

DISPARITIES IN THE TREATMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AS
COMPARED TO OTHER RACES WITH EMPHASIS ON
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

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VITA

Cecil Jerome Dalton was born in Statesville, North Carolina and attended the Iredell County Public Schools. After graduating from North Iredell High School located in Olin North Carolina, Dalton pursued a Bachelors of Arts Degree in Special Education from Appalachian State University. Upon accepting employment with the Cobb County School District in Georgia, Dalton continued with the pursuit towards a Masters Program in Education for teachers at Cambridge College located in Boston, Massachusetts. Thereafter, while employed with Atlanta Public Schools with a desire to seek Leadership Certification, Dalton attended Lincoln Memorial University located in Harrogate, Tennessee and graduated with an Educational Specialist in Educational Leadership and Supervision. While working with the Atlanta Public Schools, Dalton has had the honor of being selected by his colleagues as Teacher of the Year in 1996/1997 for Luther Judson Price Middle School, Teacher of the Year in 1999/2000 for North Atlanta High School and System-wide High School Teacher of the Year for the Atlanta Public Schools District during 1999/2000. Dalton has had a very rich experience working in education beginning as a teacher and then transitioning to Program Assistant and Special Education Liaison experiencing both Elementary and High School working in some of the most diverse and unique settings that a public school in the inner city has to offer.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

DISPARITIES IN THE TREATMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES AS
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EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

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This study represents a review of the literature along with an analysis of secondary data. The study analyzes and highlights the disparities in the quality of education provided to African American males. High school graduation rates among African American males as compared to other races suggest that there are factors that have created such inequities among the educational experience of the African American male. In conducting an exhaustive review of a secondary database analysis to locate and determine some of the disparities in treatment of African American males as compared to other races the researcher limited the range of materials to include: 1) studies that report

the high rates of suspension of African American males as compared to other races; 2) studies that report the high rates of expulsion among African American males as compared to other races; 3) studies that review the overrepresentation of African American males enrolled in special education classes as compared to other races and 4) the underrepresentation of African American males enrolled in Advanced Placement classes as compared to other races. The research indicates the degree of inequity between racial groups and illustrates the degree of effectiveness of the education of African American boys.

Educational attainment was measured by illustrating the differences in states graduation rates of the African American male population as compared to other races and finally a concluding section summarized the previous sections and suggested some directions for change. These included recommended programs and ideas regarding the central features of certain culturally derived behaviors that can help promote prosocial behaviors among African Americans.

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I wish to express my deepest appreciation to everyone who assisted me throughout this most meaningful and rich experience. This ongoing pursuit is in honor of and dedicated to the memory of both my parents Leslie Spann and Bertha Mae Dalton whom collectively as well as individually held the highest regards and respect towards the attainment of education but equally as well to the transfer of that knowledge to create better communities, churches and citizenship rendering to a life of service to others. Thank you for your legacy of the value of education. Your wisdom and faith lives on.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Martin Luther King Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the disparities in the treatment of African American males during their educational attainment. When compared to other races, the suspension rates, the expulsion rates, the percentage of children placed in special education, and the percentage of children in advanced placement classes are all represented disproportionately. This has created barriers towards their educational attainment of African American males. African American males have and continue to experience, disastrous outcomes in school settings, often leading to school dropout. Inequitable school practices include higher rates of suspension contributing to very high rates of grade retention more than any other race. Multiple suspensions, in and of themselves, activate vicious cycles of lowered expectations concerning African American students and foster the belief that remediation is needed. As a result the African American male continues to fall further and further behind his peers. Further as many African American males are disproportionately relegated to special education, limiting

their access to general education and causing them to fall further behind and leaving school before graduation (dropout) at alarming rates.

In 2000–2001 African American males made up 8.6 percent of national public-school enrollments. They constituted 20 percent of those classified as mentally retarded, 21 percent of those classified as emotionally disturbed, 12 percent of those with a specific learning disability and 15 percent of those placed in special education.

Clearly these students' race and gender places them at extreme risk of being excluded temporarily or permanently removed from school resulting in school failure. School failure is a stronger predictor of delinquency than socio-economic status, race or ethnic background and peer relations. Whether the African American male is a dropout or whether he is pushed out, the end result is the same – he is unprepared for either higher education or the workplace.

Expulsions as well as suspension have serious effects on the life chances of students. Already performing poorly in school, they are the most likely to be suspended, although they are the very students who can least likely afford to miss classes. Despite representing only 8.6 percent of public-school enrollments, black boys comprise 22 percent of those expelled from school and 23 percent of those suspended.

Among the many children in America who are at risk and likely to lack success in school most often because they lack authentic educational opportunities, highlighting the disparities in the treatment of the African American male student stands alone in terms of the accumulation of negative factors affecting his future. The evidence is startling, and the sum of all these negative factors alarming. The over-classification as Mentally

Retarded, under-classification as Gifted/Talented, under-representation in Advanced Placement classes, disproportionate out-of-school Suspensions and Expulsions combine to limit educational opportunities and to reduce achievement levels for African American students, particularly male African American students.

The Procedure/The Method

This is a secondary data review analysis comparative study using existing research to determine the disparities in treatment of the African American male when compared to other races. Further data regarding and their educational attainment was collected using data from the National Center for Educational Statics (NCES) using the following qualifiers: 1) data that reported the graduation rates of African American males as compared to other races; 2) data that reported the rates of suspension among African American males as compared to other races; 3) data that reported the rates of expulsion among African American males as compared to other races and 4) data that reported the enrollment of African American males enrolled in special education classes when compared to other races 5) data that reported the enrollment of Advanced Placement / Gifted Classes when compared to other races.

Research Questions

The research questions that motivated this study were:

1. When compared to other races, what are the graduation rates among African American males?

2. When compared to other races, what are the suspension rates among African American males?
3. When compared to other races, what are the expulsion rates of African American males?
4. When compared to other races, what percentage of African American males are placed in special education classes?
5. When compared to other races, what percentage of African American males are placed in Advanced Placement / Gifted and Talented classes?

Definition of Terms

Advanced Placement – An advanced, college-level course designed for students who achieve a specified level of academic performance. Upon successful completion of the course and a standardized Advanced Placement examination, a student may receive college credit.

Expulsion — An action, taken by school authorities, compels the student to withdraw from school for reasons such as extreme behavior, chronic absenteeism and/or tardiness, incorrigibility, or unsatisfactory achievement or progress in school work.

Graduation — A student who has received a regular high school diploma upon completion of state and local requirements for both coursework and assessment or a high school diploma from a program other than the regular school program.

Other races — Representative of the accumulation of non African American which is inclusive of White, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native.

Special Education — A service, specially designed and at no cost to the parent/guardian, that adapts the curriculum, materials, or instruction for students identified as needing special education because of a disabling condition. This may include specially designed instruction for students with any of the following: autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay (to age 9), hearing impairment, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, and other health information.

Suspension — The student was removed from his regular classroom and barred from school grounds for a specified length of time and did not receive educational services.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

History of Racial Discrimination and Segregation

The history of racial discrimination in education and all forms of discrimination is rooted in the same types of psychological processes, regardless of the types of groups that are targeted. Discrimination against race, class, ethnicity and gender has been understood as having a common set of factors which are inclusive of normal social comparison processes, perceived group threats, realistic group conflict, existential anxiety or an authoritarian personality (Brewer, 1999; Sidanius & Pratto, 2001). Within this standard approach, racism as well as sexism have therefore been seen as psychologically equivalent forms of discrimination that differs only in terms of the target groups involved.

Sidanius and Pratto (2001) base this theory on the observation perspective that all human societies with surplus wealth are group-based social hierarchies, in which there is a dominant group at the top and one or more subordinate groups at the bottom. The dominant group is characterized by possession and control over a disproportionately large share of the material and symbolic goods people desire.

Sidanius and Pratto (2001) suggest that forms of group conflict and oppression — from racism to sexism — are manifestations of humans' predisposition toward these social hierarchies. According to social dominance theory, there are three forms of group-

based systems: an age system, a gender system and an empty-set system that consists of arbitrary, socially constructed group distinctions contingent upon situational and historical factors. Examples of empty-set systems are those based on race, ethnicity or social class.

Social dominance theory, which integrates components of psychology, sociology and political science, explores the way psychological, intergroup and institutional processes interact with one another to produce and maintain these group-based, hierarchical social structures.

In conclusion the theory posits that there are important distinctions between discrimination based on sex (i.e. patriarchy) and discrimination based on socially constructed group differences such as race, ethnicity, class, or caste (i.e. arbitrary-set discrimination).

The *Brown v. Board of Education* (*Brown v. Board of Education, of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, 1954), a landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court, which overturned earlier rulings going back to *Plessey v. Ferguson*, (Homer A., Plessey Ferguson, 163 U.S. 537; 41 L.Ed. 256, 1896 U.S. LEXIS 3390) in 1896, by declaring that state laws that established separate public schools for black and white students denied black children equal educational opportunities. Handed down on May 17, 1954, the Warren Court's unanimous (9-0) decision stated that "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal." As a result, de jure racial segregation was ruled a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution. This victory paved the way for integration and the civil rights movement the United

States Supreme Court rejected the flawed reasoning in *Plessey v. Ferguson* that led to the “separate but equal” doctrine that the statutory racial segregation did not abridge the rights of African American citizens guaranteed by the 14th Amendment to the United States Constitution. The Court argued in *Brown* that modern social science trumped and invalidated the flawed reasoning of *Plessey* and provided empirical evidence that racial segregation was inherently unequal.

The plaintiffs in *Brown* asserted that this system of racial separation, while masquerading as providing separate but relatively equal treatment of both white and black Americans, instead perpetuated inferior accommodations, services, and treatment for black Americans. Racial segregation in education varied widely from the 17 states that required racial segregation to the 16 that prohibited it. *Brown* was influenced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) 1950 Statement, signed by a wide variety of internationally-renowned scholars, titled *The Race Question*. This declaration denounced previous attempts at scientifically justifying racism as well as morally condemning racism. Another work that the Supreme Court cited was Gunnar Myrdal’s (1944), *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Myrdal had been a signatory of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) an organization which seeks to encourage the identification, protection and preservation of cultural and natural heritage around the world.

