

AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ABOUT FACTORS
RELATED TO WHY BLACK BOYS DROP OUT OF SECONDARY SCHOOL

By

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LIST OF TERMS

Academic Achievement	Outcomes related to academic goals developed by the school which should be attained by the student in several areas, including: Mastering individual skills, acquiring knowledge, overall scores that result from the administration of standardized tests, such as the FCAT, SAT or ACT, cumulative grades, personal attitude
Academic Goals	Personal goals related to achievement are specified by the student. May be related to future plans, job interests, overall expectations for school performance, social-emotional well-being, etc.
Academic Performance	Measured by academic grades given on report cards or overall grade point average, and standardized test score on SAT or ACT.
Achievement Motivation	An individual's need to meet goals that have been realistically set in an academic environment, receive feedback, or experience a sense of accomplishment; can be referred to as intrinsic or extrinsic
African-American/Black	Any student who has self-identified as Black, Non-Hispanic on the school registration form. The word Black is interchangeable with African-American for the purposes of this study.
At-Risk Students	Students classified by poor attendance, high number of discipline referrals, low socio-economic status, free and reduced lunch status, minority status, failing grades, overall grade point average below 2.0, classification in the exceptional student education program (ESE), non-involvement in extracurricular activities and/or living in a single-parent household.
Cumulative Grade	The average of student grades for each subject across freshman, sophomore, and junior year.
Efficacy	Level of productivity; power to produce intended results or effects
Engagement	Participation in school-related activities

Florida's Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT)	The FCAT is the foundation for statewide educational assessment and accountability program...it measures student knowledge and understanding of reading, writing, science and mathematics content as described in the Sunshine State Standards (FLDOE, 2007).
High School Dropout	“A student who withdraws from school for any of several reasons cited in statute without transferring to another school, home education program, or adult education program. Dropout withdrawal reasons include voluntary withdrawal from school prior to graduation (e.g. after passing the age of compulsory attendance); failure to meet attendance requirements due to excessive absenteeism; discontinuance of attendance with whereabouts unknown; failure to enter/attend school as expected after previously registered; and certain other reasons. The dropout rate is calculated and reported for all children in grades 9-12 who drop out of school” (FLDOE 2007).
High School Dropout Rate	A calculation of all children grades 9-12 who drop out of school (FLDOE, 2007).
High School Graduate	Person completing minimum state requirements to receive a high school diploma.
High School Graduation Rate	Percentage of students who graduate within four years of their first enrollment in ninth grade (FLDOE, 2007).
Stereotype Threat	A threat that is imposed upon a member of a group that begins to believe and apply the negative characteristics connected to their group.
Student Voice	Student perspectives shared in educational research
Success	Meeting at least minimum requirements for high school graduation.
Sunshine State Standards (SSS)	The Standards are skills and competencies that Florida students should be able to learn from an early age, as defined by practicing classroom teachers, educational specialists, business people, and concerned citizens from Florida (FLDOE, 2007).

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African-American males are overwhelmingly represented in the nation's dropout rates. Dropping out of school has serious social and economic consequences for our society. The dropout rate is overwhelmingly represented by African-American male students, but limited attention is given to student voice. This study examines African-American male student perceptions about factors related to dropping out of secondary school.

The researcher conducted a pilot study and used interview responses of Black male students and literature about dropping out to create a 42-item survey instrument. Perceptions of African-American male students enrolled in middle and high schools, grades 6-12, from a north central Florida school district ($N = 261$) were examined. Demographic information and responses to questions related to teachers, school curriculum, family, peers, and personal experiences were gathered to add to the body of research. Pearson Correlation Coefficients were computed to identify relationships between variables perceived as most related to dropping out of school. Similar to the body of literature on school dropout, findings from this study indicate student-teacher

relationships, family involvement and peer interactions are significant factors related to Black boys' decisions to drop out of school. Implications of findings for future research on school reform and educational practice is discussed.

CHAPTER 1 THE PERVASIVE ISSUE OF BLACK MALES DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL

America's national dropout statistics reflect an educational system in crisis. High rates of student dropouts negatively impact the economic growth of our country. The economy suffers each time a student fails to complete high school. Thorstensen (2004) postulates an estimated \$944 billion tax revenue loss by males ages 25-34 who did not complete high school, with an additional \$24 billion loss resulting from increased costs in public welfare and crime connected with those students who fail to complete school. The population of students who dropout is comprised of some of the fastest growing ethnicities and largest minority populations in the United States: African Americans and Hispanics. The 2010 U.S. Census Bureau reports a total of 38.9 million African-American people living in North America, representing more than 13% of the total population. The growth of these minority groups coupled with the increasing rates of non-completion of secondary education leads to great economic concern.

Dropouts characterize alarmingly high proportions of persons who become arrested, incarcerated, drug addicted, living in poverty, unemployed, unhealthy, unwed parents, divorced, etc. (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010; Harlow, 2003). Our society pays significant costs for crime prevention, prosecution, rehabilitative and other social services, health care, and welfare. The negative economic and social consequences associated with Black male students dropping out of school enunciate the need for discussions about educational reform in the United States. African-American students should not have to endure the hardships of lifelong servitude that was sentenced to their forefathers in 1641 when a Virginia court made a distinction between Black and White indentured servants (Schneider & Schneider, 2001).

National data sources identify minorities and students of low socioeconomic status and/or those who have learning disabilities to be most likely to drop out of school (O'Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Thurlow, Sinclair, & Johnson, 2001). Because minorities have such high rates of dropout when compared to their peers, research on the achievement gap has become commonplace. Historical accounts of the educational system reveal that a persistent achievement gap existed more than fifty years ago between Black and White students. The disparity in education resulted from a racially segregated country. In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled "separate education facilities are inherently unequal" in their decision regarding *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. "The court's ruling was an early hint that American public education should be judged on whether schools produce racially equal outcomes" (Rothstein, 2004, p.13). The ruling prompted educational and social reform in the United States. The Alliance for Excellent Education (2011) emphasizes the promise for equal education among Blacks has not been met and minority students remain disenfranchised by a lack of rigorous curriculum provided for their advancement.

Within the last decade, federal legislation has attempted to ensure that gaps in achievement between races are minimized and that all students have equal opportunities for educational success. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 attempts to uphold the decision of *Brown vs. the Board*, where schools are held accountable for every student's progress and performance, giving all children equal opportunities to advance in society, "[ensuring] that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments"

(U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Despite federal requirements in both the 1950's and the new millennium, African-American students continue to lag behind their peers. Paige & Whitty (2010) argue closing the Black-White achievement gap is relevant for bringing forth social justice related to obtaining an equal education and penetrating barriers that have existed since slavery. However, Jenkins (2009) suggests that laws which prohibited others from teaching Blacks to read were alleviated less than 150 years ago, compared to higher education being offered in American for 300 years, has set a standard for oppression and created a substantial deficit for Blacks to overcome.

Practitioners have addressed the dropout phenomena by instituting a variety of strategies. Dropout prevention measures include teacher readiness programs and professional development, after-school programs, tutorial opportunities for youth, early education and literacy interventions, school-community initiatives, etc. (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Rothstein, 2004; Rumberger, 2001; and Schargel & Smink, 2001). However, despite best practices, African-American males continue to drop out of school. Dynarski (2000) reviewed the findings of three national evaluations of dropout prevention programs and found most did not improve rates of dropping out and only minimal improvements were evidenced, thus, she contends that we continue to seek new approaches to combat the dropout issue. Because Black boys remain at-risk for school dropout, their perspectives regarding what factors are related to dropout decisions are needed.

Accessing Student Voice to Understand Issues

It has only been over the past fifteen years that a considerable presence of students can be denoted in educational research. Some researchers have embraced an effort to reposition students in a way to make their voices clear. "This way of thinking

is premised on the following convictions: that young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching, and schooling; that their insights warrant not only the attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 359). Thus far, studies about students who drop out widely reflect adult perspectives. There is limited research from those who are referred to as both at-risk and dropouts, Black males.

Steinberg and McCray (2012) underscore that understanding education from the viewpoint of students helps us see how to engage students in the learning process. “Because adolescents become more aware of themselves, their own thoughts and feelings, and their relationships with others, researchers interested in this age group often solicit the students’ perspectives to gain a more complete understanding of their experiences” (Steinberg & McCray, 2012, p.2). As we attempt to identify what factors contribute to African-American male students’ decisions to drop out of school, understanding their viewpoint seems invaluable. While taking time to hear the voices of seventy-four students in focus groups, DeFur & Korinek (2010) found all students desire the chance to discuss their school process and share views on education. As a result, they surmised that dialogue with students better situates us to motivate and encourage students, provide meaningful instruction, carefully select qualified quality teachers, understand how to monitor student progress, and build strong adult-student relationships. Knowing the extent to which students feel engaged and a sense of belonging in schools can be best determined from speaking with students, then better decisions can be made about the approaches for change (Certo, Cauley, & Chafin,

2003). Students are capable of helping us identify effective strategies if we give them an opportunity to speak as credible stakeholders in the education process.

With over five million young Black boys living in the United States, only 42% of those who enter ninth grade graduate (Sen, 2006). Less than 50% of the country's African-American males earn a high school diploma in four years (Holzman, 2006). Graduation rate data gathered from all reporting states in the U.S. indicate Black male students are consistently less likely to meet graduation requirements in comparison to their male peers (NCES, 2009). The National Center for Education Statistics (2007) reports only 87.6% of 18-24 year olds not enrolled in high school received their diploma or equivalency credential. Therefore, by the age of 24, nearly 15% of African-American males still had not earned any type of credential exemplifying completion of secondary school. High rates of academic failure among Black male students have a profound impact on educational institutions at the national, state, and local levels. Questions have been raised about innate genetic ability, institutional racism, gender differences, curriculum development, teaching practices, learning styles, socio-economic concerns, educational leadership, etc. (Boykin & Bailey, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Friere, 2009; Landsman, 2004; Noguera, 2008; and Rothstein, 2004) These questions have a direct effect on schooling practices at multiple levels. For instance, dropout rates have prompted individual states to redesign standardized assessments as an effort to ensure student achievement and academic proficiency for children of every race and gender (Smith, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2010; and Wang, Beckett, & Brown, 2006) This phenomenon has yielded "high stakes testing" across the country. Some states,

such as Florida, are faced with significantly high dropout rates and are so strongly affected by students dropping out of school that the state is deemed to be in crisis.

State and District-Level Policy Influence

According to the Florida Department of Education, the state experienced a steady decrease in the dropout rates from 2000-2004, but the rates began to increase slightly for the next three years (Smith, 2007). The dropout percentages among Blacks (35.3%) in the state of Florida were approximately equivalent to their White counterparts (35.4%) in 2006-2007 (FLDOE). Because the percentage of White persons who resided in Florida (79.8%) was much higher, White students appeared to make up a greater portion of dropouts. However, dropout rates for White students was less than minority students; 2.4% versus 4.7% in 2006-07 (Smith, 2007). Dropout rates are highest among African-American students although they make up only 15.9% of more than 18 million people who comprise Florida's total population (US Census Bureau, 2008).

Florida is among five states (including Georgia, South Carolina, New Mexico, and Nevada) that are deemed to be in a statewide crisis because of the great number of schools having severe dropout rates within its border. Balfanz refers to Florida schools as "dropout factories" (2007). Because Florida is one of the largest states in America, its graduation rates have a great impact upon the educational level of the country's labor force (Balfanz, et al., 2009). As Florida incorporates graduation rates as a component of overall school grades for state assessments, the stakes increase, placing more stress upon public schools to graduate their students. Each school district will be expected to meet state criteria for success, thus needing to enhance graduation rates, diminishing the number of students who drop out of school prior to earning a high school diploma.

School districts such as the one participating in this study, that have repetitively earned an “A” grade as a district, but not had an overwhelmingly high number of schools meet its state’s standardized test requirements for Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), will be greatly impacted. Adequate Yearly Progress scores reflect how much growth a student has made from year to year. African-American males tend to not make AYP, especially in school districts characterized by an overwhelming number of non-minority and low income students. The students participating in this study live in a county where nearly 74% of 241,364 residents are characterized as White persons and the mean household income is approximately \$38K (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). A quick look at district grades may cause some to presume that most students in the county fair well academically, however, analyzing the data reveals failure of specific groups to make appropriate learning gains. Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) data for this county reflect specific populations generally do not meet AYP. Those populations include African-Americans, Hispanics, males, students with free and reduced lunch status, students with disabilities, and students who are English Language Learners (ELL). These groups characterize the highest rates of poor performance/yearly progress in reading and math on the state standardized test, but comprise only a small portion of county’s population. In 2008, Blacks only accounted for 19.5% of the county’s total population; Hispanics, 7.4%; below poverty, 22.8%; languages other than English spoken at home, 11.5% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009).

The school district participating in this study is located in north central Florida; the Black, non-Hispanic 9th-12th grade student dropout rates equal 9%, surpassing all other ethnicities. Similarly, in 2004-2005, 45.3% of Black students fulfilled requirements for a

standard diploma in four years versus 76.9% of their White counterparts. In the fall of 2005, nearly half of the total number of students enrolled in high school, grades 9-12, were male (4,644). Of those, 896 (46%) were seniors. However, only 30% of the seniors were identified as Black. Most recent reports reflect Black students as not meeting math or reading proficiency, wherein White students met proficiency on both categories as measured through state standardized testing (FCAT) from school years 2003-2010 (FLDOE, 2012).

The participating school district is comprised of 24 elementary, 8 middle, and 6 high schools, and 1 combination middle/high school. Also, the school district has 7 center schools with alternative programs. Two of its high schools are located in towns outside the city limits and have small minority populations, where student-teacher ratios are presumed to be small. A combination middle/high school located within the school district was selected as a pilot for this study because it reflects the trend presented, in which African-American students continue to drop out of school at alarming rates despite the overall impeccable rating of the county in relation to the overall district performance grade by the state.

The middle/high school selected for the purpose of the pilot study, is located in a town of approximately 1,400 persons with a median income of \$26,008 (National Relocation, 2009). In 2004-2005, 34.3% of the school was comprised of Black students (77 females and 113 males). Yet, only 72% of the Black seniors graduated that year. The previous year, only 57.7% graduated and approximately half of the students received a high school diploma in 2007, the year nearest the start of the pilot study. The 2007-2008 academic school year began with only thirty-five students having the

appropriate number of credits to be deemed as “true seniors” projected to graduate on time with their cohort. Of those, only four were Black males. Such rates prompted several questions to be explored within this study:

- What academic/instructional factors are perceived to be related to Black males dropping out of school?
- What social/emotional factors are perceived to be related to Black males dropping out of school?
- What motivational factors are perceived to be related to Black males dropping out of school?
- How is the role of the family perceived as a factor related to Black males dropping out of school?
- How are peer groups perceived as factors relating to Black males dropping out of school?

The local requirements for graduation are driven by state standards and guidelines, but many African-American males are dropping out of school and not earning high school diplomas. African-American male students residing in the participating school district have a higher likelihood of non-completion in their county than White peers. Black boys have a higher likelihood to drop out of school than White peers in the same county, state, and country which they reside. This combined with results from the pilot study, led to further investigation of the research questions among students attending other secondary schools within the district, using quantitatively measured surveys.

Problem Statement

Proponents of educational reform in the United States, have not been able to eradicate the dropout phenomena, especially for African-American male students. Some may think students who drop out of school fail their family, community and self, but we too

are failing them. By not offering a solution, we leave our youth uneducated and disadvantaged. As we seek additional efforts to challenge school dropout out, we should consider that much of the research regarding Black males dropping out of school is taken from adult perspectives. Mitra (2004) asserts that student voice efforts positively influence youth development outcomes, granting them a role in making decisions that impact them as the target population.

If given safe environments to share feedback, most students will want to share their thoughts, acting as “expert witnesses” regarding areas of improving their learning (DeFur & Korinek, 2010). Typically, when students are asked about factors associated with dropping out, the populations surveyed are persons who have already dropped out of school. Although the voice of experience is important, many students characterized as at-risk simply because of their skin color are given no platform to discuss concerns. Not only is the voice of Black males limited in educational research, it often skips those who are still enrolled in school. African-American students attending secondary school are likely to have opinions about the dreadful dropout rate that could victimize them. “The positive effects of honoring student voices and involving them in more integral, meaningful ways in their school experience cannot be ignored as we seek to improve and meet higher standards” (DeFur & Korinek, 2010).

The guiding question for this proposed study is: What factors do African-American male students believe are related to why Black boys drop out of secondary school? The study will investigate perceptions held by African-American males in relation to factors described within the context of teachers, school/curriculum, family, peers, and personal experiences. All Black male students were invited to participate whether deemed “at-

risk” or not. At-risk students are classified by poor attendance, high number of discipline referrals, low socio-economic status, free and reduced-price lunch status, minority status, failing grades, overall grade point average below 2.0, classification in the exceptional student education program (ESE), non-involvement in extracurricular activities, and living in a single-parent household.

The study seeks to discover student perceptions associated with primary factors for Black males dropping out of school. Although there is extensive literature regarding the Black-White achievement gap, limited studies are available utilizing student perceptions of these phenomena. Research on “student voice” or students’ perceptions in various fields provides a strong basis for exploring students’ self-concepts. Student perceptions relate to their feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about themselves. Marsh and Shavelson’s (1985) research on self-concept notes that a person’s perception is formed through their experiences, personal interpretations of their environment, and then influenced by others’ evaluations of them. Thus, the viewpoint of the African-American male student is a strong reference for exploring decisions made by African-American males to drop out of school. Cook-Sather (2002) emphasizes that no requirement exists, requiring researchers to follow the status quo and employ thinking from adult-only perspectives; she asserts supporting student voice literature will encourage us to accept the legitimate perspectives of students. In this regard, the current study seeks to address the needs of African-American male students by first listening to their voice as it relates to the dropout phenomena.

Significance of the Study

The academic success of all students is essential to the progress of our society. Increasing levels of dropouts among any demographic background lessens the

economic strength of our country. The global economy is placing greater demands on its workforce, requiring higher education and advanced skills of those entering the workforce. Employers are seeking competent, knowledgeable employees to hire within organizations, emphasizing the importance of graduating students from secondary and higher education institutions. However, many states with staggering dropout rates also have high unemployment rates. Currently, unemployment rates in the United States are higher for men than women (6.5% versus 5.5% respectively), according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, who also report higher rates of unemployment for Blacks than Whites (2009). Black males lag both in graduation rates and employment when compared to their peers in gender and ethnicity categories.

