 9:00 a.m. to come to ask questions and get answers. I got parents to support athletic programs but

> would not support our academic program. Then we started having teachers stay every Tuesday from 2:15-3:15 p.m. so parents could come in ask questions, get answers and leave. The program seems to be working well.

Parent involvement is an important contributor to academic outcomes. For all students, integrating parent involvement at school and home is successful in increasing academic success. The school can assist parents in learning parenting skills in making the home a learning center and extend learning into the home.

Funding For Programs

School funding regulates the resources that principals, teachers and students have available. Participants in the study spoke of the need for additional resources to provide opportunities for underserved students, particularly African American males. One participant related that the underserved population of the school is not connected to the school. Principal 1 shared:

> The underserved population of school, African American males, has not connection to the school. Today six (6) African American males(all have less than a 2.0 GPA). some things that did not represent their best behavior. I asked what they needed and they told me they needed more activities. I believe that the students would benefit from participating in a challenge course at a local college which will help them make a connection because to be successful, the students

have to help each other so that they all make it through the course. Hopefully, this project will encourage they to graduate. The project has a cost. Where do we get the money?

When speaking about school funding, participants indicated that there is not only a need for programs to support underserved student groups but also staff positions such as student advocates and additional Alternative 1 teachers.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perception of practices that school-based leaders believe increased graduation rates for African American males. This chapter discussed the themes that emerged during the time the qualitative data were analyzed. In this study, data were gathered from face-to-face, semi-structured interviews that revealed practices school-based leaders use to increase African American male graduation rates.

The researcher was able to conclude that school-based leaders at the school had similar perceptions of ten practices. The practices were discovered using statements by each of the school-based leaders during the interviews to add authenticity to the study.
Ten main themes were discovered, but seven of the themes were supported by the majority of the respondents and explained in the chapter. The themes discovered and discussed in this chapter were student/teacher relationships, mentoring programs, student academic support, data monitoring, making school connection, and teacher professional development.

The study expressed the perceptions of six school-based leaders regarding the practices they encountered or employed in their school to increase the graduation rate for African

American males. Further discussion about the findings, conclusions and recommendations will appear in Chapter 5.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION OF THE DATA AND CONCLUSIONS

Advocates for educational reform in U.S. schools have consistently tried to address the issue of inequality. Inequality among different socioeconomic and demographic groups has received more attention than any other problem in education (Gamoran, 2001). Although the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* won African American students the right to attend school traditionally reserved for Whites, segregated schools still exist today in large city school districts.

The changes brought about by constitutional rulings have resulted in high-poverty minority schools. Greater percentages of Black and Latino (33 percent and 35 percent, respectively) students attend high-poverty high schools where graduation rates for African American males is lower than all other groups (U.S. News College Compass, 2014).

If education is to be provided equitably in this country, it is important to take a look at such factors as the achievement gap, parental involvement, teacher expectations, self-esteem and identity, culturally responsive curriculum, and mentors—all issues that were investigated in this qualitative study.

This chapter summarizes this study, the processes, and findings based on the earlier-listed research question. It also contains a review of literature, conclusions, and implications. The chapter ends with a section that includes recommendations for further study.

Summary of Findings

Participants in this study were interviewed to discover the practices/programs used at their high school that they believe increased African American male graduation rates. The participants were school-based leaders who work in administration, guidance and counseling, and alternative education. Interviews highlighted seven major themes that were supported by the majority of participants: student/teacher relationships, mentoring programs, academic support, making school connections, teacher high expectations of students, data monitoring/assessment, and teacher professional development. Minor themes that were supported by fewer than half of the participants were: student self-esteem, parent involvement, and funding for programs.

Major Themes

Student/Teacher Relationships. All participants spoke of the importance of student/teacher relationships. They believe the teachers are a source to provide students with the tools and information needed for educational and career opportunities. Poor and minority families depend heavily on the teachers for information and assistance in training for post-secondary careers and higher education opportunities. In addition, participants believe student relationships with teachers and staff through classroom instruction, extracurricular activities, and other programs help students turn educational goals into reality.

Participants shared the importance of praising African American males when they do a great job and eliminating negative stereotypes in the school culture. Another factor participants commented on was the importance of spending time talking with African American male students. Teachers and staff should get to know more about students' background, find out what students believe is needed to connect them to school. Let students know that administration and staff are concerned about them. Teachers and administration should explain what they expect of students in an attempt to influence student performance.