Research performed by the educational psychologists Kenneth B. Clark and Mamie Phipps Clark (1947) influenced the Court’s decision. The Clarks’ “doll test”

studies presented substantial arguments to the Supreme Court about how segregation had an impact on Black school children's mental status. The modern social science argument was contained in a brief to the Court and was cited in Footnote 11 of the *Brown* decision. It featured in its analysis, among others, the Clarks' finding that Black children could identify their race by selecting a doll whose skin tone and hair color corresponded to White (94% accuracy) and "colored" (93% accuracy) but "preferred" White dolls to play with (35% differential—60% to 25%—in preference of the White doll over the Black doll) as the doll that best resembled the child (31% preference), as the nice doll (22% preference), and as the doll that did not look bad (42% preference). African American children could identify their own racial group membership but tended to reject it as a source of positive personal or racial identity. They viewed the results as evidence that the children had internalized racism by being discriminated against and stigmatized by segregation (Keppel, 2002). Thus, the conclusion was the legacy of racial apartheid in America, and *Brown* augured that it should be dismantled.

Despite decades of attention, there have been few, if any, adequate solutions offered for the academic achievement gap between Black students and White students. A major educational concern of the last century has been concerned with providing equal quality of education to all children, regardless of their social origin. Nonetheless, across various nations and cultures, members of low status social groups continue to display lower levels of academic and intellectual achievement in terms of grades, test scores, diploma levels, and the likelihood of school completion, than members of high status or dominant social groups. Depending on the particular society, these lower status or

subordinate groups can be based on 'race,' social class or wealth, caste membership, lineage, religious affiliation, and a number of other socially constructed group distinctions. The achievement gap between dominant and subordinate groups is documented by a very substantial body of empirical research. Predicated on race and class divisions, the achievement gap is part of a larger legacy that intertwines individual and family resources with school quality, social capital, and educational opportunity. While some researchers have blamed schools for disparities in educational outcomes, others have focused on the failure of families to adequately prepare youth for the educational challenges that lie ahead (Roscigno, 1999). Still others have faulted policymakers for ignoring the pervasive nature of school inequality, institutionalized racism, and segregation (Rumberger & Williams, 1992), especially in large urban centers. Regardless of where the blame is placed, research shows that schools and families can make a difference in closing the gap (Kober, 2001; McCombs, 2000).

The sad reality is that the issues that preceded the *Brown* decision, the Civil Rights Act and the civil rights movement, remain with us. The racial inequality in our schools and society is a manifestation of the perceptions and experience of the African American male.

Perceptions

The essential need to investigate factors regarding the disparities in the treatment of African American males in school settings contribute directly to their school success or school failure. In examining the evidence, controversial but common assumptions

demonstrate that teachers' perceptions and expectations and behaviors are biased by racial stereotypes. According to Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1978), the Emily Hargrove's Fisher Professor of Education of Harvard University, states Teachers like all of us using the dimensions of class, race, sex and ethnicity to bring order to their perception of the classroom environment. Rather than teachers gaining more in depth and holistic understanding of the child, with the passage of time teachers' perceptions become increasingly more stereotyped and children become hardened caricatures of an initially discriminatory vision."

Baron, Tom and Cooper (1985) wrote the race or the class of a particular student may cue the teacher to apply the generalized expectations, therefore making it difficult for the teacher to develop specific expectations tailored to individual students. In this manner, the race or class distinction among students is perpetuated. The familiar operation of stereotypes takes place in that it becomes difficult for minority or disadvantaged students to distinguish themselves from the generalized expectations.

Ogbu's (2002) research offers data to support systemic factors, such as race relations, Blacks' internalization of negative beliefs by Whites about their intellectual abilities, tracking (or leveling), and the role of counselors and teachers that inform Blacks' academic performance. His findings reinforce what many researchers have long concluded about the negative effects of societal and school factors on Black student achievement. For example, when asked how racism was perceived in the community and school, Black parents attributed the academic gap to racism. However, many of the White parents perceived race relations as harmonious and White school officials attributed the

academic gap primarily to socioeconomic status. When Blacks and Whites of the same social economic status (SES) were academically compared in Shaker Heights, Black students still had lower school performance, a finding that has been reported in other research (Ferguson, 2002). This supports the position that the academic achievement gap is, indeed, a racial gap and not an SES gap.

Research on the effects of teacher perception on Black male educational outcomes consistently shows that teachers perceive males to be academically inferior, lacking adequate leadership and social skills, and often find them to be overly aggressive in the classroom. Much of the research on teacher perception has compared the opinions of Black and White female teachers on the social and classroom skills of Black and White school children (Davis, 2003, 2006; Fuentes, 2003; Monroe, 2005; Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, & Bridges, 2003; Rong, 1996). However, Rong (1996) studied the effects of teachers' race and gender on their perceptions of the abilities of Black and White elementary school children and found that teachers tended to rate students more highly if they shared the same racial or gender identity. White female teachers rated White female students the highest on social and academic outcomes and, similarly, Black female teachers rated Black female students the highest. The combined effects of race and gender on student ratings were stronger among White female teachers than Black female teachers.

White male teachers tended to rate White male and female students more similarly than their White female teacher counterparts. White and Black male teachers' perceptions of Black students were not included in this study because of the study's

randomized design and there were too few Black male teachers for their results to be included. In short, Rong's (1996) study showed that for female teachers, students of the same race and gender were rated higher than students who did not share this similarity. This study suggests the need for future research to examine the perceptions of male teachers, both Black and White, on Black male educational outcomes.

Studies have shown that successful teacher interaction with Black males has involved proactive contact by teachers with their parents, increased feedback to males from teachers on their school performance, and instruction that occurs in smaller classes (Davis, 2003; McKay, Atkins, Hawkins, Brown & Lynn, 2003).

The negative perception of Black male students is foundational to another important theme in the Gordon et al. (1994) review: the cultural mismatch of black males and school teachers (Monroe, 2005; Rong, 1996). Teachers often view the displayed behavior of African American males as disruptive and deficient when compared to their peers. For example, "play fighting" was frequently read for males as aggressive behavior (Monroe, 2005). Because many teachers have little pre-service or in-service training in the cultural ethos or the social world of many black students, this may produce a cultural mismatch in the classroom (Weinstein, Curran in Monroe, 2005 pg. 79). Boykin (1984) illuminates several interconnected dimensions of Black cultural ethos that may be emphasized by Black students in the classroom, i.e., movement, verve, communalism, and expressive individualism. In addition, cultural mismatch in the classroom has been linked to the disproportionate placement of Black males in special education and being suspended. Teachers who have little interaction with Black male students not only

sometimes view Black males as overly aggressive but also lack the ability to control the classroom environments that contain males. This often leads teachers to remove Black male students from their classrooms (Monroe, 2005).

A cultural mismatch among African American school students and their teachers, due to diverse values, norms, and expectations, often provokes inappropriate teacher response to student conduct, thereby inciting disruptive student behavior. The management of this diversity, when the environment is devoid of a teacher's sensitivity to the student's life, can impact students' behavior, and ultimately, initiate an alternative school referral. This study examines such student-teacher interactions. This study intends to reveal, through the voice of the urban African American alternative school student, how a teacher's response to student behavior can inadvertently create a condition in the student that spurs problematic behavior. Other teachers understand that culturally motivated actions are often construed as negative, but choose to respond in a way that creates positive interaction. Through stories of the researcher, participants, and other students, this study will qualify the unspoken, and glorify the lives of those who might otherwise not be heard (Berger, 2006).

Multicultural education, a recent phenomenon in the western world, seeks to find answers in differences in achievement in schools between students of different cultures. Generally, ideas presented suggest that there is a mismatch between pedagogy and culture, i.e., that a change in teacher attitude and pedagogy will make a difference in achievement (Bailey & Monroe, 2002).

For many Black young men, the adaptation of the tough guy image, the cool pose, and the hypersexual persona are central characteristics to masculine identity (Harper, 2004; Whitehead, 2002). This identity comes with a tremendous cost many times at the child's expense. Many scholars believe that discriminatory perceptions of Black males as threatening or violent also plays a pivotal role in their overrepresentation in the criminal justice system (Carmichael, 2005). Discriminatory practices from the past, those that are experienced today as well as those that may come tomorrow, creates social relations with attitudes in which cultural mistrust is prevalent.

Mistrust

The history of African Americans is unique to the people of African descent as for the most part this ethnic group was transported to the United States against their will, enslaved and brutally treated by a dominant culture once they arrived. This mistreatment continues to the present. These people brought with them their own language, food preferences, dress styles, musical preferences, and other values, customs and traditions. For many these customs and traditions continue to remain prominent. In addition, as a result of being discriminated against by Whites, African Americans began to develop beliefs about Whites and what they perceived to be essential behaviors for them to survive and thrive in the United States society. For more than two decades researchers have argued that the study of African Americans would be incomplete if one did not take into consideration the tendency of this ethnic group to mistrust Whites (Harrell & Harris

1984, Whaley, 1997, 1998, 2002). One belief is that Whites could not be trusted. As mentioned previously, this is referred to as cultural mismatch.

Findings from this study also indicate that Black students and parents have a strong mistrust of Whites based on cultural transmission, treatment of Blacks in the job market, and collective mistreatment. Because Black parents taught their children to be careful of teachers (whose ideas, words, and actions could not be trusted), schooling was rarely evaluated in terms of its pragmatic function and more often evaluated in the context of Black-White relations. This is a noteworthy finding that involves deeper exploration. Ogbu (2002) argues for a pragmatic trust from Black parents and students that would allow these students to overlook race relations and see teachers as knowledge and skills experts and schooling as a means to a future social and economic end. Given that many Black parents are sending their children to school with conflicting notions of attaining academic success while keeping a critical eye on the “keeper of knowledge” (i.e., White school personnel), one could argue that it seems quite logical that Black students’ cynical attitudes toward schooling based on their minority status in the United States negatively impacts their academic performance. Ogbu’s notion of a pragmatic trust might be too much to ask of the Black community, given Blacks’ history of mistreatment and “miss-education” in America.

Most of the research in the area of cultural mistrust has consisted of a study of the relationships between cultural mistrust and behavior among African American adolescent and young adults. A population that has not been scrutinized extensively are younger, school age children. Younger children are often subject to being bullied and teased in

school (Lee & Cohen, 2008; Whitted & Dupper, 2008). Black children who do not trust Whites, including White teachers, may be apprehensive about reporting these problems to teachers.

African Americans have encountered racial barriers that have caused pain, suffering and great challenge since they were uprooted from their homeland, Africa. The co-existing of segregation and racism still divides African Americans adults and children unknowingly. Indeed, in school cafeterias, classrooms, college dining halls, faculty lounges, self-apartheid is perpetuating a continuous cycle of the Old American South. African Americans have fought hard in light of tremendous obstacles to become educated, de-segregated, and integrated to have equal human rights here in this land called America. With this fight, one common goal is to change the attitudes and beliefs that every man is created equal and not judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character (King, M. L., I Have a Dream Speech).