Minority and low-income students represent the greatest number of students who drop out of school in the United States. Staples & Dodd (2009), report Florida is one of seventeen states that represent an astounding 70% of our nation's dropout rate. The state's size and increasing population may create additional pressure to the current educational infrastructure. Florida is considered to be in an educational crisis because low graduation rates are a trend among many high schools throughout the state. Alarmingly, over 40% of the high schools in Florida have low graduation rates and approximately 70% of the school districts have at least one low graduation-rate high school (Balfanz, et al., 2009). In 2005-2006, over 300,000 students were enrolled in schools deemed as low graduation-rate high schools, approximately one-third were Black, non-Hispanic students. In that same year, less than 50% of Blacks who received a high school diploma were employed; those who failed to earn a diploma had an employment rate of 21%. Failure to maintain employment reduces financial stability

within households and further debilitates an unemployed individual. Heightened academic performance by Black male students could yield better jobs and economic growth. The results have direct implications for African-American culture and society at large.

The face of education is becoming more diverse each day. Teaching practices must support diversity of students found in classrooms. Teachers will need to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students characterized by disabilities, low income, minority status, English Language Learners, etc. By sharing student perspectives regarding the dropout phenomenon, this study will aide in guiding future instructional practices and curriculum design. The study will add to the knowledge base about the academic needs of African-American males and may impact roles that teachers and support staff play in supporting them in educational settings. The study seeks to provide additional information that will help reduce the achievement gap and encourage academic success among African-American students. More specifically, the study may foster greater communication and kindred relations between faculty and students that allows students to see greater value in education.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers have attempted to locate which factors related to high rates of school dropout need to be altered to bring about academic success for all students. A theoretical framework is needed to understand how African-American male students are affected by factors related to dropping out of school and how they perceive the relationship between Black boys and those factors. Because students participating in this study are expected to share their perceptions regarding a continuum of factors that may interact within varying systems/environments, Bronfenbrenner's ecological

approach for studying educational systems and processes was selected as the conceptual foundation for the study.

Ecological theory calls for an understanding of multiple environments that influence learners so educational researchers are not maintaining status quo interpretations of social realities, but are open to constructing new meaning before making assumptions about student needs (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). Within the framework of ecological theory, the learner develops through a multilevel systemic process involving the influences of the individual, school, work, family, and community.

Bronfenbrenner (1976) espouses an ecology of education wherein a scientific study of two systems operate at two levels, relationships between learners and their surroundings (person-environment) and interconnections between the environments themselves(environment-environment). The investigation of person-environment relationships emphasizes the dynamic between the student learner and his/her home, school, community, peer group, neighborhood, church, etc., whereas exploration of environment-environment relationships indicate studying how variables within the learner's surrounding interrelate (i.e., interactions between the learner's home and school).

For the purposes of this study, the ecological approach defines the micro-system as secondary schools where participants are enrolled. The meso-system would encompass interrelations between participants' schools and families, and would branch out to an environmental level consisting of government agencies, media and social networks, transportation, etc (exo-system). Further expansion of systemic interactions leads to a more comprehensive system, the macro-system. It includes economics,

politics, social and legal structures, etc. Each system gives value and meaning to the types of interactions that occur at every other level.

Ecological theory describes learners as those who are being discovered. In the context of this study, the ecological approach is used as a conceptual foundation for developing a theoretical framework as a means for understanding student perceptions about factors related to Black boys dropping out of school. Through an ecological perspective, Black males are viewed as learners who are constantly able to change because they are influenced by evolving systems. Furthermore, consistent changes within the environment/system could illicit new behaviors from the learner, thus researchers must be willing to shift their thinking. The premise behind the ecological approach is that gaining a new understanding of student-environment interactions is expected to help strengthen the body of research and help construct new meaning that provides greater understanding of social concerns (Bronfenbrenner, 1976).

Bogenschneider (1996) proposes an extension of ecological theory by integrating risk-focused prevention models and resiliency models in an effort to understand human development, arguing that we must identify risks and protective processes at the levels identified by Bronfenbrenner if we want to understand the development of students and guide future prevention practices. Similarly, Rumberger & Larson (1998) developed a conceptual framework for understanding student performance that highlighted the interconnectivity of multiple factors that influence students: a continuum exists between background (student characteristics), engagement (social and academic), and educational performance (educational stability, academic achievement, and educational attainment); each dimension (or environment) is fostered by connections with familial,

school, and/or community systems. According to Rumberger & Larson's framework, students have a range of outcomes available based upon their interactions with the systems that surround him. Their work has been applied in an effort to determine what can be done to address reasons for students dropping out of school (Rumberger, 2001).

This study seeks to investigate the African-American male student perceptions about factors related to Black boys dropping out of school as a means of understanding how systems influence those decisions. Therefore, a theoretical framework for this study was adapted from the conceptual views of Bronfenbrenner and (1976), Bogenschneider (1996), and Rumberger & Larson (1998). In addition, review of several bodies of literature is used to help direct the framework. Three theoretical approaches have been selected to help understand the dropout phenomena:

- **Achievement:** Outcomes related to the academic performance exercised within the context of education; discussion of an achievement gap that persists between African-American males and their peers, ultimately revealing underachievement among Black students.
- **Engagement:** Participation in school-related activities as determined by multi-tiered societal factors, including the quality of school relationships; lessened participation by African-American students regarding engaging behaviors.
- **Student Voice:** Student voice literature provides a basis for the need to hear from African-American males themselves rather than adults. In addition, student voice research supports qualitative interview methods, as used with the pilot study.

The first approach described is achievement as it relates to success or other outcomes for student academic performance. Achievement is critically discussed in terms of the achievement gap, a great divide in academic outcomes of African-American students and their peers. Disparities exist in student achievement between Blacks and Whites that exemplify a disproportionately high number of African-American males dropping out of school. According to Smith, President of the Schott Foundation

for Public Education, “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” (2004, p.2). Research related to the Black-White achievement gap suggests multiple reasons for the variance. Some suggest poverty status, peer influence, poor motivation, family structure, and lack of economic funding in schools as primary reasons for African-American and Hispanic children lagging behind their peers. Jencks and Phillips (1998), state that even when these factors are controlled, the achievement differences remain significant.

Educational research has identified the dropout phenomenon among African-American students as a pervasive issue in education. “After tracing approximately one hundred years of African-American curricular experiences, what remains is the fact that Black students continue to struggle to gain access to a thinking curriculum that will prepare them for full participation in a contemporary knowledge society” (Darling-Hammond, Williamson, & Hylar, 2007, p. 292). Cooper (2000) summarizes that differing educational outcomes led to hard questions being asked about the links between student achievement and other factors. The literature emphasizes educational reform efforts and attempts to provide reasons for the underachievement of Black students (Bradley, 2007; Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Iceland, et al., 1999; Jencks, 1972; Rothstein, 2004; Rumberger, 2001; Schargel & Smink, 2001, and Smith, 2003). Multiple factors have been reviewed, as determinants of academic failure, in an attempt to find resolution to the looming problem.

Chavous, et al. (2003) found that Black students can become disenfranchised in school due to feelings of alienation, which tend to lead to low feelings of academic

efficacy and thoughts about school importance, relevance, and attachment.

Conversely, Marsh, Chaney, and Jones (2012) studied the high achievement performance of Black students who were able to remain resilient to the challenges presented in their environments. Although dropping out of school does not mean students were necessarily experiencing low achievement, exploring factors tied to dropout may help us consider interventions.

This research does not seek to devalue dropout prevention initiatives or strategies already in place throughout the country (Bridgeland, Didulio, & Morrison, 2006; Myint, et al., 2008; Shargel, 2007; and Shargel, 2011), but we must consider why our Black male students are still dropping out of school. Conversations with students may help us understand why early education intervention and literacy strategies, after school programs, mentoring and tutoring initiatives, systemic renewal within schools, staff development and support for teachers, increased collaboration with community and businesses, and family support efforts have not managed to keep African-American boys, as well as other minority and disadvantaged groups from making decisions to drop out of school.

In order “for a student to engage in academic behaviors in the present, [he] must therefore believe that future academic success is a goal that is important enough to the student and that their behaviors will lead to future academic success” (Brown & Jones, 2004). Thus, the second theoretical approach, student engagement, is an important concept underlining the framework for this study. Student engagement, focuses on the level of participation students have with school-related activities. Bennett (2006) encourages researchers to attend to the attitudes and perceptions held by students

about school experiences to foster school engagement. Jimerson, Campos, & Grief (2003) explored the construct and measurement of school engagement, determining school engagement is a multifaceted construct that includes three dimensions:

- a) Affective – student’s feelings about their school, teachers, and peers
- b) Behavioral – student performance, such as participation in extracurricular activities
- c) Cognitive – student perceptions held about self, school, teachers and others (i.e. self-efficacy, level of motivation, encouragement by teachers, aspirations, etc.)

Studying school engagement in relation to these measures is significant for this study.

Research indicates “for many African-American youths, the most important factor in the development and maintenance of positive attitudes toward school is located outside of the school context” (Bennett, 2006, p.198).

Level of school engagement, as well as perceptions held by students, could be a result of student self-concept. Singh, Chang, and Dika (2010) found differences in self-concept and school engagement while investigating psycho-social constructs related to school achievement of Black and White students. Differences existed between the racial groups that foster a need to understand that students’ world views and internal beliefs can impact their level of participation in school-related activities.

Cross’s model (1971) for racial identity includes four stages: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization. The stages almost resemble a continuum of acceptance and value of oneself as an African-American, moving from devaluing self and only accepting Eurocentric views to becoming fully engaged, satisfied, and secure as an African-American. How an African-American male views himself and what factors he associates with his identity may directly correlate to positive or negative outcomes with his schooling. For instance, negative views of self may result

in similar negative behavior or lack of effort to succeed. Such behavior is implied with stereotype threat.

The term stereotype threat is defined as a threat that is imposed upon a member of a group that begins to believe and apply the negative characteristics connected to their group. The members of the group begin to fear being reduced to the negative characteristics that others have created about them and act accordingly. Steele (1997), who developed the term, declares that persons are not susceptible to the threat because of preexisting doubts about self, but rather by their identification with the domain and concern they have about being stereotyped by it. Ogbu (2004) further asserts that Black students' education may be largely defined by their collective identity and cultural frame of reference. Collective identity refers to how people identify themselves as a collective group; however, it is based from external factors such as slavery. Their cultural frame of reference refers to the right way for that group to behave based upon their point of view or collective experience (Ogbu, 2004). The identity formation of African-American men, as identified in the research, is very closely related to historical and societal practices toward this particular group. The implications may have profound bearing on how an African-American male student perceives his experience in education and should be recognized while reviewing data.

Lastly, student voice research has indicated that including children's perspectives in discussions about education empowers students and provides us with more knowledge about learning experiences that can affect schooling practices (Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2006; DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Doda & Knowles, 2008; Mitra, 2004; Steinberg & McCray, 2012). According to Cook-Sather (2006),

students are being repositioned in educational research because there is a rekindling conviction that young people have unique perspectives on learning that must be heard in order to adequately reshape education. “Student voice, in its most profound and radical form, calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363). Richardson and Gerlach (1980) conducted personal interviews with students in an attempt to find out why Black students were dropping out of school. Their results indicate Black students’ reasons for dropping out of school were “significantly related to their inability to perceive education as a means to ensure more opportunities in the future” (Richardson & Gerlach, 1980, p. 489). “There can be little doubt from the accumulating research evidence that as conditions conducive to learning in schools deteriorate through emphases on accountability, standards, measurement, and high stakes testing, that increasing numbers of students of color and those from urban, working class, and minority backgrounds are making active choices that school is not for them” (Smyth, 2006, p. 279).

Student voice merely refers to student perceptions or student perspectives. Acknowledging student voice in the educational research gives credence and power to students to share in the reform that directly affects them. Because the African-American male voice appears to have been lost in the field of education and society as a whole, allowing his perceptions to be heard empowers the African-American male student in a manner that is often not seen.

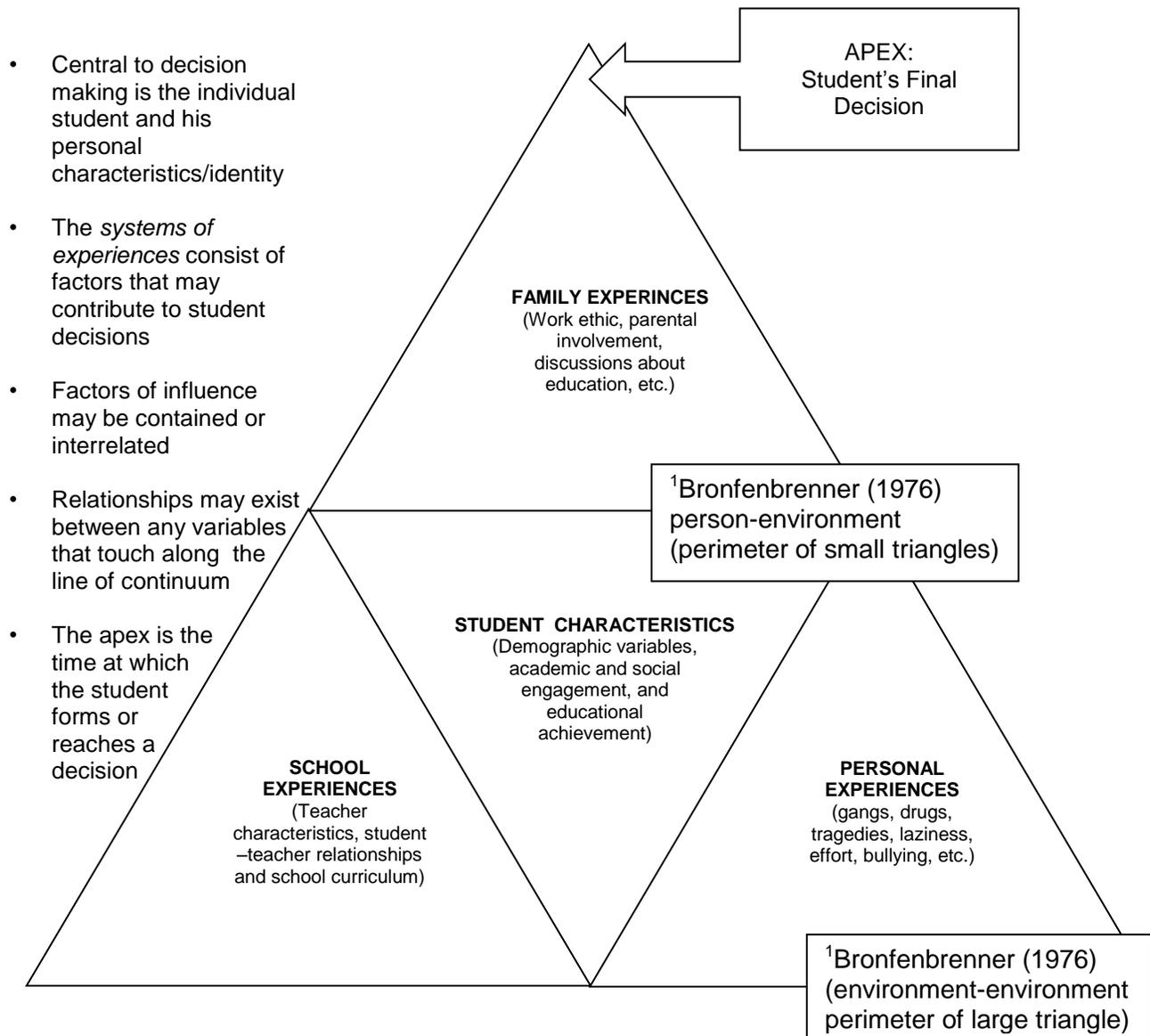
Construction of the theoretical framework was guided by the Black-White achievement gap, concern for development of Black students’ self-concept, and need

for more research regarding student voice. The ecological approach further undergirds the direction of the framework. In the framework for this study, The Apex Model, every student is viewed as an individual who has unique family, school, and personal experiences. Every experience has the potential to play a single or collective role in regards to influencing Black male students' decision making. Central to the framework are individual student characteristics such as demographic variables, levels of student engagement, and educational achievement. The three other experiential factors are placed on a continuum, advertently or inadvertently impacting the student. It is expected that as youth develop, they will develop their self-concept, behaviors, perceptions, and decision-making skills/patterns from the connection between personal characteristics and three *systems of experiences*:

1. Family experiences - characterized by parental involvements, discussions families have with students about education, work ethic, etc.
2. School experiences - student-teacher relationships, curriculum, and teacher characteristics.
3. Personal experiences - may be described by the students' affiliation with gangs, drugs, incarceration, family tragedy, being bullied, and level of laziness or effort

Again, the factors that may be found within each of the *systems of experiences* categories may be contained within their own triangular cell or interrelated, meaning the variables impact each other and ultimately affect the student. Finally, students arrive at reach an apex or decision. For the purpose of this study that decision is dropping out of school. The Apex Model helps us explore the influences of various systems upon student decision making. It is offered as a way to refocus research on the multiple factors that aide in decisions to drop out of school while considering that commonalties among students can only be gathered if we seek their involvement. African-American

males have daily experiences that can alter their educational expectations. We must identify what they have to say about factors that contribute to effect of dropout.



*Adapted from 3 theoretical frameworks:

- Bogenschneider (1996) – Ecological Risk/Protective Theory
- ¹Bronfenbrenner (1976) – Ecological Theory (¹Apex Model coincides with theory)
- Rumberg & Larson (1998) – Conceptual Framework for Studying Student Educational Performance

Figure 1-1. The Apex Model - Framework for studying systematic factors that impact school-related decisions of secondary students. (Developed by Edwards, A.D., 2012)

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Closing the achievement gap remains a major area of concern in school reform. Endeavors to address the gap have failed to provide one unified answer for the discrepancy in student success rates between Black and White students. Educational literature suggests a multitude of factors may be associated with the achievement gap, including poverty, family background, parental involvement in students' schooling, teacher expectations, males' self-identity concept, ability for students' voices to be acknowledged in the school setting, etc. (Aerurabach, 2007; Freire, 2000; Gosa, 2007; Jewell, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Noguera, 2003; Ogbu, 2003; Rothstein, 2004; Steele, 1997, etc.). However, no conclusive wide-spread results have permeated education in such a manner that the achievement gap has been significantly reduced.