Participants spoke of how building relationships with African American male students can help them integrate into the school environment and encourage them to take advantage of the educational and social benefits the school has to offer. Finally, participants mentioned that often relationships between African American students and teachers/staff helps create a connection with parents who might not otherwise be involved with their school life. If African American parents are involved, school staff can guide them and provide them with information that will help them strengthening their student's educational values which will improve graduation rates.

Mentoring Programs. School-based leaders reported that mentoring programs have played a significant role in helping to raise the graduation rates of African American males. One of the participants reported starting a mentoring program because the African American student morale was low, and student/teacher relationships were almost nonexistent for African American students. The school has used both formal and informal programs. Participants named mentoring programs sponsored by Alpha Phi Alpha, a nationally recognized fraternity, which have provided assistance to African American males to improve academic performance, build self-esteem, encourage completion of high school and pursuit of college, and increase social awareness and problem-solving skills. Two of the interview subjects informally volunteered their services to assist African American male students, such as through fieldtrips to college fairs, guest speakers, and causal table conversations.

Participants reported that relationships that were created during the mentoring seemed to be beneficial and created lasting impressions for students and staff involved. The mentoring developed trust between students and teachers. School-based leaders expressed that more staff needed to get involved with the mentoring process to help more of the African American males at the school.

Academic Support. When speaking about academic support for the African American males in the school, all of the respondents in the study reported that academic support for African American males is necessary and beneficial. In-school and after-school tutoring is offered to students at the research site. Participants acknowledged that many African American males do not have transportation for after-school help and benefit more from the tutoring that is offered during the school day. Academic assistance offered during the day included both teacher and student leadership. Some help is offered during class time, which allows students to leave the classroom for help from peer tutors. Faculty who academically support students do so during school's extended lunch period (Pride Hour) or after school.

Making School Connections. One participant related an incident in which several African American males had cut class and been caught by the school's school resource officer. When asked why they had cut class, the youths said they did not want to be in school because nothing there interested them. The principal talked with the young men, and they developed an idea which created a leadership position for the students. The students worked to create a teacher/student basketball game which was presented to the student body during a school day. The activity was a success. The principal worked with the group of students who created a name for their group, "The Change Movement". The group continues to work with the principal to plan other extracurricular activities. Their work has helped them become connected to the school.

Other participants reported that making a school connection is urgently important for all students but particularly for African American males because a positive correlation has been shown between students' involvement in school activities and academic achievement (Marsh and Kleitman, 2002). Several participants shared that they have seen improvement in academic performance of African American males who are involved in extracurricular activities. It was further mentioned that the students appear to respond positively when staff members attend football, soccer, and basketball games or drama and other activities in which students are involved.

Data Monitoring and Assessment. When speaking about monitoring and analyzing data, participants mentioned the importance of using data to support African American males for classroom placement purposes. Several participants shared that African American males often are placed in classes without checking their formative assessments, observations, standardized tests results, and other information in the cumulative file that might shed light on the students' academic performance. Guidance counselors and other school-based leaders at the school take care to check student schedules prior to the beginning of the semester to determine a schedule that fits the student academically and allows for courses in which the student has special interest. Participants also spoke of how the data gathered should be used to influence "how we review, how we teach, how we reteach and readjust what we do in the classroom."

Teacher Expectations of Students. Participants shared that some teachers still assume African American male students present behavior problems in the classroom and have low expectations for these students' academic performance. Respondents went on to say that if teachers assume students are performing according to their ability and make no effort to foster student improvement, the students are doomed to fail. Teacher beliefs influence their expectations and judgments about students' abilities, effort and progress in school another participant added. One respondent robustly advocated for strong leadership and high expectations from all teachers and staff for all students regardless of color. He added that both school and parents must have high expectations for students if the student is going to value education.

Professional Development for Teachers. All participants reported a need for professional development to help teachers understand the culture and behavior of students of other ethnicities. The participants alluded to the need for teachers to be more culturally responsive in their classroom instruction to improve academic achievement and to clear up cultural misunderstandings teachers may have about students of color, particularly African American male students. One of the most common tenets of culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on helping students of color pursue academic success (White, 2009). Because the school-based leaders and school staff appear to know little about teaching children of color, participants indicated that professional development on the topic was necessary to further increase academic achievement and graduation rates of African American males.