Attitudes and Beliefs

Ogbu's (1998) data also conveys that Black students believed they were intellectually inferior to Whites and harbored feelings of self-doubt; hence, they often eliminated themselves from higher-level courses. Also, Ogbu found that teachers' attitudes and beliefs about Black students contributed to these feelings of inferiority. Even though teachers did not openly say that Black students did not work hard, they implied it in their actions. For example, some teachers admitted not assigning homework in their skills and college-prep classes (lower-level courses), which were primarily

populated with Black students, because they believed the students would not do the work. Teachers also expected and demanded less work from these students during lessons than they did from students in their honors and AP classes. The teacher data are consistent with similar findings in the literature related to tracking and beliefs and stereotypes about Black students, particularly in lower-level courses (Irvine, 2003; Nieto, 2004; Oakes, 1985). As mentioned earlier, these findings raise the question of whether or not Black students' "low-effort syndrome" is informed by teachers' perceptions of them or whether teachers' attitudes toward and beliefs about Black students are informed by Black students' display of minimum effort. The historical and systematic effects of racism continue to perpetuate institutionalized racism and oppression for the African American male which continues to widen the achievement gap. These historical and systematic effects have resulted in many challenges that are the educational experience of the typical African American male today.

Educational Experience for the African American Male

Race, class and gender significantly influence the educational experiences and outcomes of students in the United States of America. Nationally, African American boys score lower than any other group on standardized tests and are three times more likely than their Caucasian American counterparts to be misplaced in special education or classes for slow learners. African American boys are retained in grade more often than their Caucasian American classmates, particularly at the elementary level (Jackson, 1975; Ohio Office of Black Affairs, 1990). Cultural mismatch influences the classification of

special education for black males. In one study, Herrera (1998) found that race predicted special education enrollment rates. Surveying ten cities, the author found that schools with the highest proportion of White teachers also had the largest number of African American male students enrolled in special education, while those cities with higher proportions of Black teachers had lower rates of Black male placement in special education (Atlanta, Washington, D.C.). Moreover, those cities with the very lowest proportion of Black teachers, such as New York, Milwaukee, and San Diego, had uncharacteristically high rates of Black male special education enrollment, with one out of every six African American males placed in special education. In a 2003 study, Sherwin and Schmidt suggested that the over-identification of special needs resulted from teachers' and administrators' misinterpretation of cultural "communication codes." Researching two California communities, Santa Fe and Havenhearst, the authors found that African American males consistently greeted one another with a "mock battle greeting." While African American males engaged in "mock battle" behavior in both communities, verbally aggressive behavior was not observed generally among other male groups in the Santa Fe community. Because of cultural differences in communication styles in the Santa Fe community, administrators, and staff members observing different codes were more apt to punish this perceived aggressive behavior practiced by African American male youth.

African American males are suspended or expelled from school at a higher rate than any other ethnic group (Bickel & Qualls, 1980; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Moody, 1978). In a 1994 study, Costenbader and Markson investigated 349 schools

representing 55% rural, 20% urban, and 24% suburban areas in 10 states. Among the findings were that African American students were suspended or expelled in large numbers disproportionate to their total enrollment, more than any other ethnic group (Bickel & Qualls, 1980; Costenbader & Markson, 1994; Moody, 1978). Physical aggression was the most common infraction, leading to both external and internal suspension.

Repeat offenders accounted for 42% of all students suspended, and school officials reported that of all students who dropped out of school, between 51% and 55% had been suspended. Higher rates of misbehavior among Black students, conflicts between the middle class school system and the largely low socioeconomic status (SES), and academic deficits were cited as causes for the higher rates of suspension.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's report, "The Condition of Education" (1997), fully one quarter of "students of color" have been suspended at some point during any four-year period. Skiba (2003) notes that not only are African American children much more likely than Euro American children to be harshly disciplined, but they apparently have a lower threshold for punishments. He points out those African American students are also much more likely to be disciplined for nebulous and subjective infractions such as "disrespect."

The Harvard Project authors warn that, "Research indicates that students who are suspended or expelled are at greater risk of dropping out, regardless of disability status. Minority students with disabilities already have higher dropout rates than non-minority students. Disruptions in academic programs and relationships with caring adults are often

more problematic for students with disabilities than for their non-disabled peers.”

Minority students are clearly at very high risk in our schools, which are frequently failing them. The dropout rate for African American boys is disproportionately higher than that of other race (Richardson & Gerlack, 1980).

In the 2003 report, “Opportunities Suspended: The Devastating Consequences of Zero Tolerance and School Discipline Policy,” Advancement Project authors (in collaboration with the Harvard Civil Rights Project) punctuate the bleak description of this crisis with reports of several schools that are, as they put it, “bucking the trend.” These are schools that have put much needed supports in place to help their minority students with disabilities remain in school and succeed. All of these programs tend to center around a highly supportive programmatic structure and one or more central adult figures that act to mentor and guide these students. In each case, discipline is seen not as a reason to remove the child from school, but as an indicator that a higher level of support is required.

Retention

Although retention rates were not one of the factors to be analyzed for this research, the researcher is unable to ignore the influence that multiple, habitual suspensions have on low achievement. Low academic achievement was the most frequent reason given by teachers recommending retention. However, Jimerson, Carlson, Rotert, Egeland, and Sroufe’s (1997) study included a comparison (low-achieving promoted) group similar to the retained group and reported that the groups did not differ

significantly on measures of intellectual functioning at age 64 months and at the end of third grade. That finding supports prior research by Niklason (1984) and Sandoval (1984) who found that although retained students did exhibit lower cognitive ability in comparison with promoted students, they did not differ from a group of low-achieving but promoted peers. The literature on whether grade retention is an effective tool to remediate poor school performance almost unanimously concludes that retention is not effective (Doyle, 1989; Holmes, 1989; Karweit, 1991; Niklason, 1984; Overman, 1986; Rose, Medway, Cantrell, & Marus, 1983; Shepard & Smith, 1988; Smith & Shepard, 1987). The results of the study by Jimerson et al. indicated that behavior problems worsened following retention. Retained students displayed exacerbated behavior problems by sixth grade, whereas their low-achieving, but promoted, peers remained stable.

Those findings contradict previous results by those who investigated the link between retention and problem behaviors in a sample of African American sixth- and seventh-grade students (Gottfredson, Fink, & Graham, 1994). They found that grade retention reduced rebellious behavior in school and increased attachment. The association between grade retention and adolescent problems has two possible explanations. The experience of grade retention might cause adolescent problem behaviors, or both behaviors might be explained by an underlying predisposition to failure. In the latter explanation, it is assumed that a set of personal characteristics that may begin at an early age is related to adolescent problem behaviors. Accordingly, grade retention has little or no causal effect on adolescent problem behavior because it is simply another result of low

self-control. On the other hand, some researchers maintain that retention increases adolescent problem behavior. For example, Grissom and Shepard (1989) suggested that being retained may push a student out of school by reinforcing the youth's self-perception as a failure in school. Research has been inconclusive in establishing a causal link between grade retention and problem behavior (Gottfredson, Fink, & Graham, 1994).

School-related variables contributed more to delinquent behavior than the effect of either family or friends according to Elliott and Voss (1974). In addition, Kelly and Balch (1971) found that school failure was a stronger predictor of delinquency than socioeconomic status, race or ethnic background, and peer relations. Other studies have found that school failure is consistent in both official and self-reported delinquent behavior (Empey & Lubeck, 1971; Gold, 1978; Gomme, 1982; Hirschi, 1969; Polk & Schafer, 1972; Siegel & Senna, 1988; West, 1975). Shannon (1982), West and Farrington (1977), and Wolfgang, Figlio, and Sellin (1972) reported that the relationship between academic performance and delinquency is very significant for chronic delinquents.

The relationship between grade retention and problem behaviors has been observed from one direction—the impact of grade retention on the development of problem behaviors. It seems equally important to examine the impact of those problem behaviors on grade retention. Children who display antisocial behavior in a variety of settings are at risk of low academic achievement and school failure (DeBaryshe, Patterson, & Capaldi, 1993). As early as the age of school entry, behavior problems are correlated negatively with verbal ability and reading readiness (Richman, Stevenson, & Graham, 1982). Children who show aggressive behaviors in the primary grades are at an

elevated risk for grade retention and special education placement (Ledingham & Schwartzman, 1984). Among older, more seriously antisocial youths (i.e., individuals identified as delinquent on the basis of police records or self-report), problem behavior remains associated with indices of low achievement test scores, nonparticipation in extracurricular activities, truancy, and dropping out of school (Dishion, Loeber, Southamer-Loeber, & Patterson, 1984; Elliot & Voss, 1974; Hawkins & Lishner, 1987).

Other research focused on academic performance, cognitive ability, child behavior problems, demographic factors, and parent characteristics which yielded mixed results concerning the role of achievement and intelligence in retention decision (Jimerson et al., 1997). A few researchers have investigated the role of classroom behavior in non-promotion decisions. Caplan (1973) and Pianta and Steinberg (1992) hypothesized that student behavior influences teachers' evaluations of performance. The possibility of children being retained because of behavior problems is important in the light of the concern generated by the outcome literature (Jimerson et al.). If those behavioral problems constitute a cause of grade retention for young children, there is a need to investigate the role played by similar problems when retaining older children, that is, those at the age in which alcohol use, resistance to parental discipline, and other types of conduct problems appear.

Students may be retained in grade if they lack the required academic or social skills to advance to the next grade. However, research has shown that student retention is financially costly to school systems. In addition, students who are retained and students who are suspended from school are at risk of dropping out of school (Baker et al., 2001).

In 2003, some 10 percent of public school students in kindergarten through grade 12 had been retained (i.e., repeated a grade since starting school), while 11 percent had been suspended (i.e., temporarily removed from regular school activities, either in or out of school), and 2 percent had been expelled (i.e., permanently removed from school with no services).

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES; 2003) reported that 17 percent of Black students had been retained, a higher percentage than that of White, Hispanic, or Asian/Pacific Islander students. The percentage of Hispanic students (11 percent) who had been retained was higher than the percentage of White students (8 percent) retained, while the percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander students (5 percent) was lower than that of Whites. Similarly, a larger percentage of Black students (20 percent) had been suspended than was the case for their American Indian/Alaska Native (11 percent), Hispanic (10 percent), White (9 percent), or Asian/Pacific Islander (6 percent) peers. In addition, a higher percentage of Black students had been expelled (5 percent) than was the case for White (1 percent), Hispanic (1 percent), and Asian/Pacific Islander students (less than 1 percent).