While educators debate the causes for poor performance of African-Americans in school systems, Black students are outranking other groups in suspensions, expulsions, absenteeism, low achievement and dropout (Garibaldi, 1992). In addition, Black high school students are experiencing high levels of teenage pregnancy, crime, and drug abuse and dropout, thus debilitating potential for success as an adult (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). Some educational research concludes that the public educational system is based in an unfair, racially biased, wealth-focused societal system which disadvantages poor and minority children (Rothstein, 2004; Freire, 2000; Cooper & Jordan, 2003). It is argued that such a Eurocentric based educational structure supports biased curriculum and philosophies that are shared in pre-service teaching centers and negatively affect subgroup populations (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Goodman & Fish, 1997; Bradley, 2007).

Concerns regarding minorities' lack of achievement in school are amplified due to future implications about dropouts' ability to contribute to economic growth. Such grave concerns prompted changes in educational policy. The legislative initiative, No Child Left Behind, was instituted to address academic achievement and mandate accountability standards requiring school systems to address disadvantaged populations. School districts must respond to the needs of students categorized in subgroups within their population in an effort to lessen the achievement gap. However, not everyone agrees to the validity of the legislation. Smyth (2006) asserts the "law is a devious piece of legislation that is deeply damaging large numbers of already vulnerable students, while demonstrably failing to deliver on its extravagant promises of bridging the achievement gap" (p. 280). Educators, researchers and policymakers have varied viewpoints on the legitimacy of certain reform efforts to close the achievement gap. However, limited research exists regarding the perspectives of students themselves (Cook-Sather, 2006).

International, national, state, and local school systems are faced with the same dilemma; trends reflecting African-American and other minority populations failing to meet required standards for graduation. The minority subgroups are disproportionately outranking Whites in regard to dropout statistics, thus driving the need for educational reform. "There can be little doubt from the accumulating research evidence that as conditions conducive to learning in schools deteriorate through emphases on accountability, standards, measurement, and high stakes testing, that increasing numbers of students of colour and those from urban, working class, and minority backgrounds are making active choices that school is not for them" (Smyth, 2006, p.

279). World-wide concerns exist over the large number of minorities which fail to meet expected educational standards.

Furthermore, educational research provides historical implications for Blacks' maladjustment to academic achievement and indicates the necessity for school reform and heightened accountability measures (Smith, 2003). For example, federal initiatives that undergird U.S. reform efforts provoke high stakes testing, challenging its states to monitor academic achievement of all students. Despite increased accountability, minority populations continue to do less well in school when compared to their White peers. "Although African-American students have made academic achievements and educational gains in recent years, public education in this country widely remains separate and unequal, even almost 50 years after *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*" (Cooper & Jordan, 2003, p. 380).

Graduation rates and student drop out numbers exemplify state level issues that lead to national concerns. Particular states and regions are characterized by larger numbers of students who fail to meet qualifications for graduation. Florida, the state selected for this study, has an overwhelming number of minority students who drop out of school before completing requirements to graduate. Although Florida, as well as other states, has implemented higher stakes standardized testing tied to graduation, many minority students continue to lag behind White peers and fail to finish school. Thus far, the legislative policies set forth at the state level have not greatly reduced the number of students who choose to leave school.

The implications of an imbalanced educational structure effect educational policy. Thus, reform efforts must acknowledge multiple factors correlated with students who

drop out of school and overwhelmingly poor and minority. Thereby, understanding those characteristics greatly impact educational reform. Data reveal poor minority children are likely to have reduced levels of parent involvement with their schooling (Comer, 1998, Hammond, et al, 2007; Noguera, 2008; Richardson & Gerlach, 1980; Rothstein, 2004). Their relationships with teachers are essential, as well as the curriculum, impacting the overall performance of African-Americans in school. Family and teacher relationships are each connected to students' level of motivation. However, the self-identity developed by a minority student has greater implications for the level of participation they devote to their overall achievement. Furthermore, research indicates that students who feel engaged in the educational process through sharing and decision-making tend to value their outcomes more. Each of these factors will be discussed in further detail, as they relate to the educational pursuits of African-American males in particular.

For the purpose of this study, academic achievement is defined as academic goals developed by the school which should be attained by the student in several areas, including mastering individual skills, acquiring knowledge, attaining appropriate overall scores that result from the administration of standardized tests, such as the FCAT, SAT or ACT, earn minimum graduate equivalent cumulative grades, and possessing a positive personal attitude. Historical review of Blacks' participation in the educational system exposes a legacy of underachievement among the African-American population due to disadvantages in the school system. Factors associated with the overrepresentation of Black students in dropout data will be shared from the perspectives of African-American males enrolled in secondary school. This research

examines African-American academic achievement through the lenses of students who are most directly affected by the research, Black males themselves. Agents of educational reform having been warring in a lamentable battle to close the achievement gap between Blacks and Whites. Additional studies, focused on the perspectives of students, are needed in order to stop replicating the historical cycle of underachievement among African-American students.

Historical Implications for Schooling African-American Children

America's history of slavery and racial segregation yield ripple effects that still appear in school systems today. "While between 25% and 30% of America's teenagers, including recent immigrants fail to graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma, the dropout rate for African-American males in many metropolitan areas is 50%" (Smith, 2004, p.1). Black men are dangerously close to emulating our educational past where "prior to the Civil War, a small number of free Blacks in both the North and South attended school; however, the vast majority were enslaved, illiterate, and ultimately, legally prohibited from being taught to read" (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007, p. 3). Inequities in schooling sustain the imbalance between students. The achievement gap will remain intact if comparable opportunities do not exist for Blacks and Whites. "No challenge has been more daunting than that of improving the academic achievement of African-American students" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. ix).

The plight to achieve academic equality for African-American students has been an ongoing fight for Blacks in the United States. Historical records indicate Blacks living in Boston, Massachusetts requested that schools be established for their children because of the prejudicial treatment and hostility their kids were faced with, but requests were denied. Not until 1820 was a school established for Blacks, then, a second school

formed in 1831. However, the establishment of two schools was deemed very minimal in comparison to the 150 primary schools which had been established for White children by the 1840s (Daniel, 2005). By 1846, after reviewing the poor conditions of its two schools and limited opportunities for their children, Blacks requested opportunities for their children to attend the same schools as White children. However, the General School Committee which governed the educational facilities denied such requests to end segregation. Massachusetts state law did not require Blacks to attend schools with Whites nor did it require that Black children attend school even though their parents were taxed for education at the same rates as White families (Daniel, 2005). However, the law did provide the opportunity for parents to sue for damages if a child was unlawfully prohibited from entering school.

In 1849, Benjamin Roberts filed a suit against Boston, Massachusetts' educational system on the basis of racial segregation toward his five year old daughter who was continuously denied the chance to enroll in schools designated for Whites although they were located within closer proximity to her home. She had been denied access because she was Black. Roberts' attorney argued that such practices were illegal, especially since they had made a prior ruling to abolish slavery and declare equality among all people in 1836. Despite his efforts, the Supreme Court of Massachusetts upheld its state law that allowed segregation of students based upon race and found no need to mandate requirements for Blacks to become educated.

Following this determination, another major case impacting the education of African Americans was birthed: Plessy v. Ferguson, 1896. "Plessy ushered in the doctrine of "separate but equal" in railways and other public accommodations in society;

this included education in public schools” (Daniel, 2005, p. 58). African-American children were faced with both subpar facilities and curriculum. By 1954, over 100 years after the case in Massachusetts, the Supreme Court of the United States was faced with answering questions about the legitimacy of “separate but equal” on the basis of race. Nearly 200 plaintiffs from five states (Delaware, Kansas, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington, D.C.) brought the case to the Supreme Court in 1951. The court had to determine whether minority students had equal educational opportunities when segregated on the basis of race, even when all other things, such as facilities may be equal. The Supreme Court ruled that segregated schools were unconstitutional, thus overturning the “separate but equal” doctrine of Plessy v. Ferguson (Daniel, 2005). “The laws and policies struck down by this court decision were products of the human tendencies to prejudge, discriminate against, and stereotype other people by their ethnic, religious, physical, or cultural characteristics” (Brown Foundation, 2009).

The 1954 decision in Brown v. Board of Education should have launched a change in the American educational system. For the next decade or so, only a slow process of desegregating schools began because the court used language allowing school districts to determine how quickly to make changes in their school systems. Now, more than sixty years after the Brown v. Board of education ruling, America is still contemplating how to make educational opportunities and advancements more equal among Black and White children. “One must assume that the stakes in our collective efforts to achieve educational equity for all Americans are extremely high” (Stringfield, 2007, p. 306).

“Americans can believe in the ideal of equal opportunity and also believe that the best way to ensure that opportunity is to enable all children, regardless of their parents’ stations, to leave school with skills that position them fairly and productively in the nation’s democratic governance and occupational structure. The fact that children’s skills can so clearly be predicted by their race and family economic status is a direct challenge to our democratic ideals” (Rothstein, 2004, p.1). Achievement gap literature clearly identifies African-American males as students at-risk of not meeting basic educational requirements due to poor academic performance (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ogbu, 1987; Steele, 1997). Unfortunately, this same group has a history of being ranked low on the totem pole of educational aspiration because of multiple disadvantages such as low self-confidence, expectations, and income. Black males have held a position of disadvantage regarding schooling practices throughout the history of education in the United States.

Continued History: Overrepresentation of Black Males in Special Education

The history of education does not offer much promise for African-American males. Jenkins (2009) argues legal practices and policy set the stage for Blacks to remain disadvantaged in schools today. Classrooms still appear segregated in areas where most seats in advanced placement courses are filled with whites while their Black counterparts are being remediated in special education classes. Kemp (2006) reports academic failure and disengagement are the primary reasons for students dropping out of school, whether they have disabilities or not; it is difficult to determine the rates because different calculation measures and definitions are used by states regarding students with disabilities.

Disabilities may be viewed differently by category. For instance, Carla & Deluca (2006) refer to nonjudgmental and judgmental categories of special education; where nonjudgmental refers to disabilities that require minimal inferences to be made (i.e. students who are deaf, blind, have significant intellectual disabilities, or physical impairments) and judgmental exemplifies more subtle disabilities and require professional opinions, such as “mild mental retardation (MMR), emotionally disturbed (ED), or learning disabled (LD)” (p. 6). Discussion of the terms are used in research as an attempt to answer why there is a disproportionate number of minorities in special education, especially in the case of Black males. Although Carla & Deluca (2006) share poverty explanations for minorities being overrepresented as students with disabilities because their lack of wealth may have exposed them to risks that compromised human development, they surmise that schools place those students at greater risk by constraining educational opportunities for academic achievement.

Because professional opinions are needed for the placement of students in special education classes, ensuring the accuracy of “judgmental” determinations made by educators is necessary. Notably, as Black males are at great risk for being labeled with disabilities are Black males, those likely to make the determinations come from an educational system overrepresented by White females. Thus, teacher-student relationships play key roles in the identification of students possibly at-risk of future failure and/or being labeled with disabilities (Decker, Donna, and Christenson (2007) found as the discourse between students and teachers improved, and student-teacher relationships became more positive, the social, behavior, and engagement outcomes that would have previously led to referrals for behavioral disabilities actually improved.

A lack of understanding about the ways in which Black boys behave influences their placement in special education along with at-risk characteristics tied to poverty.

Poverty and Low Socio-Economic Status

Black students, especially those that are poor, are unequivocally faltering in school systems. Poor students, particularly Black males, are not succeeding in classrooms in comparison to their peers. Historically, poverty has negatively impacted the educational pursuits of children. Researchers (Rothstein, 2004; Jencks, 1972; Coleman, 1988; Kozol, 1991) make strong connections between poverty and insufficient academic achievement among African-American students.

“By current standards, children suffer disproportionately high rates of measured poverty, and they are often the innocent victims of rapid changes in our most fundamental institutions—the family, school, and government” (Lichter, 1997, p. 121). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), poverty status is determined by the amount of one’s earnings before taxes, but excludes capital gains and losses and noncash benefits such as food stamps and housing subsidies. The income of each person within a household is summed up unless they are non-relatives. The income of a non-family member within the home is not considered part of the total household income. The dollar amounts, termed as poverty thresholds, determine the status level for a family living in poverty. The thresholds are based upon the size of the family and ages of family members. The determination amounts do not vary geographically. Any family whose total income falls below the threshold is considered to be in poverty.

Mollie Orshansky, an economist working for the Social Security Administration, developed the poverty thresholds in 1963-64 (Fisher, 1992, p. 43). Fisher (1992) indicates the thresholds or poverty line was initially determined by looking at the minimal

amount to feed a family. “Survey data in the early 1960s indicated that families spent approximately one third of their income on food” (Seccombe, 2000, p. 1096). Therefore, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated an annual low-cost food budget for families and the cost of such a plan was multiplied by three to calculate the threshold. This calculation was the basis of what we now call the poverty line. Since that time, poverty thresholds have been updated for inflation, but the calculation process remains the same. Critics of the poverty threshold measure contend that the calculation is outdated, not including government assistance such as food stamps, tax credits, or subsidies for school lunches and further argue that redefining the poverty measure may change the view of child poverty (Iceland, et al., 1999, p. 1). Additional concerns about how the poverty line was created represent families who earn merely \$1 above the threshold. Some argue changing family dynamics have not been taken into account (e.g. rising needs and costs for day care, commuting, and other work-related expenses) and that families making \$1 above the poverty line should be considered because \$1 is too minimal to separate those in poverty from those of privilege (Seccombe, 2000).

Families who fall below the threshold or poverty line qualify to have their children receive free or reduced lunch in school because of their low socioeconomic status. The USDA Food and Nutrition Service researched trends in supplemental nutrition assistance programs, finding over 39 million people were eligible for benefits in 2007, but only 26 million individuals received them (USDA, 2009). “The prevalence of hunger was higher than average among households with children, especially those led by single women, minorities, and households with income below the official poverty line” (USDA, 2009, p. 1). The U.S. Census Bureau (2009) reported the nation’s poverty rate

moved from 12.5% in 2007 to 13.2% in 2008, but Blacks had not portrayed a statistically significant drop with their real median income declining only 2.8% (\$34,218) in comparison to other races. Yet, changes in the African-American family structure, where women act as sole providers in single parent homes, leave many Black kids in poverty stricken homes.

History chronicles events that reveal African-American families are being plagued with low income. Because many African-American youth grow up in households characterized by low socioeconomic status they have many obstacles to conquer. The disadvantages of these African-American youth include high rates of infant mortality, low life expectancy, low probability of employment, most likely to be suspended or expelled from school, greater chances of being classified as mentally retarded or being placed in special education courses, and most likely absent from advanced placement courses (Noguera, 2003). These factors exemplify a substantial need for Black families to have concern for the educational welfare of their children. Research (Jencks, 1972; Coleman, 1988; Kozol, 1991) indicate that poverty is positively correlated with academic failure.

Rothstein (2004) concluded that many minority children and those from lower social classes are less likely to achieve than students from middle class families. Rothstein asserts the following factors contribute to poor academic performance by students of low income families:

- a. Children begin school with deficits in vocabulary
- b. Children from lower-income homes, on average, have lower self-confidence and are unprepared to meet school challenges with a sense of excitement.
- c. Parents are not as likely to encourage initiative at early ages, thus lessening students' active role in taking responsibility for their learning

- d. Parents tend to provide directives to children without tolerating questioning or extensive conversations between adults and children. This prepares kids for direct instruction used when learning basic skills but offers little preparation for inquiry based learning needed to succeed in higher grade levels.
- e. Changes in family structure leave children in single parent homes where mothers have less time to help kids with school work or in homes with grandparents who have low education levels and are unprepared to assist children with academics.
- f. Students see parents working in jobs that require little academic skills and begin to formulate images of their future based upon their view of parent roles.
- g. Parents in lower-class families are less likely to reinforce behaviors that meet their expectations for good grades and overall academic performance.
- h. Children are less likely to see their parents reading as a way of seeking entertainment or solving problems, thus reducing the child's interest in reading themselves.
- i. Parents hold jobs that leave little room for input or questioning. Instead, they are expected to follow orders and complete routine tasks. They teach their children to not ask questions, reducing self-efficacy and beliefs that they can affect their environment and solve problems.
- j. Parents, on average, do not hold positions that allow for time off so parents can visit the school or take their children to the doctor; therefore, parent support seems to be minimized.

Rothstein (2004) contends that the aforementioned factors affect differences in student performance. He alleges that social class differences existing because of our economic system produce the achievement gap in average achievement as they relate to a wide range of skills, such as literacy, math performance, ability to reason, citizenship, self-discipline and communication skills. According to Rothstein's perspective, social, economic and educational reform is necessary to help narrow the gap between Whites and Blacks and assist minority students in achieving academic success.

Auerbach (2007) studied parents of color and their supportive role in assisting their children with obtaining access to advanced educational opportunities. He found variation in levels of support. Some parents purposely tried not to impose their goals on

their children, thus intentionally stepping back from some of the educational decisions. Others applauded their children from the sidelines, but feared that increased encouragement could pose a threat on necessary family ties and obligations if the child actually began college. Some parents had extremely limited knowledge about school and how to support access to post-secondary education. In fact, they expressed personal difficulty in dealing with schools. Garibaldi (1992) reports some parents are too intimidated to ask questions. Most parents spoke negatively about their own lack of education. “Just as schools need to affirm and accommodate marginalized students, so too, do schools need to transform their understanding of and interactions with working class parents of color” (Auerbach, 2007, p. 276).

Compton-Lily (2003) reported the basic assumptions that are made about the academic difficulties African-Americans face in education are based upon media depictions and urban mythology. Compton-Lily alleges that society blames the parents and offers simplistic notions of incompetence by teachers in lieu of poor pedagogy and lazy, uncaring teachers. Many times families are blamed, especially those of low-income, for not being empathetic and helping their own kids in the pursuit of education. Although it seems Blacks may not have a true value for education because many have not completed high school or higher education, historical accounts depict the opposite. Blacks fought for the right to become educated, but appear to be negatively affected by their disproportionately high rate of poverty. “Although African-American students have made academic achievements and educational gains in recent years, public education in this country widely remains separate and unequal...” (Cooper & Jordan, 2003, p. 380).