Minor Themes

Student Self-Esteem. Several participants referred to the importance of the issue of self-esteem for African American males. Respondents believe that when there is a positive relationship between student and teacher or staff, students perceive that there is concern for them and that there is a high expectation for their academic performance that does not allow for academic disengagement or negative attitudes toward achievement. Participants also saw student performance and attitudes improve when staff provided academic help and attended students' extracurricular activities.

Parent Involvement. Only a few participants spoke about parent involvement. According to participants, a number of strategies have been implemented at the study site to get parents more involved with their student's education, as well as to create a positive dialogue with teachers and school officials. While school-based leaders worked to increase parent involvement, barriers such as transportation, attitude of mistrust between parents, and work schedules may have prevented school staff and parents from participating in school decision making or school activities. Perhaps despite their work to improve parent involvement, some participants saw that parental involvement remained marginal at the school, and had come to accept that they were unable to change the level of parent involvement. As a result, three (50%) of the participants did not speak to its importance of parent involvement in the interview.

According to a study by Yan (1999), middle-class African American parents are more likely to intervene in their children's school experience than poorer Black parents. African American families with higher levels of education and family income were found to have higher levels of parent contact with schools and more parent-child discussions about learning and school activities at home (Hill & Craft, 2003; Yan, 1999). This suggests that schools need to have effective strategies and programs that make social capital available to all students to augment their academic success and close the achievement gap.

Funding for Programs and School Resources. Participants spoke of the need for additional school resources and programs to address issues of student involvement in extracurricular activities (i.e., opportunities for leadership) that are not always available for or made known to every student. There is a need to create more programs and provide necessary transportation to give more student opportunities. Respondents also noted there is a need for additional positions for student advocates, as well as for instructional materials that would help improve African American male achievement. They commented, "Funding is limited, and we sometimes have to rob Peter to pay Paul, and still much needs to be done to support students."

Recommendations

Based upon the review of the literature and findings of the study, it appears that academic support is being provided for African American males and increasing their graduation rates. However, no matter how talented the teaching staff at a school, school-based leaders must give teaching staff their full support and take ownership of the work that needs to be done to improve student academic success.

This section of the study will present recommendations that might further improve the school's capabilities and potential to improve the school relationships and educational expectations of African American males. Recommendations in the following areas should be considered: student/teacher relationships mentoring programs, academic support, making school connections, monitoring/assessing data, student self-esteem, teacher expectations of students, parent involvement, funding programs, and teacher professional development.

Student/Teacher Relationships

All of the interviewees quoted in the study believe the student/teacher relationship is essential in improving student performance. When students form good relationships in their schools, they are able to take advantage of the teachers' knowledge, experiences, and resources. School-based leaders should evaluate the relationship model at their school and determine students' characteristics and needs and implement a program that best fosters relationships between students and educators. The program should take advantage of the staff members' cultural, social, and economic diversity awareness to nullify barriers that might negatively affect student/teacher relationships.

Mentoring Programs

All respondents in the study spoke of the importance of adult mentoring. Part of the responsibility of high school educators and administrators is to provide knowledge and create an environment where students can explore, plan, and begin to transition to future learning or a career. All students need to have an adult in high school who cares about them and their future after high school. Having an adult mentor affects students' educational expectations and expands their opportunities. School leaders should engage more teachers, administrators, and outside individuals (perhaps religious and spiritual advisors) to support the education process. College students could also be recruited to serve as mentors or tutors. Mentoring on the post-secondary level may be looked at as a means of retention and increasing graduation rates (Barbier, 2014). It is recommended that school leaders should work to gain more mentoring volunteers both in school and outside for African American students. Adult mentoring models traditionally acceptable types of behavior, which tends to engage African American males, increase their retention in college, and boost their levels of self-esteem.

Academic Support

All members of the school-based leadership team who participated in this study believed there is a need to provide academic support for African American male students. African American males are more likely than any other group to do poorly academically (Rolland, 2011). School leaders should plan to provide transportation home so African American males and other students in need are able to attend tutoring. Consideration should also be given to developing additional support programs before, during, after-school and on weekends. Or alternatively, educators and administrators should provide more academic tutoring times during the school day so African American males and other students are able to attend.