There are differences between males and females when examining rates of retention, suspension, and expulsion. In 2003, about 12 percent of male students had repeated a grade, compared to 8 percent of female students. Additionally, for both Black and White students, a larger proportion of males than females had been retained. A similar pattern emerged for suspensions. Overall, twice as many males as females had been suspended (15 vs. 7 percent) and the same ratio existed for White and Hispanic

males and females. The percentage of Asian/Pacific Islander male students who had been suspended was 10 times that of Asian/Pacific Islander female students (11 vs. 1 percent). Additionally, among White and Black students, as well as among students overall, the percentage of males who had been expelled was twice that of their female counterparts.

Influence of Academic Failure: Suspension

A number of studies examining school discipline observed the higher suspension rates of African American males (Monroe, 2005, 2006; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Raffaele-Mendez, Knoff, & Ferron, 2002). Academic failure is one of the largest and most consistently found predictors of later drug and alcohol use, delinquent behavior, teenage pregnancy, and dropping out of school (Gottfredson, 1987; Grissom & Shepard, 1989).”

Many studies reveal that several structural factors contribute to the disproportionate number of black males being suspended: zero tolerance policies, criminalization of males in the school system, and multiple suspensions of individual males that do not work and instead exaggerate the rates of suspensions for males (Fuentes, 2003; Monroe, 2006; Raffaele-Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Rios, 2007; Saunter, 2001). The increased school suspensions of Black males have also been linked to their overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system (Fuentes, 2003; Monroe, 2006; Rios, 2007; Saunter, 2001). The impact of school suspensions on Black males entering the juvenile justice system and often later being incarcerated has far-reaching and deleterious

effects. As Mark Soler, Executive Director of the Center for Children’s Law and Policy, notes, “the pathway from school to prison for African American males not only contributes to their high incarceration rates but also to their inability to support themselves outside of the underground economy and to being good fathers and husbands” (Fuentes, 2003).

Data on suspension consistently show that, as the National Center for Educational Statistics has reported, referrals for drugs, weapons, and gang-related behaviors constitute but a small minority of office referrals leading to suspension. Fighting among students is the single most frequent reason for suspension, but the majority of school suspensions occur in response to relatively minor incidents that do not threaten school safety (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). At the middle school level, disrespect and disobedience are among the most common reasons for suspension, and a significant proportion of suspensions are for tardiness and truancy.

Ferguson’s (2002) research successfully illuminates how institutional procedures — such as those regarding disciplines, which are often assumed by many to be objective — are fraught with an alarming degree of subjectivity and become a medium through which a racial order is perpetuated. According to Ferguson discipline decisions made by adults in the schools are often based on teachers’ “perceptions of student appearance, behavior, and social background.” These “discipline issues” with students are no longer seen as individual encounters but rather as more of a product of societal perceptions at large. The implications are enormous; the scene of the all-male African American core

group of students in the school discipline room is analogous to systems of incarceration throughout the United States.

Expulsion

Expulsion is the most severe disciplinary sanction that an educational program can impose. As the complete and permanent removal of a student from an entire educational system, expulsion is the most severe disciplinary response that any educational system can impose on a student. Transferring students with behavior problems to other educational settings (e.g., self-contained special education programs, alternative schools, etc.) is not considered expulsion. Rather, expulsion represents a complete cessation of educational services without the benefit of alternative services provided by or through the educational program that has expelled the child. In the case of kindergarten through 12th grade students in public schools, expulsion is typically the last of a series of disciplinary actions that ultimately culminates in the student being barred from attending any educational programming in that school system.

The first statewide study of expulsion in child care and early education sites was conducted in Massachusetts during the 2001 school year (Gilliam & Shahar, in press). Little research exists on expulsion at any grade level, but the need is even more pronounced for children younger than kindergarten. Among the the first efforts to collect data on expulsion prior to kindergarten (Grannan, Carlier, & Cole, 1999) was conducted as part of Michigan's *Child Care Expulsion Prevention Program*, which dispatches

mental health consultants to classrooms where students were at immediate risk of being removed from the school system.

Research reported from a national study of 3,898 prekindergarten classrooms (81.0% response rate), representing all of the nation's 52 state-funded prekindergarten systems currently operating across 40 states. Weighted results indicated that 10.4% of prekindergarten teachers reported expelling at least one preschooler in the past 12 months, of which 19.9% expelled more than one. Nationally, 6.67 preschoolers were expelled per 1,000 enrolled. Although this rate for state-subsidized prekindergarten is lower than what has been previously reported for child care programs, the prekindergarten expulsion rate is 3.2 times the rate for K–12 students. Rates are reported for each of the states and state prekindergarten systems represented. The results were significant cross state variability in expulsion rates. This could be possibly due in part to differences in how state prekindergarten systems are structured. Findings concluded that rates were highest for older preschoolers and African Americans, and boys were over 4½ times more likely to be expelled than were girls. Expulsion rates were lowest in classrooms in public schools and Head Start and highest in faith-affiliated centers and for-profit child care. The likelihood of expulsion decreases significantly with access to classroom-based mental health consultation. Although a pattern of particular risk for expulsion with African American students has been demonstrated during kindergarten through grade 12 (Holzman, 2004), the pattern of disparity appears to begin much earlier.

The term “zero tolerance” — referring to policies that punish all offenses severely, no matter how minor — grew out of state and federal drug enforcement policies

in the 1980s. The history of the term “zero tolerance” first use of the term was recorded in the Lexis-Nexis national newspaper database was in 1983, when the Navy reassigned 40 submarine crew members for suspected drug abuse. In 1986 the term “zero tolerance” was picked up and used by a U.S. attorney in San Diego as the title of a program developed to impound sea craft carrying any amount of drugs and by February 1988 the program had received national attention. U.S. Attorney General Edwin Meese authorized customs officials to seize the boats, automobiles, and passports of anyone crossing the border with even trace amounts of drugs and to charge those individuals in federal court. Zero tolerance took hold quickly and within months was being applied to issues as diverse as environmental pollution, trespassing, skateboarding, racial intolerance, homelessness, sexual harassment, and boom boxes, a far cry from its intended purpose.

From the outset, the harsh punishments meted out under zero tolerance drug policies engendered considerable controversy. Yet, just as the early zero tolerance drug programs in the community were being phased out, the concept was beginning to catch on in the public schools. In late 1989 school districts in Orange County, California, and Louisville, Kentucky, proclaimed zero tolerance policies that called for expulsion for possession of drugs or participation in gang-related activity. In New York, Donald Batista, superintendent of the Yonkers public schools, proposed a sweeping zero tolerance program as a way of taking action against students who caused school disruption. With its restricted school access, ban on hats, immediate suspension for any school disruption, and increased use of law enforcement, the program contained many of the elements that have come to characterize zero tolerance approaches in the past decade.

Zero tolerance policies were being adopted by school boards across the country, often broadened to include not only drugs and weapons but also tobacco-related offenses and school disruption by 1993. In 1994 the federal government stepped in to mandate the policy nationally when former President Clinton signed the Gun-Free Schools Act into law. This law mandates an expulsion of one calendar year for possession of a weapon and referral of students who violate the law to the criminal or juvenile justice system. It also provides that the one-year expulsions may be modified by the “chief administrative officer” of each local school district on a case-by-case basis. This law mandates an expulsion of one calendar year for possession of a weapon and referral of students who violate the law to the criminal or juvenile justice system. It also provides that the one-year expulsions may be modified by the “chief administrative officer” of each local school district on a case-by-case basis.

Over time, however, increasingly broad interpretations of zero tolerance have resulted in a near epidemic of suspensions and expulsions for seemingly trivial events especially so for the African American male . Yet in many cases, school administrators and school boards have not backed down even in the face of public clamor. They claim that their hands are tied by federal or state law (despite language in the federal law that allows local review on a case-by-case basis), or they assert that continued application of zero tolerance is necessary to send a message to disruptive students. In a number of these incidents, parents have filed lawsuits against the school districts, for the most part unsuccessfully (Zirkel, 1998). A number of states have amended their zero tolerance policies to allow more flexibility for individual cases, (Pipho, 1998) while the Office for

Civil Rights in the U.S. Department of Education began advocating a less comprehensive interpretation of sexual harassment after the suspension of 6-year-old Jonathan Prevette for kissing a classmate made national headlines (Portner, 1996).

Gale Morrison and Barbara D’Incau (1997) reported in one of the few studies of school expulsion in American education, that the majority of offenses in the sample they investigated were committed by students who would not generally be considered dangerous to the school environment. In their study, as in many that have explored suspension and expulsion, poor academic skill was a strong predictor of school exclusion.

One of the more disturbing characteristics of the zero tolerance approach to discipline is that disproportionate numbers of those at risk for a range of school punishments are poor and African American males. In 1975 the Children’s Defense Fund, studying data on school discipline from the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), found high rates of suspension for Black students. Of the nearly 3,000 school districts represented in the OCR data, more than two-thirds showed rates of Black suspension that exceeded rates for White students according to the Washington’s Research Project. Since then, researchers have consistently found disproportionate minority representation among students on the receiving end of exclusionary and punitive discipline practices. African American students are overrepresented in the use of corporal punishment and expulsion, and they are underrepresented in the use of milder disciplinary alternatives (Skiba, Peterson, & Williams, 1997). This overrepresentation of minorities in the application of harsh discipline appears to be related to the overall use of school exclusion: schools that

rely most heavily on suspension and expulsion are also those that show the highest rates of minority overrepresentation in school disciplinary consequences.

Overrepresentation of African American Males in Special Education

Although there have been notable increases in educational attainment over the past decades, there are several concerns and challenges remain. Although only 17% of the school age population is African American these children comprise 33% of those that receive labels of mental retardation (Office of Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education, as cited in Losen & Orfield, 2002). This represents a rate three times that of European students. Losen and Orfield point to a range of factors that is contributing to this disproportionate representation of African Americans among special education students, including unconscious racial bias, resource inequalities and reliance on I.Q. scores. African Americans are not only overrepresented not only among students that are identified with mental retardation, but also labeled among students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbance (Parrish, 2002). In addition, when Black students are identified for special education services they are less likely to be mainstreamed (Frierros & Conroy). Rates for the identification for special education services vary by region, being highest here in the south. In addition, although counterintuitive, rates of over identification of African Americans for special education services occur most frequently in the wealthiest school districts (Lose & Orfield, 2002).