Some poor families may not understand how to support education, but Black kids who grow up in upper middle class neighborhoods with educated parents do not fare much better. The achievement gap between White and Black students remains unabbreviated at higher socioeconomic levels. “African-American youth from higher-income households and/or with more highly educated parents do much better in school than African-American youth who lack these advantages, but not nearly as well as Whites in similar family circumstances. Indeed, the school performance of affluent African-American children often is closer to that of poor White children than that of affluent Whites” (Gosa & Alexander, 2007, p. 286). As mentioned earlier, Rothstein (2004) argues that children from low-income families start school with less skills and preparation for academic success, indicating that although all students may be able to learn, those from lower classes do not have the tendency to learn fast enough to close the achievement gap.

Because the achievement gap remains at various socioeconomic levels, parental involvement in schooling may be a strong indicator of academic success. Although the achievement gap is pronounced in areas of poverty, the amount of connection students’ parents have with their academics may be directly correlated with academic achievement outcomes. Whether in urban, suburban, or rural areas, findings associated with family background and parental involvement impact future reform efforts.

Family Background and Parental Involvement

Crucial to understanding the academic achievement of African-American males is to become familiar with the family structures that support those students and foster their earliest learning experiences. During slavery, African-American parents were

advocates for their children's education. "In fact, African-American parents' fervor in the pursuit of education was evident during slavery when slaves risked severe punishment and even their lives to learn to read because they equated freedom with literacy" (Fields-Smith, 2005, p. 130). We seek to understand whether African-American parents uphold that level of reinforcement for their children's educational attainment because students' failure to achieve indicates the family system itself is dysfunctional and beginning to perish.

Billingsley (1992) suggested that the African-American family is alive, reflecting basic values and hopes, but still far from faring well. In fact, the African-American family was deemed to be in "crisis" in 1980. Research findings during that time period signify a myriad of conditions that seem to cripple African-American families (i.e. divorce, single parent homes, teen pregnancy, school failure, substance abuse, mental illness, homicide, suicide, criminal behavior, domestic violence, poverty, unemployment, etc.) (Billingsley, 1992). Jewell (2003) documented significant changes in the structure of African-American families reflecting two-parent households decreased by approximately 7% between 1982 and 2000. In addition, African-American female-headed families rose to 44% in the year 2000 due to increases in divorce rates and unwed parenting, furthermore, male headed families doubled to a total of 8% (Jewell, 2003). Additionally, African-American women are more likely to be in poverty and endure economic hardships. Comer (1993) indicates that the degree of poverty Black families face prevents parents from providing their children with experiences that allow them to perform better in schools, but if they exhibit "personal control" (p. 304) they are capable of influencing success in our mainstream culture.

On the other hand, William Sampson (2002) refutes some of the research findings by Comer and others who have a tendency to group urban poor into one group that has similar results. Sampson (2002) asserts income is not the only indicator of success and many Black children are able to succeed in school despite issues associated with poverty or support from parents. Furthermore, when studying African-American, Caucasian, and Asian students who do not live in poverty, African-Americans score lower on standardized test scores and have lower grades than their peers from the same economic group (Ogbu, 2003). Therefore, the poverty and familial expectations and/or support are not the only indicators of academic success for the African-American student.

Billingsley argued that African-American families “are able to adapt to and survive in the face of inexorable social and economic conditions” due to their resiliency (Jewell, 2003, p. 20). Although the literature suggests dysfunction within the African-American family, including inconsistent and non-cohesive structure and constant turmoil, the Black family has continued to survive (Vereen, 2007, p. 282). Additional research on resiliency supports the presence of one or more significant adults in the life of a child can have a positive impact (Floyd, 1996). A study by Floyd (1996), researching resiliency among a group of African-American seniors in high school, concluded “generalizations cannot be made about the factors that limit the academic potential of poor youth” and recommendations to enhance resiliency included the following seven factors:

- provide support for warm and stable homes
- school personnel should work closely with families
- staff members should work closely with families

- staff members should emulate the diversity of the school communities
- increase volunteers and scale up support programs such as mentoring, literacy, and rites of passage
- enhance relationships between school counselors and students to increase likelihood of students being informed and receiving recognition
- collaborate with similar schools to provide increased opportunities for highlighting academic success on a larger scale
- provide clear rules and expectations for students, as well as foster curriculum goals that include self-esteem building, responsibility, communication, and problem solving, but also give opportunities for students to somehow share in decision making

More or less, students tend to fare better if adults are actively engaged in their learning process. Jeynes (2007) offered that parental involvement is positively correlated with student achievement, especially if it is voluntary. Conversely, if schools do not facilitate positive relationships with parents, then parental involvement could negatively affect student outcomes. Stone, et al. (1999) suggested that barriers between schools and communities, on the basis of culture, race, and class limit opportunities for social change and strong academic support. Sanders (1998) offered the idea that students receive enhanced benefits when the students are assisted through the collaborative efforts of the home, school, and church. However, schools cannot effectively assist members of African-American families without understanding their familial structure.

States, such as Florida, with high rates of African-American residency should be most familiar with the family dynamics. In 2007, Florida ranked second in the nation having 2,896,693 Black residents, only surpassed by the state of New York (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Also, data shows contemporary Blacks and their households are overwhelmingly located in urban areas (Allen, 1995). Seccombe (2000) reported 99% of Black children, who lived in single parent homes where the head of household

had less than 12 years of education, had experienced poverty. Female-headed households have become typical among African-American families, but having only one wage earner lessens the amount of income available for the household. Additional reasons for female-headed households being at risk of poverty include lower wages paid to women, especially minorities, and limited receipt of child support (Seccombe, 2000).

Consistent with increasing numbers of female-headed households is the increase of teenage pregnancy, incarceration for Black men, and divorce rates among Black couples. Each factor has led to increasing numbers of grandparents raising African-American children. Additionally, African-American families may be further characterized by decreasing rates of employment and educational attainment. Ultimately, multiple trends exist regarding the Black family. Complexities exist that limit clear understanding of the family system. Allen (1995) concludes Black families are defined by complicated overlaps between location, functional relations, shared values, affiliations, and blood ties, thus representing a complex system of relationships. He further asserts that the Black family should not be viewed according to the stereotype of a single-headed household led by a mother with numerous children in a roach infested apartment as alleged through various forms of media. Such erroneous information devalues the African-American family and the sparse differences that exist among them.

Bankston and Caldas (1998) examined the influence of family structure and other variables as they relate to academic achievement and found that peers from female-headed households who attend school together generally reflect poor performance. However, they suggest that such findings should not cause one to presume students

from female-headed households automatically lead to poor achievement. Instead, they conclude the family structure may lend itself to inadequate supervision or socialization, lessened parental involvement, or heightened disadvantages due to living in neighborhoods with negative social environments. Furthermore, children in African-American families that are subject to lower income would more likely face poorer mental and physical health, experience more punitive discipline at home, engage in higher rates of delinquent acts, and often are victims of abuse (Seccombe, 2000). “Poor Black and Hispanic children experience more frequent and more severe poverty than do Whites with fewer prospects for improvement in their economic circumstances” (Seccombe, 2000, p. 1104). Researchers agree that economic conditions in early childhood have the greatest effect on achievement performance (Duncan, et al., 1998; Lipman & Offord, 1997; Dubow & Ippolito, 1994; and Rothstein, 2004). Although many African-American families are characterized by low income and poor conditions correlated with such social class distinction, all Black families are not poor and do not suffer from ramifications of low-income.

Albeit some Black families do not suffer from poverty or low-income, the achievement gap still exists when their performance is compared to that of White students in the same income bracket. “The most important reason to expect achievement differences for Black and White children whose families have similar incomes is that income is an inexact proxy for the many social class characteristics that differentiate Blacks from Whites whose current-year income is the same” (Rothstein, 2004, p. 47). For instance, Rothstein (2004) discusses middle class income families have extended family members who are poor and also tend to have larger families, both

of which yield less money in the household. Also, middle class Black families are more likely to be the first generation of wealth and do not have other family members who can share income with them to support the family, resulting in the change of dynamics usually seen in low income families.

African-American families have displayed greater skepticism and ambivalence toward educational programs over time (Aeurabach, 2007). By drawing on theories of cultural capital, social capital, and social networks, Aeurabach (2007) assumed parent roles regarding their children's education would typically be structured by class, race, culture, and psychosocial development within individual families. In her study on re-conceptualizing parent roles in education, Aeurabach (2007) concluded as parents attempt to prepare students for post-secondary education, they emphasized limited resources and lack of personal educational opportunities. The research indicates that parents became more motivated about educational attainment for their children when their kids performed well in school and invited them to participate in academic endeavors. Additionally, because poor educational history on the part of the parent created hostility and lack of trust toward the school system, providing encouragement, advocacy, and good information are strong suggestions for improving parent involvement.

Jeynes (2007) further suggests that parental programs effect academic achievement along with voluntary parental involvement. Research has identified strong ties between parental involvement, socioeconomic status, and whether children are reared in intact homes, concluding that parents with higher education levels and socioeconomic status generally provide more academic support (Jeynes, 2007).

Because African-American families are typically identified as having lower income levels we can expect reduced rates of parent involvement from their families and less positive relationships with teachers whose relationships are generally enhanced with greater involvement. The general cultural elements of family structure are often overlooked as teachers attempt to work with minority children.

Although parental involvement may be a missing element for students regarding their academic achievement, teachers are a common factor for all students. Each child has contact with teachers in the schooling process. Therefore, the contact made between student and teacher is monumental. What students expect of their teachers and what teachers expect of their students is significant. Whether those expectations are met may have even greater bearing on a student's overall academic achievement. What do teachers expect of African-American students? Educational literature explores the answer to that question and shares implications for the future of those students as related to academic achievement outcomes.

Teacher Expectations and Readiness

“As the proportion and number of children of color in the nation's schools increases, the need for teachers who have multicultural perspectives is heightened” (Moule & Higgins, 2007, p. 609). However, while our student population of minorities is growing, many of our nation's teachers remain White, middle class, and mostly female, creating a larger cultural gap between students and teachers. Johnson (2002) investigated racial awareness among six White teachers who taught students in racially diverse classrooms and found that allowing the participants to narrate their life experiences helped them to focus on culture and racial identity that had not been provided through their teacher education programs. “Research in teacher education

needs to follow graduates into the classroom, and our work needs to extend beyond pre-service education, linking pre-service education with community-based learning and with ongoing professional development and school reform” (Sleeter, 2001, pp.102-3).

Researchers have identified the need for teachers to increase expectations of minority students and alter and/or expand traditional curriculum practices to include the cultural relevance of African-American students (Goodman & Fish, 1997; Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Casteel, 2000; Decker et al, 2006; Ferguson, 2003). Teachers should expect to differentiate learning based on culture. “African-American students often demonstrate involvement in the curriculum through vocal response, physical movement and verve which are accepted and encouraged in African-American group settings, such as religious and family gatherings. However, Euro-American teachers tend to see these behaviors as disruptive to their classes” (Bradley, 2007, p. 21). In addition, some studies have shown that teachers fail to expect strong achievement outcomes from their African-American students and do not motivate students to succeed (Casteel, 2000; Decker et al, 2006). Teachers who fail to understand the cultural backgrounds of their students limit achievement outcomes from their students. Moreover, research shows the need for teachers to develop close relationships with students; in turn, students appear to try harder to succeed (Bradley, 2007; Decker et al., 2006; Johnson, 2002).

Davis & Jordan (1994) studied Black students in eighth and tenth grade, across the nation, to explore factors associated with their achievement and engagement. Because they were concerned with what variables affect educational outcomes for Black males, the research “focused on the relationship of the student, teacher, school characteristics and four outcome measures: academic achievement, grades, locus of

control, and engagement” (Davis & Jordan, 1994, p. 572). The findings indicated that if teachers failed to believe they could effect change in the lives of their students, then student performance also lessened. Although other factors, including discipline, number of Black teachers, and teacher expectancy appeared relevant, they were found less significant when the controls were added (except for locus of control). “This suggests that the teachers who take responsibility for the quality of education they provide for their Black male students-and for the students’ success or failure-more often than not produce students who achieve” (Davis & Jordan, 1994, p. 585). “If reform-minded educators are serious about closing the achievement gap before several decades pass in the new millennium, we must continue to identify alterable factors in the schooling process that help promote academic success among all students and particularly students of color” (Cooper, 2000, p. 620).

Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) has worked with teachers who exemplify exceptional teaching practices and encourage African-American students to excel in their performance by devoting exemplary effort in developing rigorous curriculum that incorporates cultural relevance. The teachers’ experiences are shared in Ladson-Billings’ book, *The Dreamkeepers*, where she defines cultural relevant teaching as a practice that requires teachers to understand the culture of both the school and student. These practices allow students to understand the importance of the curriculum as it relates to them and uses student culture to move beyond typical dominant culture views (Ladson-Billings, 2009). This method empowers students to implore their intellect and emotions while learning versus simply accepting the dominant culture’s views as the only acceptable perspective. “The primary aim of culturally relevant teaching is to assist

in the development of a “relevant Black personality” that allows African-American students to choose academic excellence yet still identify with African and African-American culture” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 20). Similar to Freire’s (2000) work, Ladson-Billings recognizes that a “cultural silence” exists in reference to working with minority children. Minority viewpoints and cultural significance are often obsolete in curriculum, leaving those students ill-equipped to think positively about their identity and hopeless to attain true ideals about success.

Freire (2000) undergirds his research with the notion that the educational system is used as a vehicle to promote social, economic, and political domination that discourages minorities from advancing. “Rather than being encouraged and equipped to know and respond to concrete realities of their world, they were kept “submerged” in a situation which such critical awareness and responses were practically impossible” (Freire, 2000, p. 30). Freire contends that all people have the capability of looking at the world critically if provided with the tools and opportunities to encounter a new reality and deal with new perceptions. Such a philosophy is equated with culturally relevant practices and allows all students to see through a different set of lenses. In this regard, teaching becomes reciprocal, where the teacher learns from the students and vice versa. Also, students are expected to become engaged in the curriculum, feeling safe to share their perspectives which facilitates mutual respect for experiences and provides opportunities for students to learn from one another.

Freire (2000) argues that poor minority students are often placed in educational systems that oppress them, limiting their ability to transform because the oppressors are characterized by fear of those students gaining an authentic consciousness and

becoming liberated enough to challenge what is being taught. In addition, Freire (2000) refers to education in terms of a banking concept by which teachers deposit information they determine to be valuable into the “depositories”, otherwise known as students. He concludes that such a process deems students to be manageable items and dehumanizes them. Thus, Freire (2000) believes teachers must be willing to give up control and allow students to engage in dialogue, whereby both students and teachers are engaged in the lessons, learning from one another. This concept of dialogue allows for cultural relevance to emerge in the classroom and provides an atmosphere that embraces humanism and liberates the educational process.

Ladson-Billings (2009) suggests that the sharing of student perceptions is important because teachers often have low self-esteem concerning their own work and explains that working with low-income students and minorities tends to further announce those feelings. Critics of cultural relevant teaching practices emphasize that Black culture or history should not replace the entire curriculum. However, proponents of using culture relevance insist that the removal of African-American contributions from the curriculum and within the classroom suggests cultural ranking. Furthermore, it implies the culture of minorities is less valuable. They propose teaching from culturally relevant perspectives merely causes students to value those contributions, therefore, equipping African-Americans and other minority students with opportunities to create a new reality of the world which embraces a positive self-identity. “And as [teachers/schools] become more *learning centered*, they must also become more *learner centered*, that is, deliberately organized to attend to the varied developmental and cognitive needs emerging from students’ differing experiences, talents, learning

styles, language backgrounds, family situations, and beliefs about themselves and what school means for them” (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 32).

As teachers strive to include minorities in the educational process, their efforts must be viewed legitimate by those populations. Casteel (2000) outlines the students’ need to favorably identify with teachers if they will escape negative performance in school that is so strongly linked with future failure in society. Casteel (2000) summarizes research concluding African-American children were treated less well than their peers when taught by Caucasian teachers. Therefore, he approached the issue by researching students’ opinions about being placed with teachers outside their race. He surveyed 160 seventh grade students to measure their preferences. Casteel (2000) found students did not believe their race was a significant factor in how they were treated. In fact, most of the suburban low-income students who participated in the study believed their teachers liked them and were fair, but many felt the teachers failed to attend to their questions. Casteel (2000) concluded that the growing number of minority students attending public school may have raised an awareness of teaching minority populations and teacher preparation programs may be more adequately preparing new teachers. However, the low sample number yields inconclusive evidence to generalize the findings. Additional studies on student-teacher relationships are needed to determine more conclusive results.

Decker et al. (2007) made attempts to determine the effect student-teacher relationships have on student outcomes. Decker et al. (2007) acknowledged the body of literature that chronicles lessened teacher relatedness with students as they get older. Similar to the disengagement of parents in students’ schooling experiences as

they grow older, teachers also seem to have less strong ties with students. The relationship factor seems to become significantly diminished as students approach secondary school. Although Decker et al. (2007) did not account for the ethnic differences between the White teachers and Black students in their study; they recommended additional studies on the cultural competence of teachers. Forty-four students and twenty-five teachers participated in their study. They explored the association between student-teacher relationships and African-American students who were at risk of special education referrals due to poor behavior. Decker et al. (2007) found that students desired positive relationships with their teachers and school interventions would include improving the quality of relationships between student and teacher. Understanding the feelings of the students at early ages is an essential component according to their research findings.

As schools become more learner centered, it is presumed they are more closely aligned with the varying needs of the students. The African-American male learner is not only faced with socioeconomic issues, the historical context of their culture, level of parental involvement or teacher expectation, but must balance each aforementioned discourse with self-identity. "Because students' prior experiences, motivations, and interests are crucial to learning, most teachers' accounts of planning focus on how they will connect their goals with students' needs rather than on how they will "deliver instruction" according to a rational planning model" (Darling-Hammond, 1997, p. 73). Understanding the students' needs based on individual identity assists in effective delivery of curriculum in classrooms. Additional investigation on the self-identity of African-American males is relevant to the discussion of their academic achievement.

African-American Males' Self-Identity

Several theories and models attempt to explain varying stages of developing racial ethnic or cultural identity. For this study it is critical to understand how Black males come to view themselves. William Cross developed the theory of nigrescence, defined as the process of becoming darker. Cross (1971) determined that Blacks move through four stages (pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization) as they transition from a White frame of reference to a positive Black frame of reference in the development of their personal identity.