Making School Connections

Respondents believe it is important for African American males to make a connection to their school to improve their academic performance. School relationships play a significant role in helping students make the transition from high school to post-secondary education or to careers. Through students' relationship with school staff, they have an advocate—teacher, counselor, administrator-- who gives direction and intercedes on their behalf with colleges, prospective employers or whatever the student might need. Students forge closer connections with their school communities when they attend classes regularly, participate in sports, get involved in extracurricular activities, and participate in mentoring opportunities. School-based leaders should strongly promote African American male involvement in such activities to ensure their success with in the school's walls and beyond. Consideration also should be given to restructuring the daily bell schedule to allow for club meetings to take place during the school day.

Monitoring/Assessing Data

Interviewees in this study shared that monitoring and assessing data is significant in education today. Despite the importance of data, few teachers receive formal training in assessment design and analysis, which should be offered and required of all educators. Assessing and analyzing student performance helps teachers assess the efficacy of their instruction, and these data can be used in placing students in the appropriate academic classes and environments. Training in assessing student performance data would be particularly beneficial for African American males because they are often placed in classes that do not match their abilities. School personnel should continue to compare the percentage of graduation rates for African American males to the percentage of graduation rates to their White counterparts.

Student Self-Esteem

A small percentage of respondents in the study believe self-esteem is an important factor of African American male achievement. Research supports that high levels of self-esteem are critical for African American males to be successful in combating the racial discrimination they experience as they work toward their life's goals (Ruekberg, 2006). One recommendation would be for the counseling department at the research site to use dialogue or reflective writing to gain understanding of students' personal analysis of their self-esteem. This process might allow counselors to share suggestions with teachers for improving classroom instruction and developing relationships with African American males to help them succeed.

Teacher Expectations of Students

In the literature review of this study, stereotype threat is described as a phenomenon that impacts how teachers view students (Steele, 1995). Teachers' low expectations of minority students are often based on students' current low performance rather than their potential to perform. African American males are often described in such negative terms as lazy, dysfunctional, and dangerous (White, 2009). Students live up or down to teachers' expectations. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers keep high expectations for all students, regardless of their race or home environment. Secondly, teachers should recommend student participation in more rigorous coursework (Honors and AP classes, taking the SAT or ACT). Thirdly, the special education referral system needs to be examined to determine why so many African American males are inappropriately placed in remedial classrooms.

Parent Involvement

School administration and staff must communicate the importance of parent involvement in their students' achievement. Staff members must make sure parents feel welcome in the school and provide regular communication to build trust between the school and parents. To improve the achievement of minority students, specifically African American males, a group consisting of parents, teachers, students, and administrators could meet weekly or biweekly to discuss the racial and ethnic barriers that impact student achievement and parent involvement. The goals of each meeting would differ, and trained facilitators would monitor the meetings. The aim of the group would be to build relationships of trust, to learn about the cultures of involved groups, and to have open dialogue about the racial and ethnic barriers that effect student achievement. Findings in the study also indicated that school-based leaders need to develop strategies to address different levels of parent behaviors and practices and create a relationship between parent, student, and school

Funding for Programs

Interview participants were concerned about the lack of funding for programs the school might introduce to improve African American male achievement and graduation rates. For instance, county funding for necessary staff such as Alt 1 teachers and teacher advocates is often unavailable. Additionally, there frequently is no funding in place to provide transportation home following after-school programs such as tutoring and clubs, which inordinately prevents African American male student participation due to expense and extenuating obligations. To support the school's needs for transportation and clubs to benefit students, grant writing to local, state, and national sources such as the Annie F. Casey Foundation and PNC Foundation might provide financial support.

Teacher Professional Development

Teacher quality is essential in raising student achievement. It affects what students learn and how much they learn. However, not all students are fortunate enough to have effective teachers. Those students who have ineffective teachers for several consecutive years have significantly lower academic progress when compared with those who have had effective teachers. Research studies have found alarming evidence of a strong bias in assigning students to teachers of different effectiveness levels based on race; there is even evidence that African American students are twice as likely to be assigned to ineffective teachers (White, 2009).