Cultural mismatch influences the classification of special education for Black males. In one study, Herrera (1998) found that race predicted special education

enrollment rates. Surveying ten cities, the author found that schools with the highest proportion of White teachers also had the largest number of African American male students enrolled in special education, while those cities with higher proportions of Black teachers had lower rates of Black male placement in special education (Atlanta, Washington, D.C.). Moreover, those cities with the very lowest proportion of Black teachers, such as New York, Milwaukee, and San Diego, had uncharacteristically high rates of Black male special education enrollment, with one out of every six African American males placed in special education. In a 2003 study, Sherwin and Schmidt suggested that the over-identification of special needs resulted from teachers' and administrators' misinterpretation of cultural "communication codes." Researching two California communities, Santa Fe and Havenhearst, the authors found that African American males consistently greeted one another with a "mock battle greeting." While African American males engaged in "mock battle" behavior in both communities, verbally aggressive behavior was not observed generally among other male groups in the Santa Fe community. Because of cultural differences in communication styles in the Santa Fe community, administrators, and staff members observing different codes were more apt to punish this perceived aggressive behavior practiced by African American male youth.

Problems with the over identification of services have often been tied to the role of assessment in the identification of students in need of special education. Problems appear to be linked not only to test construction or cultural bias of test questions as to the role of subjectively into the processes in which students are identified and assessed. Court

cases such as *Hobson v. Hansen* (1967/1969) challenged and limited the use of the I.Q. testing in educational placement and tracking of African Americans. Cases such as *Larry P. v. Riles* (1972/1974) and *PASE v. Hannon* (1980) limited the use of I.Q. tests for placing African American students in classes for the mentally retarded (Hillard, 1983). Legislation such as Public Law (P.L.) 94-142 (Education for All Handicapped Children Act), and its reauthorization as P.L. 101-476 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 1990) protects students rights to a free and appropriate education. P.L. 99-457, 1986, which extended this legal protection to children age 3–5 and its reauthorization (P.L. 105-117, 1997) were based on many of the underlying tenants established by earlier legal rulings. These laws require that student’s assessment for placement in special education be based on a multi-disciplinary team with expertise in the area of the students presumed deficits. It is also required that assessments are culturally appropriate, that parents have the right to participation and due process in placement decisions, and that students are placed in the least restrictive educational environment as possible. Educational and Civil Rights advocates are concerned with the apparent weakening of an individual’s recourse under Title VI under the Civil Rights Act of 1964. In 2001, the decision rendered by the Supreme Court in *Alexander v. Sandoval* indicated that such cases should be pursued by the Office of Civil Rights and not by private individual action. The courts have played and will continue to play an important role in the education of African American boys.

Underrepresentation of African American Students in the Advanced Placement and Gifted and Talented Classes

It is well documented that African Americans are underrepresented in AP courses (e.g., Gandara, 2004; Miller, 2004; National Study Group for the Affirmative Development of Academic Ability, 2004). The University of Texas at Austin's Charles A. Dana Center research investigated Calculus courses with high enrollment of minority students in high poverty schools to understand the specific factors associated with this high enrollment (Pucci & Sobel, 2002). The study found that these courses were situated in districts with a culture of high expectations for student achievement; a commitment to training teachers and advanced level content; and a partnership with an outside agency that provided resources, training and support for teachers and students. The teachers in these schools had very high expectations for their students and used varied instructional strategies to make the high level content assessable to students. In turn, students in these schools took the initiative to enroll in AP classes and continued to persist even in the face of difficulty. The study did not examine student success within the course or the AP exam.

One of the main major objectives of the College Board is attempting to keep minority students as participants in advanced level courses, particularly AP classes with support from the federal government and state government in recent years (e.g., Borman, Stringfield, & Rachuba, 2000; Kinlaw; 2006; White House Press Release, 2004). As a result of these intense strenuous efforts, the number of African American and Latino students enrolled in AP courses has increased significantly. The number of African

American students participating in AP exams nearly doubled between 2000 and 2005 to approximately 62,000, and the number of Latino students taking the exams more than doubled to approximately 135,000 during that same time period (Epstein, 2006).

This increased access to AP courses and the challenging curriculum within them for African American and Latino students represents an important movement towards achieving equity at the highest levels of school achievement. Other studies of the gifted with particular concerns such as gifted Asian American students (Plucker, 1996), African American (Ford, 1992, 1998; Herbert, 1995, 2000a, 2001; Herbert & Beardsley, 2001) and Hispanic (Corderio & Carspecken, 1993; Diaz, 1998) students, gifted children of alcoholics (Peterson, 1997), and gifted students with learning disabilities (Reis & Colbert, 2004), underscore the potential salience of resilience in research and counseling of troubled gifted youth. Related to the concept of “fit” in the school, Seely (1984) found gifted delinquents with high creative and fluid intelligence combined with relatively lower verbal and crystallized intelligence and school performance.

Work by Ford (1996; Ford, Tyson & Frazier Troutman, 2002) and Worrel (2003) highlights another domain in which African Americans face challenges within American educational systems: educational opportunities for the gifted and talented (Ford et al., 2002) suggest that African Americans are underrepresented in the Gifted and Talented Programs by 50%. The authors note that bias beliefs about the cognitive abilities about African Americans and the use of intelligence tests as the primary method of identifying youth for participating in the gifted and talented programs, places these youth at disadvantage. The singular use of an I.Q. test may be inappropriate as I.Q. predicts only

half of the variance in performance. In addition, only half of standardized tests have less predictive validity in relations to the academic performance and outcomes of African Americans. More comprehensive analyses of capabilities and the use of assessments based on multidimensional models of intellectual capacity may be warranted.

In addition Worrell (2003) noted that potential bias in recruitment processes may play a role in the under identification of African American youth for Gifted and Talented programs. Worrell also raises the question as to whether Steele's stereotype vulnerability places African American Gifted and Talented youth at risk of academic underachievement. In his study for participants in a summer program for Gifted and Talented students, Worrell noted that Gifted and Talented youth may come from homes that are less affluent and this may raise questions as to whether youth and families are aware of opportunities for Gifted and Talented students. Ford also raises questions as to what types of educational experiences are engaging for, relevant to, and support the retention of Gifted and Talented American students and what training is needed to support Gifted and Talented teachers programs. Further, he suggested that program designers need to use appropriate assessment, recruitment and retention strategies.

In conclusion when examining the disparities and the achievement level of African American students, researchers have discussed significant academic and social challenges confronting African American students in their quest for education. Researchers' have elucidated several serious, stifling factors to the educational system that may negatively impact African American students' achievement, aspirations, and pride. African American students' schooling is characterized by low achievement rates,

curriculum inequities, tracking practices, and differential patterns of expulsion and suspension (Hilliard, 1994; Martin, 2003; Price, 2000; Weissglass, 2000). African American students are disproportionately represented in low ability group classes; over-represented in special education, vocational, and general education programs; underrepresented in gifted and talented academic programs; and underrepresented in upper level mathematics, science, and computer classes (Berry, 2003; Patton, 1995). Such data suggest with the fact that African American students are frequently the victims of negative attitudes and lowered expectations from teachers, counselors, and administrators (Rousseau & Tate, 2003). As the recipients of lowered expectations from school personnel, African American students often experience alienation and distancing in school. The appearance of a gap in achievement is of concern to many educators, researchers, and policymakers. Evidence of these disparities in achievement has shown up in assessment scores, course enrollment patterns, and allocation of resources.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

In order to examine the research questions identified in this study the researcher has conducted a secondary data analysis based on data collected the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES; 2003). Data was entered into SPSS version 15.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics were conducted based on the demographic data. Descriptive statistics included frequency and percentages for nominal (categorical/dichotomous) data and means/standard deviations for continuous (interval/ratio) data. Also standard deviation measures, represented statistical dispersion, or the spread of values in a data set. If the data points are all close to the mean, then the standard deviation was close to zero. The arithmetic mean is defined as the sum of scores divided by the number of scores (Pagano, 1990, p. 60).

RQ1: Will there be a proportional difference on graduation rate between other races and African Americans?

H₁₀: There will not be a proportional difference on graduation rate between other races and African Americans.

H₁₁: There will be a proportional difference on graduation rate between other races and African Americans.

To examine hypothesis 1, a z-test of two proportions was be conducted to assess if there are proportional differences on the graduation rate between other races and African Americans.

The z-test of two proportions was an appropriate analysis if the extent of the research question was to examine whether a statistically proportional differences existed between two independent populations such as control verses experimental groups. Rejection of the null hypothesis was be rendered, given an alpha of 0.05, when test results concluded that the calculated z-value was greater than the critical z-value of ± 1.96 , thus revealing a significant proportional difference. Setting alpha at 0.05 ensured that the researcher could be 95% certain that the differences did not occur randomly.

RQ2: Will there be a proportional difference on suspension rate between other races and African Americans?

H₂₀: There will not be a proportional difference on suspension rate between other races and African Americans.

H₂₁: There will be a proportional difference on suspension rate between other races and African Americans.

To examine hypothesis 2, a z-test of two proportions was be conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on suspension rate between other races and African Americans.

RQ3: Will there be a proportional difference on expulsion rate between other races and African Americans?

H3₀: There will not be a proportional difference on expulsion rate between other races and African Americans.

H3₁: There will be a proportional difference on expulsion rate between other races and African Americans.

To examine hypothesis 3, a z-test of two proportions was conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on expulsion rate between other races and African Americans.

RQ4: Will there be a proportional difference on special education rate between other races and African Americans?

H4₀: There will not be a proportional difference on special education rate between other races and African Americans.

H4₁: There will be a proportional difference on special education rate between other races and African Americans.

To examine hypothesis 4, a z-test of two proportions was conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on special education rate between other races and African Americans.

RQ5: Will there be a proportional difference on number of children in advanced placement classes between other races and African Americans?

H5₀: There will not be a proportional difference on number of children in advanced placement classes between other races and African Americans.

H5₁: There will be a proportional difference on number of children in advanced placement classes between other races and African Americans.

To examine hypothesis 5, a z-test of two proportions was conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on the number of children in advanced placement classes between other races and African Americans.