Each stage of identity characterizes the world view held by an African-American individual. Each stage is described as follows: (1) In the pre-encounter stage, a person will devalue their culture by taking a complete view of the world from a Euro-American perspective; (2) The encounter stage is identified by personal or social events that challenges the Euro-American frame of reference causing one to change the interpretation of their identity; (3) During the immersion-emersion stage, African-Americans will develop great pride in their culture, but even though their involvement in the shaping of "Black Pride" is high they fail to greatly internalize a positive attitude about themselves. Generally at this stage, African-Americans will promote Blackness while devaluing Whites; and (4) Internalization refers to the person achieving a high level of inner security with their Blackness and become incredibly satisfied with their identity as an African-American individual. In the final stage, they are less anti-White, as they merely accept who they are without the need to reduce the culture of Whites (Parham & Helms, 1981). Students who view themselves negatively and have no hope of advancing in a Euro-American society are less likely to perform well academically. Identifying the plausibility of students operating from the earliest stages of positive self-

identity would greatly impact how to respond to these students. As indicated by Robinson and Brian (2006), schools must actively participate in heightening the level of pride and commitment Black students have concerning their community. The psychological functioning of an individual has extreme ramifications upon performance, behaviorally and academically. Thus, recognizing and responding to where African-American students rank in psychosocial development impacts academic performance outcomes.

Erik Erikson, a well-known theorist in the field of psychology, contributed to the field by creating eight stages of psychosocial development. Erikson contended that the fifth stage is of utmost importance because the concern for identity reaches its climax while adolescents are seeking their true selves. “Erikson posited that identity is formed through exchanges with the social world, such as the aspects of the social world are selected and integrated into one’s developing sense of self” (Sneed, Schwartz & Cross, 2006, p. 62). Based on this assumption, researchers began to formulate additional models as a framework for dealing with individual personality and behavior. Sue & Sue (1990) created the Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model, as an expansion of the Minority Identity Development Model, to further explain persons’ attitudes and behaviors. “The model defines five stages of development that oppressed people experience as they struggle to understand themselves in terms of their culture, the dominant culture, and the oppressive relationship between the two cultures: conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness” (Sue & Sue, 1990, p. 96).

According to Harper (2007), Black male students who embrace oppositional identity and accept underachievement are validating the authenticity of their Black male identity because to allow variability within the group would be attributed as “acting White” (p. 234). Research indicates that Black male students do not view themselves equivalent to Whites and believe in greater opportunities for success in sports and music in comparison to academics (Ogbu, 1987; Haberman, 1997). “Some African-American students often develop an oppositional identity due to the lack of Black academic role models both in the people who teach them and the materials that are used in most schools (Bradley, 2007, p. 20).

According to Noguera (2003), researchers consider oppositional identity as a cause of oppositional behavior that is exemplified because Black students have a fear of being ostracized by peers for not being able to match their academic achievement. He disputes this notion, expositing its failure to address the culture of schools. At the same time he argues, “Black males may engage in behaviors that contribute to their underachievement marginality, but they are also more likely to be channeled into marginal roles and to be discouraged from challenging themselves by adults who are supposed to help them” (Noguera, 2003, p. 445). Blacks’ underrepresentation in honors and advanced placement courses is an example of the schools participation in non-challenging behaviors. “If Black boys are to be sufficiently prepared to meet the challenges of the new millennium, it is important that they come to see themselves as intellectually and effectively competent in both academic and social circles and that they are able to enroll in as well as graduate from institutions of higher learning” (Cooper & Jordan, 2003, p. 382).

Steele (1992) proclaims students identify with academics when they begin schooling and are motivated to do well, but over time African-American students become less identified with academic performance. According to Steele, African-American students relate their academic performance to how they feel about themselves when they start school but negative experiences in school and society causes them to become more sensitive to negative expectations about their cultural group. A stereotype threat is produced that causes African-American students to fear lower academic performance thinking it will confirm negative images associated with being Black (Steele, 1992). Moreover, Steele (1992) explains Black students will disidentify with academics to protect their self-esteem. If school does not matter, then academic achievement is an unnecessary factor in maintaining a positive self-image. Cokley (2002) tested Steel's theory of academic disidentification with a sample of college students. He gave the Academic Self-Concept Scale (ASCS) and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale to 359 African American and 229 European-American students and compared the correlations of academic self-concept, self-esteem, and grade point averages (GPA) of underclassmen to upperclassmen. He found that both groups had significant positive correlations between self-concept and GPA, but the correlation between self-esteem and GPA was minimally supported. The study revealed European-American female upperclassmen showed a significant positive correlation between GPA and self-esteem, but for all other groups the correlation decreased. Cokley (2002) contends these findings partially support Steele's work and because his sample included college students the disidentification process may have already been in place. Thereby, the older the students are, the more likely it is that their

self-identity is already in place and may not be as dependent upon achievement outcomes as other factors related to their life.

The attitudes African-American males possess while in school is an additional factor associated to academic achievement. Unfortunately, “they tend to perceive of American society as a closed system within which they will be unable to participate regardless of their educational background” (Richardson & Gerlach, 1980, p. 492). Research regarding minority students’ attitude toward academic achievement provides additional insight to the dropout phenomena occurring among African-Americans. The body of literature represents itself as viable resources for enhancing student motivation.

Minority Students’ Attitude and Motivation Toward Academic Achievement

African-American males are typically thought of as products of single female-headed households with economic disadvantages, located in communities where schools have limited resources. “Many Black dropouts believe that given the current social and economic barriers to mobility, education will be of little benefit to them” (Richardson & Gerlach, 1980, p. 489). It is often suggested that Black males have less opportunities for success because they are not placed in advanced courses or expected to succeed. They are more likely to be missing from both honors and advanced-placement courses (Pollard, 1993). Conversely, “throughout the country, Black children are overrepresented in special education programs” (Noguera, 2003, p. 436). Furthermore, Black males often lack positive peer influence or strong male role models and have reduced sense of self-efficacy.

According to Bandura’s social cognitive theory, self-efficacy may be defined as “the judgment of one’s capability to take the action necessary to attain their desired kind of performance” (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). The intellectual ability of African-American

males has been traditionally unacknowledged by White Americans and subsequently not accepted by Blacks who begin to doubt themselves and discourage peers from exhibiting academic success which they define as “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). As espoused in Coleman’s literature, “it is not surprising that there is a connection between the educational performance of African-American males and the hardships they endure within the larger society” (Noguera, 2003, p. 432).

Black males’ poor test performance outcomes may be linked to a situational phenomenon called stereotype threat, where they may feel increased pressure from being viewed by negative stereotypes such as “at-risk” students, having inferior intellect, or likely candidates for dropout. Similarly, researchers have hypothesized that Whites, based on their perception that they may be stereotyped as racist, may experience stereotype threat in interracial contexts (Goff, Steele, & Davies, 2008). “Where bad stereotypes about these groups apply, members of these groups can fear being reduced to that stereotype” (Steele, 1997, p. 614). Thus, whether Black or White, stereotype threats may lead to the social distancing that is experienced in classrooms. Much like the formation of self-identity, stereotype threats pose as incredible barriers to African-Americans. Their self-concept and motivation can be severely hindered by negative feelings about who they are and what is expected of them.

The perception of schooling for many Black youth is that it is an optimal and obtainable goal, whereas, other Black adolescents may perceive academic success as unattainable and thus a waste of time. “We must create an educational system that not only celebrates African and African-American culture, but also imbues Black children with the skills they need to survive in society and to contribute to its creative

development” (Hale-Benson, 1986, p.3). Although research indicates that Black males may exhibit behaviors which contribute to their underachievement, they are also likely to be placed in academic settings that do not challenge them (Noguera, 2003). The relationship between socioeconomic levels and underachievement underscores the need for economic empowerment in schools with underprivileged students. The same resources that are unavailable to schools are the same resources that are not available to families, thus creating a major barrier to school achievement (Powell, et al., 2007).

The responsibility to motivate students in general is not merely the responsibility of one person. An old proverb institutes the idea that motivating, supporting, and disciplining children is a societal responsibility or community affair: “It takes a village to raise a child”. That philosophy almost seems lost in the age of single parent households. Today, it appears most people look the other way when problems arise, but youth need “villages” to become a motivating force again. A child’s success is not inevitably determined by his IQ or how smart he is, but rather by the intelligence of his motivator (Dunn & Griggs, 1995). Dunn and Griggs (1995) stated that when one is speaking of the responsibility of the African-American community, they are generally referring to one woman. Thus, it seems the old adage must be rejuvenated by having schools and communities work together to enhance academic performance among African-American males.

Because African-American children are likely to live in poor communities, research investigating the impact of their families warrants further research. According to Powell, et al.,

Americans have the highest rate of child poverty” and “we should be concerned for poor elementary school students because we have empirical evidence that

duration and severity of poverty impairs the young children's physical and mental growth, academic ability, and socio-emotional well-being, inhibits effective parenting, and increases the chances that children will attend inferior schools and live in high-risk environments (2007, p. 300).

“School failure at the high school level translates into a variety of unproductive outcomes: dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, crime, drug use, all of which have serious implications for quality of life as an adult” (Cooper & Jordan, 2003, p. 385). Noguera (2003) argued that we still fail to understand the impact of cultural and environmental factors as they relate to Black males' perception of schooling and overall performance. “Learning how to influence the attitudes and behaviors of African-American males must begin with an understanding of the ways in which structural and cultural forces shape their experiences in school and influence the construction of their identities” (Noguera, 2003, p. 452).

Teachers are a large motivating force for students from all backgrounds. Minority students desire to have teachers who believe in them as much as students of the predominant White culture. “Teachers who hold negative perceptions can inadvertently turn off Black male students who have high abilities, positive self-concepts, and outstanding personal expectations, and who set achievable aspirations” (Garibaldi, 1992, p. 8). Garibaldi surveyed over 2,250 African-American male students, a random sample of 318 teachers, and 3,523 parents in a New Orleans school district and found discrepancies in expectations between students and teachers. Nearly all students (95%) expected to graduate from high school, 40% felt their teachers did not set high enough expectations and more than half (60%) of the participants believed their teacher should push them harder. Despite student expectations to graduate, 60% of the teacher participants responded negatively when asked if they believed the students

would go to college. In turn, 80% of parents believed their sons would attend college. Teachers' belief in future aspirations for African-American students was extremely low meaning they have little reliability in motivating the students and lack of agreement with parents.

Garibaldi illuminates the discrepancies between perceptions held by adults and students. His findings led to more than 50 recommendations for the New Orleans school district. As a result of the study, some suggestions were made to motivate African-American males. Garibaldi (1992) suggests we encourage more African-American males to participate in extracurricular activities that are related to academics; provide recognition and tangible awards for students who perform well academically; teachers should encourage African-American male students to pursue college while they are enrolled in elementary school; teachers should show relevance of teaching to future goals and job readiness; businesses should provide rewards and incentives to the children of their employees for regular attendance, above-average grades, and participation in extracurricular activities, etc.

The positive responses from parents, teachers, community members and peers are necessary elements in student motivation of Black males. The achievement gap evidences the low self-efficacy of the African-American subgroup population. Many African-American males are not making positive judgments about their academic ability or following through to achieve success. Thus, others' input is tantamount to academic achievement. Yet, what encouragement is needed for individual students cannot be determined without recognizing what the student himself needs. Attempts to motivate

students without understanding how they perceive their educational environment would pose greater hardships.

Student Voice/Perceptions

While researchers have identified possible reasons for the achievement gap that exists between Black and White students, they have spurred increased interest in male achievement. African-American males, in particular have high rates of dropout from school. Yet, minimal effort has been devoted to speaking with Black males about this phenomenon. By and large, the information shared in educational research comes from the adult perspective and the voice heard in literature is that of adult researchers, not students. “Student voice’, in its most profound and radical form, calls for a cultural shift that opens up spaces and minds not only to the sound but also to the presence and power of students” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 363). Attending to the voices of students gives us a fresh perspective for educational reform because it provides us with critiques and recommendations from those most affected by our efforts (Cook-Sather).

Student voice literature is grounded in qualitative studies that support interviews with students. Although the methodologies needed to acquire information may be more labor intensive and time consuming, invaluable data may be collected that influence curriculum practices. Studies that represent student voice give viable information regarding students’ attitudes, feelings, behaviors, etc. (DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Mitra, 2004; Smyth, 2006; Steinberg & McCray, 2012; and Thiessen, 2006). Each allows us to understand the influence and impact those factors have on their academic performance. “...The different position from which students experience schooling and, more generally, from which they experience the world makes their contributions to discussions of school

reform essential” (Cook-Sather, 2009, p. 224). Yet, quantitative measures reinforce findings of studies for student voice research.

Educators are recognizing the legitimacy of what students share and how their perspectives may positively influence educational reform, thus, there has been an extensive expansion of research on student voice over the last twenty years. Current interest in student experiences remain and studies in the field are increasing. “The recent studies document what students do in school, how schools influence the development of students, how students address the challenges and circumstances of successive waves of school reform, and how students make sense of, adapt to, and even improve the unique and complex world of school” (Thiessen, 2006, p. 347).

Student voice literature legitimizes the value of student input and further suggests that giving students a say in what happens in school settings encourages greater concern about achievement. Smyth (2006) argues students have felt their school experience has been trivialized; therefore, they developed hostility toward learning environments and chose to underperform. Thus, Smyth (2006) indicates the voices of students must be clearly heard, especially subgroup populations, in their resilience to everyday practices. “Central to any reclamation will be the restoration of young people’s trust in the social institution of schooling-something that is becoming increasingly and severely corroded at the moment” (Smyth, 2006, p. 282).

Unfortunately, the silent voice of low-achieving students leaves a deadening ring in the ears of educational researchers. It is paramount that we address the needs of failing/at-risk students. There is an increased need to examine students’ perceptions about schooling practices so we may understand their interpretations of pedagogy.

Increased investigations of student experiences and viewpoints will allow for reasonable solutions to closing the achievement gap. “The scant attention paid to students’ voice is inexcusable given their role as the primary clientele in K-12 schools” (Howard, 2001, p.132).

Conclusion

African-American males continue to dawdle in achievement when compared to White peers. Their standardized test scores and overall achievement marks the need for advancement. As Black male students grow older and enter secondary school populations the number of students who drop out grows increasingly worse. Unless further research indicates methods for lessening the achievement gap, African-American males remain in danger of dropping out of school and possibly noted as failing citizens in society. It is time that their voices are heard.

Expansive literature has already covered minority populations’ experience with school dropout. However, most research continues to include the adult perspective. Minimal studies focus on the Black male students’ perspective. While Black boys remain silent in the literature, the dropout phenomenon continues and the African-American voice goes unheard. To date, the literature includes adult viewpoints on how African-American history, low-income, family background, teacher expectations, self-identity concept of Black men, and failure to adhere to the voice of the student are speculated to impact dropout behavior. Some believe economic and social barriers are factors related to dropping out of school. Others conclude that negative stereotypes cause students to become disengaged in education and lead them to decisions to drop out of secondary school. Meanwhile, other researchers provide the rationale that minimum parental involvement with the school process has led to our alarming dropout

rates for Black males. Additional educational reform contenders believe teachers' low expectations for Black males and failure to adapt their instruction to culturally relevant material for minority students, results in African-American males dropping out high school before earning a diploma.

Multiple perspectives exist regarding factors associated with reasons for dropping out of school. This study is designed to explore relationships viewed significant for dropping out and whether student voice echoes adult perspectives when sharing their thoughts about why Black boys dropout of the secondary school setting. Finally, the study seeks to add collective perspectives of African-American male students to the body of literature that permeates educational reform research.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research question guiding this study is: “What factors do African-American male students believe are related to why Black boys drop out of secondary school?” This research study focuses on perceptions of African-American male students because educational literature states they are most at risk dropping out of school. The research question highlights the importance of African-American male student perspectives about the dropout phenomena they are portrayed by in educational literature. Thus far, a major weakness of education research is its limited attention to student voice. “Without the voices and support of students, a key component in school reform efforts is missing” (Smyth, 2006, p. 283). African-American males are asked to complete the Student Voice Survey as a method of sharing their thoughts about factors related to Black boys dropping out of school (Appendix H). The categories on the survey are related to the research question which is driven by several non-directional hypotheses:

H₁: African-American male students with similar demographics will hold similar beliefs about reasons for Black boys dropping out of school.

H₂: African-American male students perceive poor relationships with their teachers are a factor for Black boys dropping out of school.

H₃: African-American male students perceive school curriculum is positively correlated with reasons Black boys choose to drop out of school.

H₄: African-American male students perceive family situations are related to why Black boys drop out of school.

H₅: African American male students perceive Black boys' personal experiences as a reason for dropping out of school.

The survey was designed to provide quantitative descriptions about the opinions shared by student participants. From their responses, claims have been made about the population. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data was collected at one point in time versus over long periods as with longitudinal data collection. On-line surveys were developed for the purpose of easy access, low cost, and ability to gather data quickly.

Sample/Setting

The study was conducted with a purposeful sample of students from middle and high school. Each school belonged to school district located in north central Florida. Participants were selected from a population of convenience in a school district where the researcher is employed. Participants were gathered based upon accessibility, achieved by school principals granting approval to conduct the study at their school site.

The selected school district is considered an urbanized area by the Census Bureau (2010) and most schools within the district are located inside the city limits. Five middle schools and four high schools are located outside city limits. The National Center for Education Statistics (2007) has developed four locale categories for schools based on the 2006 classification system: city, suburban, town, and rural. The school district used in this study meets the definition for city, but schools within this study are not defined as "city" schools. The majority of the participating schools fit the definition of "town" schools. Almost all of the middle and high schools participating in the study fit the definition of a "town" school, including the school where pilot study participants were

enrolled. The only exception was the alternative school and it lies on the city/county boundary line.

Included in the sample are four of the five (80%) public middle schools and two of the four (50%) public high schools located outside of city limits. Center schools within the participating school district focus on students with special needs and disabilities. The private and charter schools often focus on special populations too; however, none are included in the sample. The school that granted permission for the pilot study to be conducted can be described as a combination middle/high school designated. Similarly, the alternative school is designed for middle and high school, but placement is based upon students exhibiting behavioral concerns requiring a referral for the student's zoned home school.

The combined student enrollment for all traditional schools participating in the study is 2,120 middle school students and 1,695 high school students which includes all racial and ethnic backgrounds. The student enrollment for African-American male students attending those schools is equivalent to 249 middle school children and 242 high school students. An additional 53 African-American students were enrolled in the alternative school, of which 35 were males. All Black males students enrolled at the participating schools were invited to participate in the study; 261 of 579 (45%) completed surveys as part of the sample population.