Teachers who are highly effective differentiate their instruction to meet students' needs and learning styles, which has a positive impact on the students' achievement. Teachers' use of classroom strategies that are related to culturally responsive activities, instructional time, cooperative learning, affirmative process, and communicative learning activities have especially benefitted African American students. Teachers must learn the behaviors and perspectives of African American students, particularly aspects unique to African American male students, and respond to them in ways that foster positive developmental outcomes. It is recommended that administrative staff provide and require professional development opportunities that provide teachers with strategies for boosting African American male achievement and graduation.

Conclusion

Despite the legal changes brought by *Brown vs. Board of Education,* a crisis still looms in how African American males are educated in the United States in the 21st century. While the national graduation rate for African American males has risen from 52% in 2009-2010 to 59% in 2012-2013 (Newsweek, 2015), these students continue to graduate high school at a rate well below that of Whites—80%, Latinos—65% for 2012-2013. However, some high schools, such as the research site for this study, have had success in raising graduation rates for African American males. This researcher was interested in discovering what practices school-based leaders perceive will increase the graduation rate for African American males.

Six school-based leaders were interviewed from a high school in Maryland that has had significant success in increasing graduation rates for African American males. The data gathered from the interviews with these school-based leaders revealed the following practices (themes) they believed facilitated an increase in African American male graduation rates: student/teacher relationships, mentoring programs, academic support programs, making school connections, data monitoring and assessment, building student self-esteem, teacher high expectations of students, parent involvement, funding programs, and teacher professional development. This is by no means a complete list of “cure all” practices that will end the African American male graduation dilemma, but rather practices that worked at this particular high school. There was a reoccurring sentiment that all teachers and staff need to be willing to help implement programs and activities that will continue to improve the academic achievement and graduation rates of African American males.

The low graduation rate for African American males may not be the sole result of the academic content. Results of the study implied that academic content may not be enough to increase the graduation potential of these students. It is imperative that the community joins the school to develop social, cultural, spiritual, and physical health programs that keep African American males in school and help them graduate. Having rigorous academic standards and relevant curriculum without building strong social and cultural opportunities for African American males will net results of unacceptable graduation rates. Additionally, non-instructional support from guidance counselors, social workers, school nurses, and community members must intersect with the academic programs and relationship-building practices of school staff that motivate African American males to be active participants in their learning.

The overarching theme of this study is relationships—respect and contact with community building. Educators play an important part in the trajectory of students during their formal education. If teachers develop positive relationships with students, classrooms become supportive, safe places where students can engage in positive academic and social activities, take on academic challenges and work on self-esteem and self-concept issues. Strong student-teacher relationships help students develop higher academic achievement and social-emotional adjustment (Murray & Malmgren, 2005). In their early high school career, students either commit to graduating or decide to drop out. Developing positive student-teacher relationships may help to decrease dropout rates and increase graduation rates. Administrative and teaching staff at Dover have worked at cultivating student-teacher relationships and are enjoying a significant improvement in graduation rates for African American males.

While the practices of the school-based leaders and teachers at Dover High School helped to improve the graduation rates of African American males, research show that developing relationships, mentoring students, providing academic support, building student self-esteem, using student data to make instructional decisions and teacher's high expectations of students are all factors that improve student achievement for all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status. Sound educational practices result in positive student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

This study revealed that school-based leaders are faced with more than just the challenge of the achievement gap. They must focus on why some individual students are learning and others are not, why some students believe in themselves while others do not, why some students apply lessons to their lives and others do not. The study has provided just a glimpse of the factors and barriers school leaders at a high school in Maryland face. More extensive research is needed into the cultural background, home environment, and the student learning experiences of African American high school males to determine which future interventions should be implemented to continue to improve the graduation rates of these students.

APPENDIX A

Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

TO:______________________

FROM: Linda S. Jones

DATE: Month Day, Year

SUBJECT: Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

I am requesting your permission to conduct a research study at ______________High School as part of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Maryland. I am researching high schools that have successfully increased graduation rates for African American males over the past three years, and _________________________High School of _____________________County has been identified as such a school.

The purposes of this study are to a) examine the practices school-based leaders at a Maryland high school use to improve the graduation rate of African American males; b) explore additional strategies school-based leaders might consider implementing to continue raising the graduation rates of these students; and c) identify the barriers school-based leaders believe African American males face on their path to graduation.