IV. RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

Table 1 below presents 2003 graduation rates by state and race. To examine hypothesis 1, a z -test of two proportions was conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on graduation rate between other races and African Americans. The results of the z -test was significant, $z = 284.90$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the graduation rate for African American males (48.0%) was significantly lower than the graduation rates of males in other races (66.0%). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 1

State Graduation Rates by Race, 2003

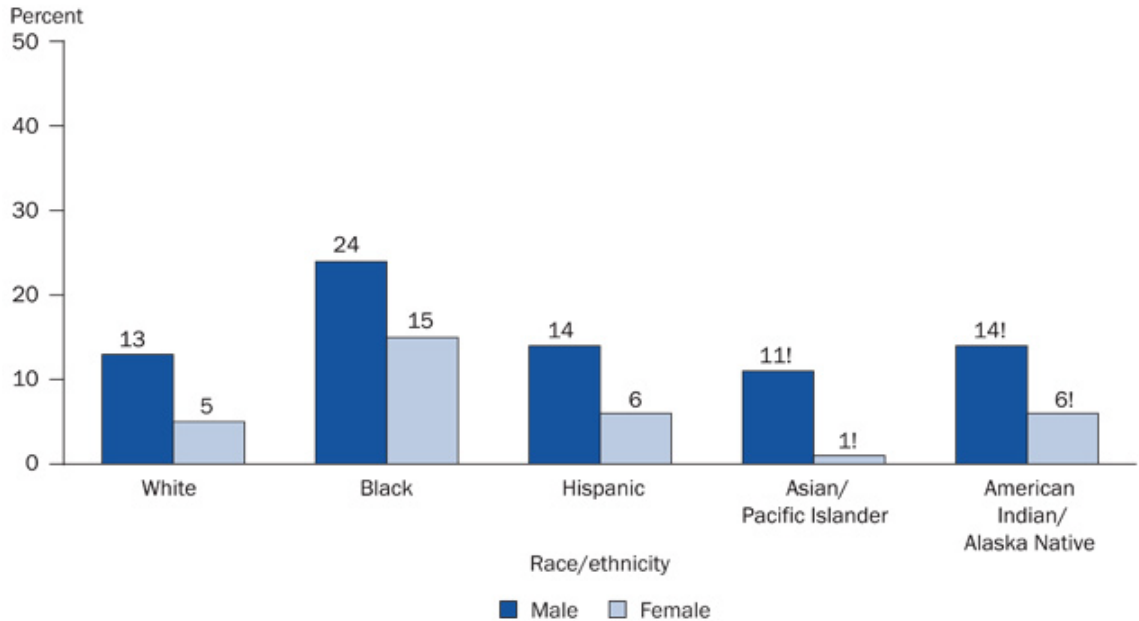
Table 1: State Graduation Rates in Alphabetical Order															
State	Total	Asian	Hispanic	African-American	White	Asian Male	Asian Female	Hispanic Male	Hispanic Female	African-American Male	African-American Female	White Male	White Female	Male	Female
Alabama	60%	I	I	52%	65%	I	I	I	I	47%	58%	62%	69%	56%	64%
Alaska	60%	I	I	56%	65%	I	I	I	I	50%	I	64%	66%	61%	65%
Arizona	71%	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Arkansas	74%	I	I	69%	77%	I	I	I	I	61%	76%	74%	80%	70%	78%
California	65%	81%	56%	56%	73%	79%	83%	51%	61%	50%	62%	71%	76%	62%	70%
Colorado	72%	I	51%	59%	80%	I	I	46%	57%	52%	66%	77%	83%	68%	77%
Connecticut	82%	89%	53%	67%	91%	81%	98%	48%	60%	60%	74%	89%	93%	78%	87%
Delaware	65%	I	I	57%	69%	I	I	I	I	50%	65%	66%	73%	59%	71%
District of Columbia	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
Florida	61%	I	53%	50%	69%	I	I	49%	58%	46%	54%	66%	73%	58%	65%
Georgia	56%	I	I	48%	64%	I	I	I	I	41%	54%	60%	67%	51%	61%
Hawaii	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I	I
Idaho	74%	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Illinois	73%	85%	54%	49%	85%	85%	85%	49%	60%	42%	55%	83%	86%	70%	76%
Indiana	74%	I	56%	55%	78%	I	I	I	63%	47%	63%	75%	80%	71%	77%
Iowa	85%	I	I	I	88%	I	I	I	64%	I	I	87%	90%	84%	87%
Kansas	76%	I	51%	54%	83%	I	I	50%	I	50%	59%	81%	84%	75%	79%
Kentucky	69%	I	I	55%	72%	I	I	I	I	53%	58%	71%	74%	69%	72%
Louisiana	63%	I	80%	55%	70%	I	I	74%	85%	48%	62%	67%	74%	58%	69%
Maine	74%	I	I	I	75%	I	I	I	I	I	I	71%	75%	70%	74%
Maryland	75%	92%	71%	65%	81%	94%	90%	I	78%	59%	71%	78%	85%	71%	80%
Massachusetts	72%	69%	I	52%	80%	I	I	38%	I	46%	58%	76%	85%	69%	76%
Michigan	77%	I	48%	57%	80%	I	I	I	53%	50%	65%	77%	84%	71%	80%
Minnesota	84%	72%	I	I	90%	I	78%	I	I	I	I	87%	93%	82%	87%
Mississippi	59%	I	I	60%	66%	I	I	I	I	50%	70%	61%	72%	55%	63%
Missouri	76%	I	I	63%	80%	I	I	I	I	55%	71%	78%	82%	74%	80%
Montana	76%	I	I	I	80%	I	I	I	I	I	I	79%	81%	78%	80%
Nebraska	84%	I	56%	52%	89%	I	I	I	61%	48%	57%	87%	91%	82%	87%
Nevada	67%	I	47%	73%	75%	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
New Hampshire	79%	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
New Jersey	88%	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
New Mexico	59%	I	52%	47%	71%	I	I	48%	56%	I	53%	68%	76%	56%	64%
New York	58%	62%	33%	38%	74%	58%	66%	29%	37%	33%	43%	71%	77%	54%	61%
North Carolina	69%	I	I	62%	76%	I	I	I	I	54%	70%	75%	77%	66%	73%
North Dakota	85%	I	I	I	87%	I	I	I	I	I	I	86%	86%	86%	86%
Ohio	79%	I	59%	57%	84%	I	I	I	I	52%	62%	82%	86%	77%	81%
Oklahoma	72%	I	I	64%	79%	I	I	I	I	61%	68%	77%	80%	73%	76%
Oregon	70%	I	55%	I	74%	I	I	I	I	I	I	71%	77%	68%	74%
Pennsylvania	81%	79%	50%	61%	87%	I	I	45%	56%	54%	68%	85%	88%	79%	84%
Rhode Island	75%	I	I	I	74%	68%	I	I	I	I	I	68%	76%	65%	71%
South Carolina	54%	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
South Dakota	79%	I	I	I	83%	I	I	I	I	I	I	81%	83%	80%	81%
Tennessee	60%	I	I	49%	59%	I	I	I	I	41%	59%	56%	63%	52%	61%
Texas	69%	81%	59%	67%	78%	78%	84%	55%	63%	61%	72%	77%	80%	66%	72%
Utah	77%	I	I	I	82%	I	I	I	52%	I	I	80%	84%	75%	80%
Vermont	78%	I	I	I	80%	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Virginia	75%	80%	I	67%	78%	I	I	I	I	61%	74%	76%	81%	71%	78%
Washington	69%	69%	54%	48%	74%	67%	72%	50%	60%	I	I	70%	78%	67%	74%
West Virginia	76%	I	I	64%	77%	I	I	I	I	58%	70%	75%	79%	74%	79%
Wisconsin	85%	I	54%	46%	92%	I	I	I	I	40%	53%	91%	94%	83%	88%
Wyoming	70%	I	54%	I	72%	I	I	I	59%	I	I	69%	76%	67%	75%
National	70%	72%	53%	55%	78%	70%	73%	49%	58%	48%	59%	74%	79%	65%	72%

M = Missing data
I = Insufficient data to calculate graduation rate

Hypothesis 2

Figure 1 presents the 2003 percentage of public school students in kindergarten through 12th grade who had ever been suspended, by race and gender. To examine hypothesis 2, a z-test of two proportions was conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on suspension rate between other races and African Americans. The results of the z-test was significant, $z = 50.79$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the

suspension rate for African American males (24.2%) was significantly higher than the suspension rates of males in other races (14.9%). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.



! Interpret data with caution.

NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic origin.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the 2003 National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES:2003).

Figure 1. Percentage of Public K–12 Students Ever Suspended by Race and Gender, 2003

Hypothesis 3

Table 2 presents the percentage of public school students in kindergarten through 12th grade who had ever been expelled, by race and gender. To examine hypothesis 3, a z -test of two proportions was conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on expulsion rate between other races and African Americans. The results of the z -test was significant, $z = 45.63$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the expulsion rate for

African American males (6.7%) was significantly higher than the expulsion rates of males in other races (2.2%). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2

Percentage of K-12 Students Expelled by Race and Gender, 2003

Race/ethnicity	Expulsions	Male	Female
Total¹	2.0	2.9	1.1
White	1.4	2.2	0.6!
Black	5.0	6.7	3.3
Hispanic	1.4!	1.9!	0.9
Asian/Pacific Islander	0.5!	0.8!	#
American Indian/Alaska Native	3.4	5.8	#

Rounds to zero.

! Interpret data with caution.

¹ Total includes other race/ethnicity categories not separately shown.

NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic origin.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education

Statistics, Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey of the

2003 National Household Education Surveys Program (PFI-NHES:2003).

Hypothesis 4

Table 3 presents the percentage of children ages 3 to 5 and ages 6 to 21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by race, between the years

1998 and 2004. To examine hypothesis 4, a z -test of two proportions was conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on student enrollment in special education between other races and African Americans. The results of the z -test was significant, $z = 43.67$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the enrollment of African American male students in special education (12.6%) was significantly larger compared to the special education of males in other races (9.2%). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 3

Percentage of Students Served Under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 1998–2004

Age group and year	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native
<i>3 to 5 years</i>						
1998	4.8	4.9	4.4	3.0	2.3	5.7
1999	5.0	5.2	4.8	3.3	2.4	5.7
2000	5.1	5.6	5.3	3.5	2.8	6.6
2001	5.3	5.8	5.5	3.8	3.0	7.1
2002	5.6	6.1	5.8	4.1	3.2	7.7
2003	5.8	6.4	5.9	4.3	3.6	8.2
2004	5.9	6.5	5.9	4.4	3.8	8.6

(table continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Age group and year	Total	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native
<i>6 to 21 years</i>						
1998	8.6	8.5	11.4	7.5	3.8	10.2
1999	8.7	8.3	11.2	7.4	3.9	11.9
2000	8.7	8.5	11.8	7.5	4.2	12.4
2001	8.8	8.6	12.0	7.7	4.2	12.9
2002	8.9	8.6	12.2	8.0	4.4	13.2
2003	9.1	8.7	12.4	8.2	4.5	13.8
2004	9.2	8.8	12.6	8.4	4.6	14.1

Note: Data have been revised from previously published reports. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic origin.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), 1998 through 2004.