African-American male students were purposefully selected to participate because they are only minimally conveyed as providing perspectives to the body of research, but are overrepresented as students at risk of dropping out of school. Their voice should be heard in educational literature. Participants from multiple grade levels were selected

because students drop out at each grade in secondary schools and multiple tiers of information will provide variance of descriptions between grade levels.

The school district's research office was contacted to obtain approval for the study. Then, information about the study was forwarded to the principals of each school for them to make decisions about participation. Principals who consented to conduct the study in their respective school were contacted to set up times to survey students based upon procedures that were best for their school culture. Participating schools varied in their decision on how to grant access to students (i.e. using computer labs during electives, English class, after school program, etc.).

Before students participated in the study, they were asked to take assent forms home to their parents to share information about the study. Parents/guardians were asked to reply with a signature, using the "opt-out" form, only if they did not want their child to participate (Appendix G). Once the deadlines for returning the paperwork were met at each school, the studies were conducted in the school's computer lab using www.zoomerang.com. Each student was given the access information on individual slips of paper to start the on-line version of the survey. If a scheduling problem or other school concern arose, then students were provided a hard copy of the survey instrument using the exact formatting of on-line questions. Afterwards, all data was entered in the computer system by the researcher.

All participation was completely voluntary. Participants were not compensated for their involvement in the study. Persons who decided to not participate in the study or selected to discontinue participation were not penalized in any way. No risks were imposed upon participants.

Instrumentation Development

A pilot study was conducted for this current research. A collection of responses were gathered by interviewing African-American male students enrolled in a public middle/high school, grades 6-12. Five students chose to participate in the study and shared their thoughts about factors related to Black boys dropping out of school. Their responses to eleven open-ended interview questions were audio recorded and transcribed (Appendix C). Evidence of similarities and/or differences among student participant responses as it relates to Black males dropping out of school has been described by sharing their perceptions and summarizing results (Appendices D & F).

Open coding and thematic data analysis allowed specific themes to emerge from the data. A cross-section of student interview responses and educational literature yielded a common thread of perspectives about factors related to the dropout crisis. The similarities consisted of the following factors: types of demographic variables, teachers, school/curriculum, family involvement, peer groups, and personal experiences. The combined literature review and interview results led to the development of a 42-item survey instrument which was used to obtain additional African-American male student perspectives on factors relating to dropping out of school.

The survey instrument was sent to all administrators and guidance counselors employed by the school district. Feedback from educational leaders was shared regarding the questions and changes were made based upon responses to establish a more valid instrument. The survey includes 7 questions that focus on student demographics. The demographic variables related to extracurricular activities, age, grade level, grade point averages, and parental information. Thirty-three questions were

broken down into the following categories: teachers (5), school curriculum (10), family support (5), and personal experience (13); all were designed on a continuous, 5-point Likert scale where participants marked a range of responses from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” (Table 3-1). The final two questions were open-ended questions, for the purpose of receiving further clarity about the topic.

Procedures

The purpose of this section is to outline the data collection and analysis methods used for this study. The methods were used to guide an exploration of student perceptions about African-American male students’ decisions to drop out of school and highlight trends in the data. Statistical procedures were followed to report measures of validity within the study. Although this research study is quantitative, the instrument incorporates student voice. An unbiased approach was used in the final data collection for the purpose of reliability.

Nominal values were assigned to student responses for the purpose of analyzing the data. Students were not penalized for non-completion of the surveys though. In some cases, survey items to be measured on the Likert-scale were left unanswered by student participants. For those items, the response of “neither agree nor disagree” was coded to provide descriptive statistics for the data. Descriptive statistics and frequency tables regarding demographic information and overall student responses are outlined in chapter four.

Demographic factors related to age, grade level, head of household, highest level of education completed by parents and involvement in extracurricular sports; all were coded according to the number of responses available. Additional items included in the survey were divided into categories recognized in literature as factors related to

decisions to drop out of school: teachers, school/curriculum, family, and students' personal experiences. Those items were coded by responses shared on a five-point Likert-scale, where 1 = "strongly agree", 2 = "agree", 3 = "neither agree nor disagree", 4 = "disagree", and 5 = "strongly disagree". However, for the purpose of providing clear descriptions, responses 1 and 2 were combined to indicate students' overall agreement with a statement. Similarly, responses 4 and 5 were paired to reflect overall disagreement with the statement by participants. Finally, summarized qualitative data shared by students who participated in the pilot study interviews is presented along with data from the two open-ended survey questions.

Correlation and regression analyses were applied to describe the data output and reliability and probability of outcomes. To better understand the relationships described in the results section, Pearson Correlation Coefficients were used. Pearson's correlation coefficients (r) provide the degree of linear associations existing between two variables, emphasizing the strength and direction of the relationship, where correlation coefficient values of -1 reference a negative relationship, 0 equates to no relationship, and 1 refers to a positive relationship. By definition, any variable correlated with its self will have a correlation coefficient value of 1. Correlations are yielded significant at both the .01 and .05 levels based on the ends of the sampling distribution (two-tailed). This means if the p-value is less than 0.05, then the correlation is rendered significant with the researcher being 95% confident that the relationship between the variables is not due to chance. At the 0.01 level of significance, the researcher is 99% certain that the variables are not related by chance. The closer the value is to .000, the more likely the variables are significantly related to one another. Descriptive analysis of data is outlined in chapter 4,

clarifying how variables are interrelated after independent and dependent variables were examined. The significant relationships are explained by a range of scores, defined in categorical areas.

Bivariate and multivariate linear regression models were used to determine the plausibility of any independent variables being able to significantly predict another variable. The SPSS Premium Packaging Software was used to organize the various results from testing how factors were related. Subsequent, thematic analysis was used to provide descriptions of the themes derived from the two open-ended questions.

Limitations of Study

First, some assumptions were made regarding the study. Assumptions are elements expected to be true and taken for granted by the researcher. The researcher assumed participants in the study would be concerned about the topic and provide honest statements about their thoughts regarding dropping out of school. It was expected that students who took time to reply to open-ended questions would provide genuine statements, as well as make good choices to share the most accurate responses on the Likert-scaled items. Furthermore, an assumption was made about the collective identity of the student participants. It was expected that participants would hold values and beliefs about other African-American males because they were most likely socially connected.

The interpretation of results may be most limited by the inability to provide external validity. Data is not considered generalizable to all school populations because the results may not be relevant for all African-American students attending secondary schools. Because a small number of middle and high school students' perceptions were shared, the diversity of responses is minimized. The sample size (n=261) reduces

generalizability in a school district which comprises more than 2,000 African-American male students enrolled in secondary schools. “When researchers generalize, they really make claims about the applicability of their findings to other settings” (Firestone, 1993). Thereby, the limited sample may not be representative of all African-American males enrolled in middle and high schools. According to Johnson & Onwuegbuzie (2004), the sample size could lower credibility for other administrators and/or leaders of educational programs. Furthermore, similar demographic features regarding location may suggest similarities among neighborhoods in which students live and present questions about predictions for Black males attending large inner city schools. However, the same conditions for conducting the interviews or surveying students may be applied at any school thus yielding a consistency of measurement through replicable designs.

Although a perfect random sample was not used, the responses from participants are still meaningful to add to the body of research and provide a basis for future research questions to be explored. Given the importance of the large number of Black youth dropping out of school, additional descriptive data helps provide a clearer picture of the circumstances even if not generalizable. To increase the external validity, the survey would need to be given to a larger number of schools throughout the school district, over a longer period of time, and include additional demographics.

Participation from more students from varying schools with a variety of demographics may have enhanced results. The limited demographic data gathered for this study does not allow for analysis related to household income or students with disabilities, categories which are extremely important to the state’s standardized testing.

However, most students will not report low income (free/reduced lunch status) or participation in the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) program. For instance, including students who qualified for the ESE Program may have added valuable data relating to the pressure Black males face when dealing with a learning disability too. Due to requirements for anonymity and randomness, the researcher could not determine/report that information; doing so would jeopardize anonymity and possibly reveal sensitive information about students who decided to participate.

Creswell (2003) asserts quantitative researchers employ varying strategies of inquiry, philosophical assumptions, methods, and practices. He characterizes the quantitative researcher as one who uses surveys or experiments, pre-determined approaches, numeric and statistical data, and tests hypotheses and theories to verify their accuracy. Such studies may be characterized as unbiased. However, the researcher may be subjective to internal beliefs held about the study that impact its value and overall approaches used to collect data and determine findings.

The researcher and participants are all culturally relevant, self-identifying their race as African-American. Although cultural similarities may exist, there is a discrepancy in gender which may inhibit the researcher from fully relating to the experiences of the male participants. In addition, both the age and level of education achieved by the researcher presents a large gap between her and the participants. As each generation further develops their language, certain terms or slang used by the young participants during the pilot study interviews and as responses to open-ended survey questions may need to be clarified as to not be misinterpreted. Making presumptions about terms used

by the participant could change the meaning of particular responses; therefore, the age differential could skew data.

Preconceived ideas about how participants should respond or what results should come from data collection may hinder the interview process used as the pilot and basis for survey questions. If the researcher's own biases are reflected in the interview and summarization of data, then it "it may allow her to overlook some relevant occurrences, to the detriment of internal validity" (Tuckman, 1999, p. 7). Determinations of causal relationships or internal validity may also be negatively affected by a maturation threat. Due to varying ages (11-19) of student participants, the older students' responses may have greater perceptiveness simply because they have developed a keener awareness over time. Thereby, a variation in perception of African-American males in sixth grade may differ significantly from those who are seniors in high school.

Table 3-1. Likert scales used in survey instrument

Category	Example of research question	Range of responses
Teachers	Black males drop out of school because teachers are unfair.	Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree
School/ Curriculum	Black males drop out of school because they are failing classes.	Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree
Family	Black males drop out of school because their parents/guardians need them to work to help support their family.	Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree
Personal experience	Black males drop out of school because of drugs.	Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree

Source: Student Voice Survey: Student Perceptions About Dropping Out of School, 2011

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

The Voice of Our Black Boys

Due to cultural identity, it may be presumed that student participants are more likely to communicate with other African-American students as compared to their White peers. Therefore, they may have keener perceptions about schoolmates who have had unfortunate ties with poor academic achievement. Thus, the perceptions of the African-American male students surveyed are very important to the study of underachievement and high school dropouts. Yet, when Black boys were interviewed as a pilot for the survey design and asked to describe a time when someone requested them to share their thoughts regarding academic success for African-American students, none could really come up with a significant instance.

One student said the only time he recalled African-American achievements being discussed was in class during Black History Month; otherwise, there never was a time in classrooms when someone requested his opinion about Black students' success in school. The first opportunity those participants had to share their perceptions regarding African-American males and academic achievement was during their interviews. Nonetheless, trends from the students' interview responses provided the researcher with enough evidence to pursue further investigation of student perceptions about Black males dropping out of school before earning a diploma.

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

Descriptions of the demographic variables used in the Student Voice Survey (Appendix H) are outlined to provide a more precise view of the sample population. The total sample included 261 students, ages 11-19, enrolled in grades 6-12. Specific

characteristics were revealed when survey results were reviewed, as indicated below, and the frequency of responses shared per demographic variable are shared in Tables 4-1 through 4-7.

Age of Student: The mean age of students who participated in the study was 13-14 years old, with approximately 38% (n=98) being represented by that age range. None of the 6th-12th grade student participants were more than nineteen years old and the youngest participants were 11 years of age although students in middle and high school can include students 10-22 years old.

Grade Level: Combined 7th and 8th grade students comprised 47% (n=123) of the total participants, nearly half of the sample size. Other students who participated included 24 sixth graders, 23 ninth graders, 45 tenth graders, 30 eleventh graders, and 16 twelfth graders. Of those surveyed, 44% (n=114) were enrolled in a public high school and 56% (n=147) attended middle school.

GPA: The average self-reported unweighted grade point average (GPA) was 2.19 on a 4.0 scale. The 2.19 (“C”) average determined by students’ responses is only slightly above the minimum 2.0 GPA required for students to graduate from high school. Thirty-six percent (n=95) reported maintaining a GPA between 2.00-2.99; less than 10% (n=24) were below minimum standards for graduation with grade point averages between 1.00-1.99; however, 38% (n=100) of the sample indicated having grades within the 3.00-4.00+ range. The minimum GPA necessary for students to participate in sports and other extracurricular activities is 2.00, while some academic clubs may require a higher standard GPA for membership. Participants with grade point averages below 2.00 are deemed at high risk (9%; n=24) and students with a GPA falling between 2.00-

2.49 is at moderate risk for non-completion (21%; n=54) of high school, indicating one-third of the participants exemplify academic concern.

Head of Household: Students were asked who they lived with at home. One student failed to complete the survey question, but 38.7% (n=101) of the remaining students declared living with both their mother and father in the same household. However, no indicators exist to reflect whether their parents were married or if the definition of “mother and father” included a step-parent. A larger percentage of students, 39.5% (n=103), expressed living in the same home with their “single mom” or with “mother and her significant other (boyfriend or girlfriend)”. In comparison, only 5.4% (n=14) of the students indicated living at home with their “single dad” or “father and his significant other”. The remaining 16% (n=42) of the sample population reported living with a grandparent, another relative, or some other person. No participants marked “foster parent” as their head of household

Highest Level of Education Completed by Mom: All but two students shared information regarding their mothers’ education level. 31% (n=81) of students’ mothers earned a college degree; 48 “graduated from a university (BA or higher)” and 33 “graduated from community college (AA)”, whereas 14.7% of mothers “completed some college, but did not finish” requirements to earn their degree, compared to 8.8% of dads. Again, more moms “graduated high school” and earned a diploma than dads (27% vs. 24.2%). Participants indicate mothers as having greater success in school due to lower rates of dropping out than fathers: 6.9% (n=18) vs. 11.1% (n=29). Nearly one-fifth (20.1%; n=52) were unsure what level of education their mother attained

Highest Level of Educated Completed by Dad: One student failed to indicate a response related to their father's education. Fathers who earned the same degrees as mothers (AA, BA, or higher) only comprised 23.5 % (n = 61) of the sample size with 15.8% (n=41) earning a "BA or higher" and 7.7% (n=20) attaining an "AA" degree. Fathers who "completed some college, but did not finish" requirements to earn their degree equaled 8.8%. Again, a lesser number of dads "graduated high school" and earned a diploma than moms (27% vs. 24.2%). More than one-third of the participants (32.3%; n=84) had no idea what level of education their fathers completed

Extracurricular: Most students shared their involvement in extracurricular activities, two students skipped the question. A little more than one-tenth of the students reported no involvement in extracurricular activities while nearly one-third indicated some involvement in a school club, service learning organization/volunteerism, student government association, and/or band. Most students were involved in some type of sport outside of the academic school day (85.1%; n=222); 61% play on the basketball team and 56% reported membership on the football team, while 106 boys played both football and basketball. Twenty-six students selected "other" as a response to involvement in extracurricular activities and were prompted to list what activities they were involved in. Of those, ten indicated involvement with at least one of the following sports: co-ed cheerleading, archery, fencing, lacrosse, tae kwon do, kickboxing, ping pong, skateboarding, and kickball. Non-athletic activities included a culinary program, Talent Search, Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA), National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE), Boy Scouts, Pre-Collegiate, acting/drama, cleaning job, playing guitar or games, technology,

reading, completing activities with brother, serving as a disc jockey (DJ), and helping people on farms. The data does not reveal how involved parents are with their child's extracurricular activities or whether parents who experienced academic success were also involved in sports or some other activity during their middle/high school years. Demographic descriptions help us recognize trends among groups of students participating in the study as related to the variables (Tables 4-9 through 4-15). The sample population is young, with most students attending middle school as seventh and eighth graders, at the start of their teenage years, near the start of adolescence. One hundred students reported having grades that meet honor roll criteria (above 3.0), although the presence of positive academic achievement is reported, we must consider whether self-reported grade point averages are accurate and valid. Also, GPA ranges are not particularly beneficial (e.g., 95 students reported grade point average between 2.00 - 2.99, but we cannot tell how many of those students were at the 2.00 mark, at-risk of failure, or at 2.99, needing one-hundredth of a point to make the honor roll or if the discrepancy between those numeric values would make a difference in student perceptions. The participants in this study tend to live with their mothers and at least one-third of the boys are exposed to mothers who have post-secondary degrees compared to their fathers whom they reported as being somewhat absent from the home and not serving as a role model for attaining academic success by graduating from high school.

The sample population is further described by one-fifth of the parents being characterized as dropouts. Of those, some may be in the same household, but if each parent who dropped out of school represents a different household and parents serve

as primary role models to their children, a much needed concern arises. Many youth mimic their parent's behavior. Therefore, we could expect nearly the same number (approximately 18%) of student participants to drop out of school if they mirror poor academic outcomes of parents. In contrast, participants who live in households where parents have evidenced high levels of success, regarding academic achievement by earning advanced degrees, may lend themselves to heightened potential for similar academic requirements.

A significant number of students marked "I don't know" when asked the highest level of education their mother or father completed. More than one-third of the participants (32.3%; n=84) had no idea what level of education their fathers completed and nearly one-fifth (20.1%; n=52) were unsure what level of education their mother attained. These results indicate a lack of awareness by students about their parents' education and may support other survey results related to how participants perceived limited household discussions about education as a strong factor for dropping out of school.

Examining Relationships of Factors Related to Drop Out

A correlation analysis was run to determine the relationships between variables. Based upon the sample size (n=261) and the number of items provided on the survey (n=42). Pearson Correlation Coefficients were used to explain relationships. Several variables in the study were determined to be correlated to one another with a strong degree of significance. The degree of strength by which factors are related and the level of significance of the relationships for each of the demographic variables and Likert scaled items are described in a correlation table (Object 4-1).

Pearson's correlation coefficient values indicate the strength of the linear relationship between age and grade level. The data set shows as age increases, grade level tends to increase too ($r = .924$, $p < 0.01$). The data suggests one could predict a student's grade level from their age, at least as the constructs are measured here. With a great degree of confidence (99.3%), it can be determined that a negative relationship will continually exist between age and students' perceptions about teachers' level of encouragement impacting Black boys' who drop out of school. As students get older and promoted to higher grade levels, the value designated for "teachers do not encourage students to work hard" moves in the direction of agreement with the statement; and the converse is true. One-third of the students surveyed felt teachers "[not encouraging] students to work hard" was a factor for dropping out. Older students account for those who believe the teacher's behavior impacts dropouts. Despite the relationship that exists between teachers' behavior and students' ages, we must keep in mind that correlations do not prove cause and effect relationships.