The study will focus on school-based leaders' perceptions regarding specific strategies or practices that have contributed to/or that could be implemented to continue to improve the graduation rates of African American males. After key practices are identified, the themes will offer suggestions to schools that are attempting to increase the graduation rates for these students. Your county's participation in the study will add to the knowledge and practices that can help to promote equal educational success and close the academic achievement gap.

If the school-based leaders agree to this request, they will be asked to participate in a 45- to 60-minute interview regarding the school's practices that contributed to consistent graduation of African American males.

The interviews will take place in person at the participants' convenience. I will tape record the interviews and transcribe the notes to ensure accuracy. Participants' identities will remain confidential, and the interview notes and recordings will not be shared with others. The interview notes will be examined for reoccurring themes and used to identify school-based perceptions of practices that support improved rates of graduation for African American males.

Participation in the study will be voluntary. Participants who agree to take part in the study are free to withdraw their consent or suspend participation at any time. A copy of the informed consent and the interview protocol are attached for your information.

Please sign and return your approval by Month Day, 2014. If you are unable to respond by that date, please send this approval as soon as possible. Please return one copy of this signed form to:

Linda S. Jones
10710 Brookwood Avenue
Upper Marlboro, MD 20772

You may also email the signed copy to XXXXXXXXXXX. If you have any questions regarding this study, please feel free to contact me at XXXXXXXXX or by email at XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, you may also contact the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Carol Parham at XXXXXXXXXX.

Your signature indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree for me to invite your site and staff to participate in the study, and that you have received a copy of this form.

Respectfully,

Linda S. Jones

Attachments:
Copy of Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study
Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities
Interview Protocol and Questions

I hereby consent to my county's participation in the research described above.

County

Superintendent or Designee Signature

Please Print Superintendent or Designee's Name

Date

APPENDIX B

Participant Interview Protocol and Questions

I will review the following information prior to our interview:

> You have been chosen for this study because this high school has demonstrated a consistent increase in graduation rates for it's African American male population over the past three years.
>
> I will be conducting research regarding your perceptions of the practices that may contribute to successful strategies used to increase graduation rates for African males.
>
> I will be conducting one 45-60 minute interview with you. I will record notes of our conversation during the interview and the interview will be tape recorded with your permission.
>
> I will not be excessive in demands and will be sensitive to your needs. I will attempt to be the least disruptive as possible.
>
> The findings will be published and shared with the educational community.
>
> I assure you of confidentiality that names will not be used in manuscript, and individual identities will be concealed through coding data. No one will have access to the transcriptions, recordings, and field notes except me.
>
> Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or your school or district.
>
> You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty.
>
> Original documents and recordings of interviews will be safeguarded and not shared with others. They will be stored for three years, after which they will be destroyed.
>
> Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the best practices school-based leaders use to help improve graduation rates among African American males. Participants will be asked the following interview questions to understand the specific practices implemented at the school to help improve graduation rates for African American males:

The researcher will share that she is about to start the recording device. The researcher will then start recording and formally introduce herself and begin with the following questions:

1. How long have you worked in the field of education?
2. What led you to pursue a career in education?
3. What is your current position at the school?
4. How long have you held this position?
5. What other positions have you held at the school?

Core Interview Questions

1. What is the name of the program with which you work at your school which addresses the achievement gap?
2. Why was the program initiated?
3. How long has it been running?
4. What other teachers/administrators participate in the program?
5. Is the program unique to your school or an adoption of a more formalized program?
6. What space and resources are required for the program?

7. What student population(s) does the program support?
8. How many students participate in the program?
9. What are the goals of the program?
10. How do you measure whether the goals of the program have been met?
11. How does the program positively impact the graduation rates of African American males?
12. Are there other programs in existence at the school that support African American males?

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Date:

Participant: ___________________________________

Principal Investigator: Linda S. Jones

Title of Project: High School Leaders' Perceptions of Practices That Increase Graduation Rates of African American Males

1. I , _______________________________, agree to participate in the dissertation research study conducted by doctoral student Linda S. Jones, from the Higher Education Program at the University of Maryland, College Park. I understand that I may contact Ms. Linda Jones' dissertation chair Person, Dr. Dennis Kivilghan, at 301-405-2863 or dennisk@umd.edu, if you have any questions or concerns regarding the study.