Hypothesis 5

Table 4 presents the number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) examinations, and the percentage change in the number of students taking AP examinations, between 1999 and 2005, by race. To examine hypothesis 5, a z -test of two proportions was conducted to assess whether there were proportional differences on advanced placement between other races and African Americans males. The results of the z -test was significant, $z = 51.91$, $p < .001$, suggesting that the scores on advanced placement tests of African American males (0.8%) were significantly lower than the

advanced placement of males in other races (2.2%). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 4

Number and Percent Change of Students Taking Advanced Placement (AP) Examinations by Race, 1999–2005

Race/ethnicity	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Percent change 1999 to 2005
White	445,880	504,600	549,065	607,816	660,225	702,489	762,548	71.0
Total minority ¹	240,101	243,322	271,815	305,435	338,104	378,613	434,891	81.1
Black	31,023	36,158	40,078	45,271	51,160	57,001	67,702	118.2
Hispanic	62,853	74,852	86,018	98,495	114,246	130,042	148,960	137.0
Asian	75,875	85,756	92,762	102,653	111,704	121,038	135,815	79.0
American Indian/ Alaska Native	3,136	3,584	3,472	3,896	4,530	4,974	5,654	80.3
Total¹	685,981	747,922	820,880	913,251	998,329	1,081,102	1,197,439	74.6

¹Total includes other race/ethnicity categories not separately shown.

Note: Data reported are for all students who completed an Advanced Placement exam. The College Board collects racial/ethnic information based on the categories American Indian/Alaskan; Asian/Asian American; Black/Afro-American; Latino: Chicano/Mexican, Puerto Rican, Other Latino; White; and Other. Black, non-Hispanic refers to test-takers who identified themselves as Black/Afro-American, and Hispanic refers to the sum of all Latino subgroups. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic origin.

Source: The College Board, Advanced Placement Program, *National Summary Report, 1999–2005*.

V. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Now, I say to you today my friends, even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: — ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.’

Martin Luther King Jr.

*Speech at Civil Rights March on Washington,
August 28, 1963*

Implications and Recommendations

In the Supreme Court’s 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote,

Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments ... it is a principal instrument in awakening the child to cultural values, in preparing him for later professional training, and in helping him to adjust normally to his environment ... it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education.

Policymakers and educational reformers offer sound recommendations for narrowing this gap. Ogbu discusses four policy approaches to improving the academic achievement of Black students: (a) choice, (b) performance contracts and merit pay, (c) cooperative learning, and (d) culturally responsive pedagogy. While these approaches are not

particularly new, he also offers specific recommendations for the African American Community and the schools in Shaker Heights that can certainly be considered at schools across the nation trying to manage the achievement gap. Ogbu recommendations to the African American Community suggests the following: enhance academic orientation with supplementary educational programs; develop a cultural context to increase the value of academic success and the visibility of academically successful Blacks as role models; establish a local Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics (ACT-SO) a year long enrichment program designed to recruit, stimulate, improve and encourage high academic and cultural achievement among African American high school students. The ACT-SO program centers on the dedication and commitment of community volunteers and business leaders to serve as mentors and coaches to promote academic and artistic excellence among African American students. There are 25 categories of competition in the Sciences, Humanities, Performing and Visual Arts. ACT-SO; These successful role models are able to distinguish the affective from the pragmatic value of education; develop and institutionalize appropriate and effective parental educational strategies; and teach children how to work hard and persevere to make good grades.

Another recommendation for the school system is to enhance the effectiveness of the Minority Achievement Program (MAC) in the school because it “integrates Black collective identity with academic identity.” Ogbu believes that the expansion of the program designed to increase the achievement of African American students will increase academic engagement. He also advocates for increased parent involvement by providing workshops on leveling and tracking and other structural features within the school that

assist parents in helping their children make more informed decisions regarding their academics.

The achievement gap between minority and majority students has been studied for years as it relates to societal and school factors. However, community forces have not received as much attention in the quest to close the minority achievement gap.

Community forces include the ways minorities interpret and respond to schooling; these interpretations and responses extend to cultural and language differences. An ethnographic study on community forces in an attempt to explain why the African American students in the Shaker Heights school district are not performing academically like their White counterparts. Shaker Heights is an upper middle class suburb located outside Cleveland, Ohio. The school system is one of the best in the nation; however, a wide gap in academic achievement existed between White and Black students. As ethnographers, the author and his team lived in Shaker Heights and interacted on a daily basis with African Americans in the community and at school. For eight months, they collected data using group and individual discussion, formal documents, and participant observations. They also conducted individual interviews with students, school personnel, and community members. This research was conducted using four elementary schools, one middle school and the community's high school. I believe that this study is valuable in developing a framework for understanding the Black-White achievement gap.

The idea that the lower school performance of Black students is due to inadequate IQ has persisted throughout the history of American education. However, in the context of Shaker Heights Blacks, the inadequate-IQ explanation is inapplicable because their

performance on IQ tests did not predict their academic achievement. Ogbu found that low teacher expectations coexisted with students' unwillingness or refusal to do class work or homework. Findings from this study also indicate that students suffer from social and sociolinguistic differences, recognizing that schooling in the United States is based on White culture; we are challenged to move away from this viewpoint and to consider school as an institution that prepares students for their future adult cultural task and roles in society.

Though Ogbu often sparked controversy in educational discourse, particularly among researchers and scholars of color, John U. Ogbu was a leading scholar in the work on African American student achievement. His last book leaves educational researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with complexities to resolve and inspires us to hear what middle-class African American students are saying about what is necessary to help them achieve at high levels.

Social workers can be instrumental in identifying school dropout as a systemic problem and can serve as advocates for dropout prevention efforts during middle school, a time when students are at increased risk of encountering the personal and family problems, school difficulties, and behavioral problems that contribute to a failure to graduate (Lozefowicz, Colarossi, Arbretton, Eccles, & Barber, 2000). It is further proposed that school social workers already in middle schools and junior high schools are potentially situated in unique positions to implement programs for early adolescents at risk of later school dropout. To be effective advocates, program developers, and interveners, school social workers need to be aware of the ecological risk factors

associated with school dropout, be familiar with the adolescent life stage, and be knowledgeable about dropout prevention approaches so they can tailor their efforts to a particular student, family, student group, school, district, and community.

School social workers should take a more active role in questioning referrals from teachers and administrators. All referrals should include previously established, uniform data in order to reduce the overrepresentation of Black males in special education (Mills, 2003).

In an essay by researcher and well respected educator Asa Hilliard III, “No Mystery: Closing the Achievement Gap between Africans and Excellence” (1998), a call for reconceptualizing the achievement gap was put forth. Traditionally, the achievement gap is defined as the differential in performance among ethnicities and gender. Hilliard conceptualizes the achievement gap as the difference between what is defined as excellence and actual performance. He challenges the traditional definition because by defining the achievement gap as the difference between White students’ performance and African American students’ performance, whiteness is normalized. Furthermore, he contends that White students’ performance is mediocre at best and that the standard for excellence should be better than mediocre. Hilliard suggests that that the traditional definition of the achievement gap may show a gap in the opportunity to learn rather than the gap in intelligence. Instruments used to measure intelligence cannot accurately measure intelligence because the instruments favor students who have the privileged opportunity to be exposed to the items on the instrument. Hilliard offers examples of

excellence that serves as models for addressing the gap between performance and excellence.

- Strategic plans should be made to recruit and retain more Black male teachers. Currently, Black males represent 1% of the teaching force (Lewis, 2006).
- Recommendations to help with the recruitment and retention of male teachers include assigning male teachers a mentor, targeting Black male high school students for recruitment into the teaching profession, increasing collaboration with 2-year institutions since most males attend community colleges, and using teacher preparatory programs to increase Black male PRAXIS scores.
- Efforts to reduce crime should not just target the offender's criminal behavior, but should also include targeting the offender's family and community. These efforts should also include improving the offender's self-concept and self-esteem (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004).
- Funding for community-based interventions should be increased (Spencer & Jones-Walker, 2004).
- Classroom instruction should be linked to the job skills needed in the current labor market, i.e., Career Academies (Holzer, 2005).
- Access to effective programs such as the Job Corps and Youth Services Corps should be increased for males who drop out of high school (Holzer, 2005).
- Employment discrimination enforcement agencies should establish programs to monitor the practices of wage and employment discrimination and conduct random job audits at the national, state, and local levels (Coleman, 2003).

- Fatherhood initiatives often focus on either the needs of fathers or their children. Programs should attempt, in a meaningful way, to incorporate the needs of both fathers and their children and recognize the contributions of fathers beyond economic support (V. Gadsden, Winter 2007).

Throughout America, there are in fact schools that enable African American boys to succeed. But they are isolated, and there has been no national commitment to bring high-quality education to all children. Ronald Edmonds, founder of the Effective Schools Movement, observes, “We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us. We already know more than we need to do that.”

We must acknowledge this national problem and commit to the long and likely painful, journey toward a positive future for African American boys. Though flawed in significant and improvable ways, the stated intent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is commendable. It should be revised and fully funded to ensure success. Many educators of color support NCLB as a means — perhaps the only current systemic means — to ensure that Black boys will not be left behind.

More fundamental even than NCLB, though, is the undisputed research about the benefits of early childhood education and what it means to the probability of success in school and life. Analyses by the RAND Corporation is a nonprofit institution that helps improve policy and decision making through research and analysis of one preschool project after another — including the Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian Project and Chicago Longitudinal Study among others — confirm the benefits of quality early

childhood education including less grade retention, less need for special education, and increased high-school graduation rates. These results were especially significant for African American students, who all too often arrive at the kindergarten door with severely inadequate school readiness.

There are many examples of excellent educational outcomes for vulnerable children in general and Black boys in particular. These examples demonstrate that adequate financial resources combined with adults who hold themselves accountable for student success do produce high-level results for students most at risk of academic failure. Project GRAD (Graduation Really Achieves Dreams), which began in the Houston public schools, is now being implemented in several urban school districts. It takes a student from kindergarten through high school and ensures consistent and rigorous math, reading and behavior decision-making instruction from highly trained teachers, then rewards graduates with college scholarships.