The strongest relationships between factors on the survey are described by correlation coefficients yielding the greatest confidence (at the .01 significance level) and strongest direction (closest to $r = 1$). The most significant bivariate relationships have coefficients equal to or greater than $r = .500$, however, all factors characterized by the first 40 questions are reported in Object 4-1. They include every demographic variable and each of the factors reported on the 5-point Likert scale. However, the strongest relationships are factors that tend to more tightly group together, moving in the same direction, reflecting greater consensus of opinions from the students when answering survey questions and possibly suggesting strong inter-rater reliability.

Findings from the survey results indicate a perfect positive relationship exists between two variables, “Black males drop out of school because teachers do not care about them” and “Black males drop out of school because teachers are unfair” ($r = .638$, $p = .000$). Therefore, 100% of the time, responses about teachers not caring will move in the same direction as responses about teachers being unfair. African-American males, who by in large disagree with the notion that uncaring teachers are related to dropping out of school, will also oppose the idea that dropping out is paired with unfair teachers. Similarly, a positive linear relationship ($r = .682$, $p = .000$) exists between survey items, “Black males drop out of school because they do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about problems related to school” and “Black males drop out of school because they do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about personal problems”. Nearly 60% of the African-American male students believe Black boys dropping out of school is related to their lack of comfort with talking to teachers about their problems, on both components (school related and personal problems). The results show Black male youth notice student-teacher relationships and have opinions about their impact on education.

The relationship between perceptions regarding “Black males drop out of school because of drugs” and “Black males drop out of school because they are part of a gang” was rendered significant by Pearson’s r coefficient value of .69 ($p = .000$). Typically, gangs and drugs are thought to go hand and hand. Most portrayals of drugs on television are tied to drugs and students in this study seem to think within that same frame of reference. Sixty percent of the students marked either “agree” or “strongly agree” as it related to each component. Students perceive both gangs and drugs to be

a factor of drop out for Black males, moving in tandem together. Interestingly, an additional 10% of the sample population (70% of total sample) considers a factor for students dropping out of school is the lack of effort given by the Black male student. Also, the lack of effort is significantly correlated to drugs ($r = .622$, $p = .000$) and not knowing why school is important ($r = .601$, $p = .000$).

Not knowing why school is important is related to other factors besides lack of effort. African-American middle and high school students tended to have a pattern of thoughts associated with the factor, “Black males drop out of school because they do not know why school is important”. They perceived several other variables in a similar way: drugs, getting a young lady pregnant/becoming a father, experiencing family tragedy, involvement with a gang, laziness, and not being involved in extracurricular activities. Each factor has a statistically significant relationship with not realizing the importance of school (each with $r \geq .500$).

The Viewpoint of Black Boys on Student-Teacher Relationships

An analysis of correlation coefficients valued at more than .399 is represented by student-teacher relationships. The correlations are reported in regards to student relationships with teachers, school curriculum’s impact on dropping out, how family impacts decisions about school dropout, and how personal experiences of Black male students relate to academic decisions.

The survey instrument included several statements related to relationships with teachers: Black males drop out of school because (1) “teachers do not encourage them to work hard”, (2) “teachers do not care about them”, (3) “they do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about problems related to school”, (4) “they are uncomfortable talking to teachers about personal problems”, and (5) “teachers are unfair”. The

researcher hypothesized that participants in the study would view poor relationships with students as a major factor for dropping out of school.

Of the five statements posed about teachers, over 50% of the respondents marked “agree” or “strongly agree” for “Black males drop out of school because they do NOT feel comfortable talking to teachers about problems related to school” (n=133) and “Black males drop out of school because they are uncomfortable talking to teachers about their personal problems” (n=131). Only 13% (n=36) perceive students drop out of school because teachers do not care about students. About one-third (n=77) of the students either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the notion that teachers’ failure to encourage Black males led to decisions to drop out of school. The remaining variable asked students to rank their level of agreement with the belief that Black males drop out of school because teachers are unfair; 26% (n = 69) perceive the statement to be accurate.

Survey items about perceived negative behaviors by teachers, such as being unfair or failing to care about students, are related to other teacher variables. The variable related to unfair teachers maintains a strong linear relationship with teachers do not encourage students to work hard; the same variable also held a positive relationship with students who were uninterested in school and class sizes that were too large. Teachers perceived as uncaring maintain relationships with teachers who “do not encourage students to work hard”. This implies that you can predict “teachers who do not encourage students to work hard” from the construct of “teachers who do not care about [students]”. Thereby, given a high number of teachers who are perceived by students as uncaring, there is a greater chance that students will also feel as though

they are not being encouraged by teachers to work hard in school. Similarly, Black male students (or other Black male students in their environment) who perceive that teachers will not encourage students to work hard will have a greater chance of also perceiving students as feeling uncomfortable with talking to teachers about school related or personal problems, thinking teachers are unfair, and believing class sizes are too large.

Although lack of encouragement from teachers was perceived as a factor of dropping out of school, participants did not perceive unfair or uncaring teachers as strong reasons for African-American male students dropping out of school. When asked if teachers not caring is a factor for quitting school, 51% of the student participants marked “disagree” or “strongly disagree” while a lesser 36% of the students shared some level of disagreement with the idea that decisions to leave school are based upon teachers being unfair. Moreover, at least fifty students responding to each of the two statements marked “neither agree nor disagree” for those items.

A little more than 50% (n=133) of participants perceive one reason African-American male students drop out of school is because they are not comfortable talking to teachers about school related problems. Likewise, 50% (n=131) of the same group of students perceive Black males drop out of school because they are “not comfortable talking to teachers about personal problems”. The data indicates relationships between Black male students and their teachers are important, as perceived by the sample population. The findings echo conclusions by Davis & Jordan (1994), student performance was lessened when teachers did not believe they could effect change through their relationships. Important in relation to the age of students sampled for this

study, Decker (2007) found parent-student relationships became less strong as students approached secondary school. Here, students indicated the perceived importance of secondary school relationships with teachers. Professional development regarding student-teacher relationships and guiding teachers through focused discussions about their perceptions of cultural-identity and how to relate to African-American male students could prove helpful (Johnson, 2002).

How Black Males View School Curriculum in Relation to Dropping Out

Ladson-Billings (2009) identifies cultural relevant teaching as a practice that requires teachers to understand minority children, as well as the school's culture; as a result, students understand the curriculum in relation to self and become empowered to use their intellect while identifying with their culture and pursuing academic excellence. Additionally, Friere (2000) asserts because minority viewpoints are often left out of school curriculum, students feel disadvantaged at attaining academic success. Therefore, the researcher hypothesized African-American male students would perceive school curriculum is positively correlated with reasons for Black boys to drop out of school. An assumption was made by the researcher that African-American male students would view the limited educational resources related to their culture as a reason to minimize interest in school. However, restricted culturally relevant materials were only perceived as problematic when families already were non-supportive of academic success.

Using Pearson's correlation, the strength of the relationship between perceptions about "classes that were not relevant to their culture" and dropping out because of personal experience variables was weaker than evidenced by other categorical variables. However, the relevance of culture does have a significant relationship with

the perception that Black Boys who drop out of school are impacted by school “work [that] is too hard” ($r = .337$, $p = .000$). The relationship between the constructs delivers a coefficient of determination (R^2) value of .113569; 11% of the variability in perceptions about cultural relevance can be explained by students viewing school work as too hard. Also, relationships between teachers and cultural relevance stand out, but it merely indicates that as teachers fail to encourage students; behave unfairly; do not care about students; or students feel as though they cannot talk to the teacher, then the likelihood of students having issues with culturally irrelevant material also increases (Object 4-1). Students simply did not share a strong belief that curriculum materials or instruction that was not culturally relevant to their ethnic background would be relevant for dropping out of school.

The data did reflect that students who perceived not having culturally relevant materials in school as a factor for dropping out of school also perceived teachers not encouraging students to work hard, treat students unfairly, don't care about students, or fail to provide comfortable environments for students to share concerns with them as factors for dropping out of school. During the interviews, students talked about never having opportunities to discuss their opinions about school curriculum and generally not discussing ties to their history except during Black History Month. Increasing the number of lessons taught that provide cultural relevance to students of color could still invoke greater interest in class.

Surprisingly, there were few students who perceived behavioral disruptions in class were related to boys' decisions to drop out of school. Classroom management is a major concern for educators. It is possible that teachers are managing classes well,

less disruptions occur, or students simply don't see the disruptions as a strong reason to drop out of school.

Still, a few meaningful relationships in the area of curriculum are evidenced. Connections between the difficulty of class work and lack of tutorial assistance are reported as supportive factors in making decisions to drop out of school. Similarly, significance exists between classes being too hard and students failing class ($r = .397$, $p = .000$). Furthermore, the perception that Black males drop out of school because classes are uninteresting is strongly tied to the idea that Black males choose to drop out of school because "teachers are unfair" ($r = .506$, $p = .000$) and "classes are too large" ($r = .565$, $p = .000$). Perceptions about culturally relevant teaching practices have a direct relationship with work being too hard which in turn is related to lack of tutoring and failing classes, therefore, future research related to cultural relevance is worth exploring.

The participants in the study did not conclusively show the need for culturally relevant materials to be used during instruction as much as they desired to have culturally friendly relationships with teachers. However, the results suggest that teachers infuse non-disruptive cultural behaviors of African-American students into their instructional practices in an effort to build relationships that encourage students to take part in curricular activities (Bradley, 2007). Student responses reflected a desire for greater encouragement from teachers in relation to working hard in classes. It can be presumed that teachers with great expectations will push students to reach them as found by Davis and Jordan (1994). Lack of motivation and encouragement from teachers as described the African-American male student participants could be viewed as a form of continual oppression (Friere, 2000).

How the Black Family is Related to Boys Dropping Out of School

Student responses indicate strong correlations between family connections and overall academic performance for African-American students. Results indicate a relationship between negative school behaviors and families who do not value education or talk about the importance of finishing school. For instance, participants who perceive dropping out of school is a result of families not discussing the importance of school also think Black males drop out because “classes are not interesting”, “classes are too hard”, “[they] do not get tutoring/extra help with school work”, “[they] miss too many days from school”, “[their] friends are not interested in school”, “[they] do not believe school will help them get a job” and “[they’re] not motivated to finish school” (Object 4-1). Overall, Pearson’s correlation coefficient ($r = .521$, $p = .000$) indicates a statistically significant relationship between the survey item “Black males drop out of school because education is not important to their family” and “Black males drop out of school because their family does not talk about the importance for finishing school. Twenty-seven percent of the variability in the significance of family discussions can be attributed to how valuable families view education to be, and vice versa. As more students agree about how significant finishing school is to the family, so does the perceived overall importance of education to family members.

The more “family does NOT talk about the importance of finishing school”, the more likely it is that “education is not important to the family” and that students believe “school does not help them get a job”. Families that do not talk about school or the value of education are perceived similarly by Black males in this study. Student responses suggest the world of work may have greater value than attending school.

Participant responses did not yield strong links between future job attainment and current school attendance.

The level of education attained by parents provides descriptive data. The data illustrates participants whose parents earned higher degrees have greater belief in African-American male students' positive thoughts about school. Also, discoveries made during the interviews suggest the level of education attained by parents is perceived as a significant motivator for Black males to earn a diploma. Similarly, this study indicates participants with higher grade point averages typically were from households where parents attained higher levels of education. Findings reflect that the only significant relationship existing between the highest level of education attained by parents is "parents/guardians need [students] to work to help support the family" (Object 4-1). As the education level of participants' parents rises, so does the perception that Black males drop out because parents need them to work in order to help support the family.

Results reflect the need for positive encouragement toward students in the form for family discussions about school and family members verbalizing the importance school to Black male students. There are evident relational connections between parental influence variables and others shared in the survey instrument. When students think "Black males drop out of school because their family does not talk about the importance of finishing school", they are as likely to have conversations about education not being important to their family ($r = .521$), where responses continue to move in the same direction; not believing school will help them attain a good job ($r = .455$); not being motivated to finish school ($r = .382$); parents not contacting the school ($r = .331$); having

friends who are not interested in school ($r = .329$); connection with drugs ($r = .308$); classes being too hard ($r = .307$); not receiving extra tutorial/help with school work ($r = .230$); and need to work to help support family ($r = .226$). Each was measured at the .01 level of significance and yielded p-values of .000, using Pearson's correlation measures.

The researcher hypothesized family situations would determine decisions to drop out of school. Data from this study demonstrates relationships between family's educational values and student academic behavior. Parent-student relationships appear to have strong bonds with African-American male students' perceptions about why Black boys drop out of school. Although the majority of students in the study were involved in extracurricular activities, no parental variables exemplified a linear relationship with students' involvement in those activities. Furthermore, discussions about the importance of finishing school exhibited no significant linear relationships with any of the demographic variables (Object 4-1).

Although many participants lived in two-parent households, evidence of traditional married biological parent serving as the head of household was not evident. Furthermore, most of the Black boys who lived in single parent households were living with someone other than their fathers. The demographics regarding head of household parallel research findings that the structure of African-American family households has changed to reflect absent parents (Jewell, 2003; Seccombe, 2000; and Vereen, 2007). No distinctions about the role of finances can be used to support findings because household income was not included among the demographic variables.

Students clearly identified that, in their opinion, Black boys dropping out of school is somehow related to the lack of discussions that take place with families and lack of concern families appear to have about education. Rothstein (2004) asserts minimal familial discussions take place in Black households and such behaviors are typical because of social class distinctions. However, if the leaders of African-American families have learned to remain silent in regards to student performance and fail to encourage their children talk about academic achievement then according to results from this study, Black students are likely to remain disadvantaged in relation to dropping out of school (Bankston & Caldas, 1998; Friere, 2000; Noguera, 2008; and Rothstein, 2004

Personal Experiences of Black Males in Terms of Decisions to Drop Out

Personal experience variables include, beliefs about school helping African-American males obtain a job, being motivated to finish school, identity as a minority, relationship with drugs, victimization of bully behavior, expectation of becoming a father, involvement with family tragedy, membership in a gang, lack of academic effort, exhibiting laziness, failure to be involved in extracurricular activities, and lack of understanding about the importance of school. The assertion made by the researcher was African-American male students would perceive Black boys' personal experiences as a reason for dropping out of school.

Students who perceived drugs as a factor for quitting school also perceived gang affiliation as a factor. An analysis of results using Pearson's correlation indicates student perceptions about "gang membership" leading to decisions to drop out of school are significantly connected with lack of motivation to finish school, having friends who are not interested in school, failing classes, not showing best effort, laziness, relation to

bully behavior, family tragedy, becoming a teenage father, and not understanding why school is important. Gang affiliation is perceived by participants to negatively impact decisions to stay in school. However, being part of a gang had no correlations with teacher variables (Object 4-1).

Participant responses denote when African-American males' personal experience is listed as an independent variable, school success is limited if their perceptions about school are also limited. For instance, if Black boys do not know why school is important then they are less motivated to finish school. However, the converse is true; less motivated African-American male students have diminished thoughts about why school is important. A positive correlation exists between school achievement and personal experiences. In fact, the most significant relationships exist between variables that fall under the category of personal experiences in the survey instrument (Object 4-1). However, they either have no relationship or very limited significance with demographic variables and those related to teachers.

Noguera (2003) summarizes the results regarding the perceptions held about relationships between personal experiences and Black boys dropping out of school; he indicated there should be no element of surprise regarding poor performance in education by African-American males in lieu of the hardships they must with the larger society. If the perceptions of students participating in this study persist in larger populations of African-American males concerning the links between personal experiences with drugs, gangs, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, etc., and dropping out of school, the "quality of life as an adult" has greater ramifications (Cooper & Jordan, 2003). The pattern of negative behavior represents a cyclical pattern wherein

evidence of negative personal behaviors appears to lead to dropout and dropout may lead to participation in negative behaviors. Although causal relationships cannot be determined here, it is suggested that the relationship between factors is strong enough to warrant caution with how students become involved in personal experiences and how they identify themselves through their experiences (Cross, 1971, Harper, 2007; Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, 2006; and Sue & Sue, 1990)

Regression Analysis

Linear regression analysis yielded statistics that exemplified the probability that particular outcomes were not by chance. The output data are evidenced in Tables 4-11a, b, c, and d. The reliability of y-intercepts and coefficients revealed what patterns emerged in the data. P-values $\leq .05$ had greater probability that output from the various factors was not obtained by chance. Although correlations exist between variables, functions of linear regression determine the strength of individual variables.

A linear relationship exists between perceptions held about students failing classes and perceptions of (a) class being too difficult, (b) students feeling uncomfortable talking to teachers about school related problems, and (c) students not feeling comfortable talking to teachers about personal problems. An examination of the relationships was conducted using a linear regression model. The model regarding participants' perceptions about failing classes can be predicted by the other three variables with statistical significance: "classes are too hard" ($p = .000$); "not comfortable talking to teachers about school related problems" ($p = .001$); and "uncomfortable talking to teachers about personal problems" ($p = .000$). The regression analysis yielded $R^2 = .362$, the outcome may be continually predicted by the independent variables with 36% probability of accuracy (Table 4-11a). The standard error calculated

for the independent variables falls between .057-.068, indicating a limited spread of variation between the variables and that the sample may be determined as a representative of the overall population.

Further descriptions about three dependent variables, (1) “students are not motivated to finish school”, (2) “students do not put forth their best effort, and (3) “students do not know why school is important”, are shared due to their strong relationship with independent variables (Table 4-11b-d). First, “students are not motivated to finish school” is best predicted by perceptions that Black males drop out of school because their “family does not talk about the importance of finishing school” ($p = .000$) and “students do not get tutoring/extra help with school work” ($p = .021$). It is safe to predict perceptions about unmotivated students are attributed to perceptions about families who do not discuss the importance of graduation and getting assistance with school work. Secondly, “students who do not put forth their best effort” can be significantly determined by two independent variables at the .01 level of significance; the student’s “family does not talk about the importance of finishing school” and “students are not motivated to finish school”. Third, perceptions about student’s families who “do not talk about the importance of finishing school” are predictors for “students who do not know why school is important” ($p = .028$).