2. The purposes of this study are to examine the perceptions of practices high school-based leaders that have successfully increased the African American male graduation rate at their school a) what successful practices (including strategies, activities or programs) have high school-based leaders credit to increasing graduation rates for African-American males; b) are there other practices school-based leaders might consider implementing to continue raising the graduation rate for African American males.

3. I understand my participation will involve one 45-60 minute interview regarding school-wide practices that sustain increased graduation rates for Africa American males.

4. My participation in the study will be from the date listed above to April 30, 2015. The interview shall be conducted in person and tape recorded in order to ensure the accuracy of the interview notes. The researcher will convert the audio files to written text and will use the interview content to substantiate proof of increased graduation rates of African American males.

5. I understand that the possible benefits to myself or society from the research are increased knowledge about practices surrounding sustaining graduation rates for the African American males' subgroup in metropolitan American high schools. I understand that I may not benefit at all from my participation.

6. I understand that the researcher will work with me to ensure there is minimal risk,

discomforts, and inconvenience, identifying and addressing any concerns I may have. I understand that harm to human subjects is not limited to physical injury, and that there are certain risks that might be associated with research. These risks include: psychological, social, economic and legal risks. Physical risks may be fatigue. Psychological risks may include boredom, embarrassment and anxiety. I believe the risks of this study are minimized and are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits of the study. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question, and to discontinue participation at any time.

7. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or any activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I also understand that the researcher may find it necessary to end my participation in this study.

8. I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under Maryland law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others.

9. If the findings of the study are published or presented to a professional audience, no personal identifying information will be released. I understand that the interviews will be tape recorded only with my permission prior to each interview. The raw data gathered will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and transcribed interviews will be stored in locked file cabinets to which only the investigator will have access. The possibility exists that the data may be used in future research. If this is the case, the data will be used without any personally identifying information so that I cannot be identified, and the use of the data will be supervised by the investigator listed above. The raw data will be maintained in a secure manner for three years at which time the raw data will be destroyed. I do not anticipate the need to share un-coded data with others, and would do so only with your permission.

10. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquires I may have concerning the research within described. I understand that I may contact Linda S. Jones at 240-506-4180 or 410-544-0900, if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Dr. Dennis Kivilghan, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland 20745. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I may contact the Institutional Review Board at the University of Maryland at 301-405-4212.

11. I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.

12. I understand I will not receive any compensation financial or otherwise for participating in this study.

13. I understand to my satisfaction in the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

____

Participant's Signature

____

Date

____

Witness

____

Date

I have explained and defined in detail the research procedure in which the subject has consented to participate. Having explained this and answered any questions, I am co-signing this form and accepting this person's consent.

____

Principal Investigator

____

Date

APPENDIX E

Participant Interview Protocol and Questions

I will review the following information prior to our interview:

> You have been chosen for this study because this high school has demonstrated a consistent increase in graduation rates for it African American male population over the past three years.
>
> I will be conducting research regarding your perceptions of the practices that may contribute to successful strategies used to increase graduation rates for African males.
>
> I will be conducting one 45-60 minute interview with you. I will record notes of our conversation during the interview and the interview will be tape recorded with your permission.
>
> I will not be excessive in demands and will be sensitive to your needs. I will attempt to be the least disruptive as possible.
>
> The findings will be published and shared with the educational community.
>
> I assure you of confidentiality that names will not be used in manuscript, and individual Identities will be concealed through coding data. No one will have access to the transcriptions, recordings, and field notes except me.
>
> Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or your school or district.
>
> You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty.
>
> Original documents and recordings of interviews will be safeguarded and not shared with others. They will be stored for three years, after which they will be destroyed.
>
> Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

The purpose of this study is to examine the best practices school-based leaders use to help improve graduation rates among African American males. Participants will be asked the following interview questions to understand the specific practices implemented at the school to help improve graduation rates for African American males:

The researcher will share that she is about to start the recording device. The researcher will then start recording and formally introduce herself and begin with the following questions:

Demographic Questions:

1. How long have you worked in the field of education?
2. What is your current position at the school?
3. How long have you held this position?

Core Questions:

1. Your principal identified you as someone who is making a difference in the graduation rate of African American males. What is it that you are doing that is making a difference?
2. Why did you start these practices?
3. How long have you been doing these practices?
4. What space and resources are required to implement these practices?
5. How many students do you feel your practices impact?
6. Please describe what you do that you think has an impact on the graduation rate of African American males.

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