Carlton Jenkins, principal at Linden McKinley High School in Columbus, Ohio, used Project GRAD to lead a renaissance of what was once the worst-performing high school in the district. Between 1998 and 2003, the following improvements resulted in McKinley High being nominated for the National Association of Secondary School Principals' Breaking Ranks Award:

- Enrollment increased by 25 percent;
- Graduation increased by 100 percent;
- Out of school suspensions declined by 81 percent;
- Expulsions declined by 59 percent;

- Mobility declined by 73 percent;
- The school went from meeting no state standards to meeting the reading and writing standards; and
- Zero students in advanced-placement courses to 286 students in advanced courses.

Jenkins values the additional resources, the curricula (specific reading, math and behavior programs) and college scholarships that come with the implementation of Project GRAD, but he believes that it takes that and much more to maximize the potential of Black boys. Core to the growing McKinley High success, Jenkins says, is building trusting relationships with students and those who teach and support them. According to Jenkins, developing the staff's teaching ability and fostering positive attitudes about Black boys is essential, and he credits that change to the dramatic reductions in suspensions and expulsions that account for more learning opportunities. Visiting classrooms each day and attending student functions are part of Jenkins' routine to ensure that academic expectations permeate the entire school community. Jenkins is known for telling his staff and students, "Failure is not an option at LMHS!"

Another example with demonstrated results is the Institute for Student Achievement (ISA). Over its 13-year history, ISA schools have demonstrated remarkable results for African American students. In places like Roosevelt and Hempstead high schools on Long Island and Benjamin Banneker and Park East high schools in New York City, the results have been extraordinary. About 95 percent of the ISA students complete high school, and more than 85 percent were accepted to college. ISA's success record is

largely due to its approach of identifying a group of ninth-grade students at risk of academic failure and becoming dropouts, then working with this group over a sustained four-year period to improve academic performance. Through specialized counseling, extended learning, parental engagement, college-preparatory activities and other supports that help students master a rigorous academic curriculum, the students respond and succeed.

Last Sept. 22, “J.,” a Black Roosevelt High senior, responded to the question, “If I were in charge, what would I do to ensure a positive future for Black boys?” J. told an audience discussing how to improve school results for poor students, “I would never have been planning on attending college without this program ... maybe I would have gotten messed up with a bad crowd and not even graduated — or worse. All kids need what we have at Roosevelt!”

These two highly successful examples clearly demonstrate the necessary intersection among three critical factors: qualified and motivated staff, leadership committed to improving the academic achievement for all students, and funding adequate to ensure that poor and challenged students will succeed academically at a high level. If these schools can succeed, there is no excuse for any school to fail.

Adequate financial resources continue to be a huge challenge. There are promising lawsuits on equal funding in New Jersey, Kentucky, Maryland and New York. But it will be incumbent upon local communities to actively express their intolerance for the failure and exclusion rates associated with African American male students. At a more systemic level, school districts such as the Boston, San Diego and Richmond, Va.,

districts have made significant academic progress for all student groups. State accountability test results show significant improvement rates for African American and Hispanic students in those districts led by stellar and determined superintendents. In Boston, for example, the black-white graduation gap has narrowed to 8 percent for African American boys, and the graduation rate for African American girls is actually higher than that for non-Hispanic White girls. The evidence thus shows that large urban systems can change course and reverse the downward spiral of school failure for students.

The promises of public education and freedom remain elusive for Black boys. Slowly, positive steps are creating a cautious faith in our will to ensure that this group of students will not waste away due to the public's silence. We, the public, have choices to make about who gets to receive a quality education, who benefits from the promises of public education, who enjoys optimal freedom in America and who does not. For the sake of Black boys and other vulnerable students, the right choices must be made.

Other solutions toward eliminating the disparities toward the treatment of African American males as compared to other races are outlined below based in part on my daily experiences working with Atlanta Public Schools. As an employee of Atlanta Public Schools I am very honored to know that as a system we are actively involved collectively towards sustaining the educational opportunities for children. Although this is our mission as a system we are still challenged with some of the "more traditional" mentalities in some areas including racial biases towards the African American male. My experience has recognized that some high school settings, which are comprised of truly integrated student bodies, located in mainly relatively affluent neighborhoods, have

displayed some of the same societal characteristics and discriminatory racial attitudes toward the African American inner-city male, and having thus created school climates that seem to offer little support for the struggling inner-city African American male.

The Atlanta Public Schools has been truly blessed with an award winning superintendent with a mission to transform the district into a "world-class" school system using nationally-proven reform models, facility upgrades and business operations redesign. Six years later after her arrival, standardized test scores were on the rise, aging facilities were renovated and a new blueprint for business operations had been implemented. Continuing the vision ('APS 2007') the superintendent stated that by the 2007-08 school year, Atlanta Public Schools will be the nation's highest performing urban school district with 100 percent of schools meeting or exceeding 70 percent of their annual growth targets. Every elementary school in Atlanta made adequate yearly progress in 2008, and graduation rates at several high schools have improved.

Among the school openings for the 2007-2008 school year the Atlanta Public Schools piloted two single-gender academies at Benjamin S. Carson Honors Preparatory School serving grades 6 -12, phased-in over time in the northwest corridor. As a system, Atlanta Public Schools has a responsibility to address cycles of poor achievement that exist in schools such as Carson. The district selected Carson based on the challenging demographics of the community and the need to improve student performance.

According to the United States Census Bureau's 2000 report, 41% of the 28,730 residents in Carson's zone did not graduate from high school. Criterion Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), designed to measure how well students acquire the skills and knowledge

described in the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS) obtained results from the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement revealed an achievement gap among girls and boys at Carson. Why single gender schools?

Highly supported by research, single-gender schools can accomplish the following:

- Improve academic achievement
- Significantly increase graduation rates
- Produce a higher number of students attending college

The support for single-gender school is clear:

- Quantitative and qualitative studies evaluated in a U.S. Department of Education report revealed that single-gender schools can positively impact student achievement in all subject areas.
- Single-gender schools encourage students to have higher aspirations for post-secondary education and careers.
- Research solidly indicates that boys and girls learn differently.
- Single-gender classrooms break down gender stereotypes (ex. girls will take math and science classes; boys will take music and arts classes)
- In 100 percent of studies on career aspirations of students, students in single-gender Schools set higher goals to attain.
- In single-gender schools, boys and girls are more likely to be enrolled in higher levels of math and science classes as well as other key areas of academic achievement.

- Self-concept and aspirations for graduation and college goals are higher in single-gender Schools.

Consistent and ongoing In-service sensitivity training should be an absolute mandate of administrators, teachers, counselors and social workers to better understand the African American male students (and other historically marginalized groups), as well as their biases towards these children. My experience has clearly made me aware that there is a conflict between school culture which tends to always provide the support, understanding and sensitivity to the average middle class student and the types of supports that are required to understand Black male culture. Administrators as well as teachers need to better understand that this angry, stony-faced, six-foot-three, 14-size shoe African American male with a scowl on his face is, in his inner core a youngster who needs, positive affirmation, sensitivity, structure and most of all understanding with a great deal of mentoring.

Strategic plans should be made to recruit and retain more black male teachers. Currently, black males represent 1% of the teaching force (Lewis, 2006). Recommendations to help with the recruitment and retention of male teachers include assigning male teachers a mentor, targeting black male high school students for recruitment into the teaching profession, increasing collaboration with 2-year institutions since most males attend community colleges, and using teacher preparatory programs to increase black male PRAXIS scores.

A “safety valve” process should be implemented in schools with predominately African American male students to track the number of males recommended for

suspension. When the suspension rates of black males reach a critical level, school personnel should be alerted and strongly consider enacting policies to reduce the number of black males suspended. These may include:

- Comprehensive reevaluation of the use of zero tolerance policies in middle schools. Schools should place equal focus on the academic competency of black male students and on improving their high school graduation rates.
- A dropout prevention program utilizing successful models based on best practices that specifically target African American male students should be established.
- Black male students should be strongly encouraged to enroll in gifted and AP classes, with efforts made to ensure the presence of a critical mass of black male students in those classes.
- Efforts should be made to increase the academic involvement of fathers at all levels in their children's education, especially at the pre-school level. School activities for black fathers should include both formal and informal opportunities so they can develop relationships with school personnel.
- Parents should be engaged in pre-school level activities that offer opportunities to increase their academic skills so they are better prepared to help their children. Studies have shown that low-income black parents tutored in mathematics improve the academic outcomes of their children.

Effective communication recommendations to reinforce a positive school experience:

- Show immediate respect by calling the African American boy by his last name e.g., “Mr. Dowdell” or even “Scholar Dowdell”.
- Preface discipline statements with a positive statement
- Pick your battles

Learning Communities

Research revealed that secondary students learn better in smaller, more personalized settings. Another positive approach that the Atlanta Public Schools my current place of employment have adopted that supports the educational experience of the African American male is the opening of The New Schools at Carver. This was our first bold step toward transforming high schools, both structurally and academically. Using Carver as a blueprint, Atlanta Public Schools has further opened four small schools each on the campuses of South Atlanta and Therrell in August 2007. In August 2008, Maynard Holbrook Jackson High School (formerly Southside High School) transformed into a campus of small learning communities (SLCs). In 2009, Douglass will also be transformed into a campus of SLCs and Washington will become a campus of small schools. By 2010, Grady, Mays and North Atlanta high schools will be officially transformed into SLCs or small schools.

By the 2010-11 school year, the large, comprehensive public high school will be a dinosaur in Atlanta. All of our high schools will offer small, personalized environments that provide rigorous and engaging learning opportunities to adequately prepare every student. Our goal is to provide an engaging environment that fosters student achievement and ensures that we graduate at least 90% of ninth graders in four years.

Though my daily experience is met with great hope and optimism with experiencing broad, substantial, systematic, system changes within the school system that I am employed; there remain constant daily challenges that create barriers towards creating a fair and balanced perception of the African American male. Embedded within the daily experience of the African American male are the realities that there are disparities in the treatment of the African American male as it relates to other races with emphasis on educational attainment.

Future Research Directions

- Continued studies on the disparities in treatment toward the African American male with emphasis on educational attainment.
- Future research and evaluations should disaggregate program data to examine African American male outcomes.
- New studies should examine the influence of male teachers, both black and non-black, on black male student outcomes.
- White and other non-black teachers who have had success in teaching black male students should be identified, and their methods and approaches should be studied and highlighted.

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