The most frequent independent variable is “student’s family does not talk about the importance of school”, as it is a predictor of student’s motivation to graduate, understanding why school is important, and encouraging students to put forth their best effort. Although the independent variables have a positive linear relationship with the predicted variables, they are weak in the proportion to which the outcomes may be

predicted again (only 25% for motivation, 14% for effort, and 8% for understanding why school is important; Tables 4-11 b, c, and d).

Correlations between variables, as well as linear regression models provide similar results regarding the importance of family values on education being linked to student performance. Participants perceive family as a strong variable regarding decisions for showing effort in school. Similarly, relationships are key factors in classrooms between students and their teachers. Relationships with adults appear to have a strong impact upon student behavior in the educational setting. The results gathered in the study do not veer far from data collected during interviews with students. Interview responses and quantitative data from the surveys mimic one another as it relates to African-American male students' perceptions about why Black boys drop out of school.

Open-Ended Survey Questions Summarized

Participants were asked, "What makes Black male students want to stay in school? Ninety percent (n=234) of the students shared a response. One student clearly summarized many of the responses by writing "sports, money, and girls". Others reported involvement in sports, goal of playing college/professional athletics, earning money by getting good jobs and equipping themselves to take care of family, responsibility as a teen father and/or an interest in girls, as typical reasons for staying in school. However, other responses included the desire to achieve goals, success, and fulfill dreams. Dreams seem to include earning a diploma, going to college, making parents proud and "makings something of themselves". Much like responses shared during student interviews, family members, teachers, friends and girls, were perceived as significant factors for remaining in school.

Students were asked the converse, as well; “Why do YOU think Black male students drop out of school?” Eighty-nine percent (n=233) of the total students surveyed chose to share additional responses. Students perceived reasons were associated with self-worth and lack of concern about self or education, being unmotivated or looking for an easier route to attain money. Drugs, gangs, incarceration, and lack of motivation were included as primary factors. Additionally, they listed difficulty in class, lack of interest in school, hanging out with the wrong crowd, trying to be cool with peers, and not having parents or teachers encourage them, as reasons to leave school.

Conclusion

Results gathered from the survey reiterate thoughts shared by adult perspectives regarding the dropout phenomena. That shows that student perspectives are similar to adults and Black males are capable of adding support to the body of literature that exists. Because the sample population was small, additional studies are needed to generalize findings from the perspective of Black males. Researchers have the ability to empower Black boys by asking to hear their voice and Black boys, in return, have the authority to grant us understand about factors related to dropping of school. Although in some areas, the survey limited the voice of the students, redevelopment of the instrument may provide greater awareness about the dropout epidemic and efficacy of interventions programs.

Table 4-1. Frequency of responses for age of participants (n=261)

Age	Frequency	Percent
10	0	0.0%
11	5	1.9%
12	40	15.3%
13	58	22.2%
14	40	15.3%
15	37	14.2%
16	31	11.9%
17	36	13.8%
18	13	5.0%
19	1	0.4%
20	0	0.0%
21	0	0.0%
22	0	0.0%

Table 4-2. Frequency of responses for grade level of participants (n=261)

Grade level	Frequency	Percent
6th grade	24	9.2%
7th grade	60	23.0%
8th grade	63	24.1%
9th grade	23	8.8%
10th grade	45	17.2%
11th grade	30	11.5%
12th grade	16	6.1%

Table 4-3. Frequency of responses for self-reported unweighted grade point average of participants (n=261)

GPA	Frequency	Percent
4.0 and above (A)	101	5.7%
3.50 -- 3.99 (B+)	31	10.0%
3.00 – 3.49 (B)	72	22.6%
2.50 – 2.99 (C+)	8	15.7%
2.00 – 2.49 (C)	6	20.7%
1.50 – 1.99 (D+)	21	6.9%
1.00 – 1.49 (D)	15	2.3 %
Below 1.00 (F)	0	0.0%
I don't know	6	16.1%

Table 4-4. Frequency of responses for participants' head of household (n=260)

Student lives with...	Frequency	Percent
Mother and father	101	38.8%
Mother and her significant other	31	11.9%
Single mom	72	27.7%
Single dad	8	3.1%
Father and significant other	6	2.3%
Grandparent(s)	21	8.1%
Other relative	15	5.8%
Foster parent(s)	0	0.0%
Other	6	2.3%

Table 4-5. Frequency of responses for highest level of education completed by participants' mothers (n=259)

Education level attained	Frequency	Percent
BA or higher	48	18.5%
AA	33	12.7%
Some college	38	14.7%
High school	70	27.0%
Dropped out of high school	18	6.9%
I don't know	52	20.1%

Table 4-6. Frequency of responses for highest level of education completed by participants' fathers (n=260)

Education level attained	Frequency	Percent
BA or higher	41	15.8%
AA	20	7.7%
Some college	23	8.8%
High school	63	24.2%
Dropped out of high school	29	11.2%
I don't know	84	32.3%

Table 4-7. Frequency of responses for involvement in extracurricular activities (n=259)

Extracurricular activity	Frequency	Percent
None	33	12.7
Band	23	8.9
Basketball	37	14.3
Baseball	144	55.6
Football	158	61.0
Golf	7	2.7
School Club	30	11.6
Soccer	22	8.5
Service Learning/Volunteer	8	3.1
Student Government	9	3.5
Swimming	30	11.6
Tennis	6	2.3
Track and Field	64	24.7
Volleyball	9	3.5
Wrestling	18	6.9
Weightlifting	62	23.9
Other	26	10.0

Table 4-8. Frequency of responses for descriptive statistics of demographic variables (n=261)

	Age	Grade level	Grade point average	Who student lives with at home	Mom's highest level of education	Dad's highest level of education	Involved in extra-curricular activities
Mean	5.43	3.61	4.620	2.78	3.49	4.03	1.88
Standard deviation	1.895	1.741	2.343	2.065	1.744	1.811	0.439
Minimum	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Maximum	10	7	9	9	6	6	3

Table 4-9. Most strongly correlated variables significant to age demographic

Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Variable
.924	.000	Grade level
-.288	.000	Classes are not interesting
-.261	.000	Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about school related problems
-.256	.000	Teachers do not care about them
-.231	.000	Classes are too large
-.216	.000	Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about personal problems
.174	.000	Bullying
.173	.005	Who student lives with at home
-.166	.007	Teachers do not encourage students to work hard
.166	.007	They got a young lady pregnant/will become a father

Table 4-10. Most strongly correlated variables significant to grade level demographic

Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Variable
.924	.000	Age
-.246	.000	Classes are too large
-.244	.000	Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about personal problems
-.242	.000	Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about school related problems
-.202	.001	Students are failing classes
-.185	.003	Teachers do not care about them
-.154	.012	Teachers do not encourage students to work hard
.150	.015	Students are being bullied
.150	.016	They got a young lady pregnant/will become a father
.122	.048	Students do not get tutoring assistance (extra help) with school work

Table 4-11. Most strongly correlated variables significant to grade point average demographic

Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Variable
.297	.000	Highest level of education completed by mother
.295	.000	Highest level of education completed by father
.284	.000	Who student lives with at home
.187	.002	They got a young lady pregnant/will become a father
.183	.003	Students do not put forth their best effort
.149	.016	How important school is to student
.146	.018	Students don't know why school is important
-.134	.031	Classes are not interesting

Table 4-12. Most strongly correlated variables significant to “I live with” demographic

Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Variable
.284	.000	Grade Point Average (GPA)
.187	.002	How important school is to student
.173	.005	Age
.152	.014	Parents need to student to work to help support the family
.149	.016	Grade level
.148	.017	Highest level of education completed by mother
.127	.040	Students don't know why school is important

Table 4-13. Most strongly correlated variables significant with highest level of education completed by student's mother demographic

Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Variable
.471	.000	Highest level of education completed by father
.297	.000	Grade Point Average (GPA)
-.238	.000	Parents need to student to work to help support the family
.159	.010	Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about personal problems
-.126	.042	Involved in extracurricular activities

Table 4-14. Most strongly correlated variables significant with highest level of education completed by student's father demographic

Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Variable
.471	.000	Highest level of education completed by mother
.295	.000	Grade Point Average (GPA)
.200	.001	Parents need to student to work to help support the family
-.170	.006	Involved in extracurricular activities
.159	.010	Classes not relevant to culture

Table 4-15. Most strongly correlated variables significant with involved in extracurricular activities demographic

Correlation coefficient	Significance level	Variable
-.238	.000	Highest level of education completed by mother
-.170	.006	Highest level of education completed by father

Table 4-16. Top ten correlated variables with most significant relationships (p = .000)

Correlation coefficient	Variable 1 (correlated with variable 2)	Variable 2 (correlated with variable 1)
.924	Age	Grade level
.690	Gang member	Drugs
.682	Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about school related problems	Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about personal problems
.638	Teachers are unfair	Teachers do not care about students
.622	Students do not put forth their best effort	Drugs
.602	Students do not know why school is important	Students do not put forth their best effort
.594	Students do not know why school is important	Students are not involved in extracurricular activities
.584	Teachers do not care	Teachers do not encourage students to work hard in school
.577	Students do not know why school is important	Students are lazy
.575	Teachers are unfair	Teachers do not encourage students to work hard

Table 4-17. Factors that can be used to predict the most significant relationships

Significance	Independent variable	Dependent variable
0.04167	Grade point average	Black males are uncomfortable talking to teachers about problems related to school
.534023	Family does NOT talk about the importance of finishing school	Education is not important to their family
.502339	Black males do NOT believe school will help them get a good job	Education is not important to their family

Correlation Analysis Matrix

[Object 4-1. Pearson correlation of variables \(.pdf 101kb\)](#)

Table 4-18. Proportion of variance in outcomes related to failing classes

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. error			
R Square = .362					
(Constant)	.086	.183		.471	.638
Classes are too hard	.321	.057	.288	5.592	.000
Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about school problems	.230	.068	.232	3.369	.001
Students do not feel comfortable talking to teachers about personal problems	.265	.067	.274	3.987	.000

Dependent Variable: Students are failing classes

Table 4-19. Proportion of variance in outcomes related to student motivation

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error			
R Square = .254					
(Constant)	-.009	.270		-.032	.974
Student's family does not talk about the importance of finishing school	.240	.065	.239	3.672	.000
Students do not get tutoring/extra help with school work	.163	.070	.140	2.323	.021

Dependent Variable: Students are not motivated to finish school

Table 4-20. Proportion of variance in outcomes related to level of effort

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
R Square = .143					
(Constant)	.961	.279		3.439	.001
Student's family does not talk about the importance of finishing school	.183	.070	.189	2.629	.009
Students are not motivated to finish school	.258	.065	.267	3.963	.000

Dependent Variable: Students do not put forth their best effort

Table 4-21. Proportion of variance in outcomes related to importance of school

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Coefficients Beta		
R Square = .296					
(Constant)	1.184	.353		3.352	.001
Student's family does not talk about the importance of finishing school	.174	.079	.161	2.210	.028

Dependent Variable: Students do not know why school is important

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Disparities exist between Black and White students that exemplify highly disproportionate numbers of African-American male students who drop out of school. The review of research indicates that Black males are disproportionately represented by high school dropout rates. Multiple intervention strategies have been put in place with attempts to prevent future dropout behavior (Dynarkski, et al., 2008; Myint et al., 2008; Schargel, 2007). Several factors are relevant due to the strength of their relationship with dropping out of school. Some of those factors have been shared in the results for this study, including family structure, peer influence, school curriculum, teacher identity and behavior, and student motivation/personal experience).

The Apex Model, developed by the researcher, will be used as the framework for further discussing the data presented in this study. Thus, findings will be outlined in terms of personal characteristics of African-American males and the *systems of experiences* for youth: (a) school experiences, (b) family experiences, and (c) personal experiences. The conclusion will focus on positively influencing the apex or final decision of Black boys in America regarding dropping out of school. For the purpose of this research, it must be noted that decisions can be made intentionally or unintentionally, thus doing nothing at all while having a reactive response to the inaction is still termed as a decision. Research-based strategies are connected to the *systems of experiences* as a way to determine best practices suggested for each environment.

Student Characteristics

The demographic variables, including those which relate to student engagement and academic performance are central to describing a student. School, family and

personal experiences are environmental contributors to the individual student. The way in which a student views dropping out of school can be subject to how those systems interrelate with known variables about self, such as age, grade level, grade point average, person students live with, and other characteristics used to describe him.

Students have a tendency to define themselves within the school culture by how well they achieve academically, level of participation in sports, and groups they participate in. Their level of academic and/or social engagement provides us with a brief representation of the person. Level of engagement, achievement, and self-development are discussed in social science literature and represent multiple facets of student identity (Balfanz, Herzog, & Maclver, 2007; Bennett, 2006; Cross, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 1997). However, central to this study is how the alterable factors, such as level of engagements, can be changed by the relationships within systems that surround the student. Hence, their decisions are at the constant mercy of surrounding environments and we should work to provide them with (1) the best systematic factors available or (2) teach them how to make difficult, yet positive decisions in lieu of poor systematic factors.

The students in this study are characterized by a summary of demographic variables. The sample size included 261 African-American students who were enrolled in secondary schools within the same school district, wherein most participating schools were those that were located outside city limits. Most participants were in middle school, maintained "C" average grades (2.00-.2.99 on a 4.00 unweighted scale) and were involved in extracurricular activities. Most of the students played football and/or basketball. Household demographic descriptions, indicating that many participants lived

with their mothers is consistent with research findings (Allen, 1995; Jewell, 2003; Jeynes, 2007; Vereen, 2007). Additionally, many of their mothers completed higher levels of education than fathers, on average. Many of the students did not know what level of education their fathers completed. Although the data provided some insight, findings did not reflect strong relationships between demographic variables and other factors in the study. However, the survey instrument failed to include questions related data that could have provided useful in understanding the dropout phenomena, according investigations by researchers interested in educational reform (Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012; O'Connor and Fernandez, 2006; Polite & Davis, 1999; Rothstein, 2004). Information related to household income, total number of persons living in the household including siblings, free-reduced lunch status, specific classes students have failed, if student have been retained, actual GPA versus range, placement in advanced or special education courses, and factors related to student's self-concept, could further illuminate relationships between demographic characteristics and other factors, to help provide clarity regarding students' perceptions.

School Experiences

Similar to the research executed by persons interested in the effect of school upon dropouts, findings from this study reaffirmed the notion that teachers impact academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Paige & Witty, 2010). Students perceived relationships with teachers to be an important predictor of decisions to drop out of school. These findings are paralleled to a study by Decker, et al. (2007), where students who exhibited poor behavior and were at-risk of being referred to a special education program by their teacher still desired positive student-teacher relationships. African-American males participating in this study perceived poor

relationships with teachers as a problem too. Findings indicate participants believe students who are uncomfortable talking to teachers about personal or school related problems are more likely to quit school. Additional findings revealed students perceive encouraging students to work hard in school is important. Consistent with perceptions of Black males in this study is research by Ladson-Billings (2009), where teachers exemplifying excellent teaching practices, include how to use instruction to encourage students to perform academically. Thus, findings from this study reveal that teachers appear to have great impact upon student effort, as evidenced by African-American male students' perceptions.

Teacher behaviors are important to students, a viewpoint that was echoed by the African-American male students who participated in this study. The view is considered further on a national scaled, thus identifying teacher preparation and readiness programs as one type of dropout prevention strategy (Schargel & Smink, 2001). However, it is not certain that the relationships students are looking for from teachers can be taught. Findings from the study do not overwhelmingly suggest that students perceive feelings of oppression from their system of school experiences as argued in educational literature by Freire (2000).

African-American male students in the study provided very limited support of culturally relevant materials being related to school dropout. However, culturally relevant emphasis is a hot topic in dropout prevention literature. Yet, it can refer to the building of relationships, as well as the inclusion of stories about African-Americans in coursework. As Ladson-Billings (2009) reminds us, the purpose of using culturally relevant materials is to help African-American students develop an ethnic personality

while choosing academic excellence. Therefore, understanding the ethnic backgrounds and 21st century behaviors of African-American male students may assist in strengthening student-teacher relationships. Thus far, misinterpreting behaviors of Black boys has disproportionately placed them in special education programs, a likely inhibitor of strong student-teacher relationships (Carla & Deluca, 2006; Decker, Donna & Christenson, 2007). This practice may pose a foundation for employing more African-American male teachers who might more easily identify with the culture of students in this group.

Student participants did not perceive that all of the factors within the school-centered *systems of experiences* were related to dropping out of school. However, a Black boy who drops out of school could be related to one significant variable while other factors have no direct impact upon that decision. Consistent with findings by Bogenschneider (1996), students noted that some factors were more closely associated with the dangerous behavior of dropping out of school. However, other factors did appear to impede the healthy development of the student. Within this operational system, it is likely that poor student-teacher relationships place Black boys at greater risk for dropping out of school; however other simultaneously functioning systems can compound the weight of his decision with negative factors or possibly alleviate the issue by introducing positive factors. The findings from this study encourage further exploration of the *systems of experiences* that are similar to the conceptual framework for studying student educational performance, developed by Rumberger and Larson (1998), in an attempt to help decrease Black males' participation in school dropout.

Family Experiences

Black students answering survey questions in this study, indicated the relationships they have with their family is as important as student-teacher relationships, if not more so. Families that do “not talk about the importance of finishing school” and those that demonstrated “education is not important to their family” were perceived by student participants to have the most significant relationship with dropping out. How participants perceived the level of interest families had in school-related activities/education was similar to arguments proposed by Rothstein (2004). Students felt strongly that if family members held limited views of education then a strong connection with school dropout behavior existed.

Although Comer (1998) suggested students use “personal control” instead of relying on parents to excel in school, Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky (2008) had findings similar to this study, suggesting students truly value family involvement and view it as an important form of support. However, this study did not provide questions about personal family interactions outside of the school setting. Detailed descriptions of types of parental support desired by students would be useful in further discussing the family *systems of experiences*. Findings about level of education attained by participants’ fathers were left unclear. The researcher is unsure if students could not determine the answer because fathers were absent from the household or if limited conversations with the father led to lack of awareness. Assumptions, however, can be made about the necessity to support caring family environments and that Black males should be given time to share and exchange educational information with their parents. This effort would focus on perceived benefits of having positive conversations about school with parents and/or family members versus simply living in a survival mode to overcome the

non-cohesive family structures that are in place, as suggested by Vereen (2007).

Although the perspective of the latter is to indicate the strength and resiliency of African-American students, this study relies upon the perceptions of the participants as an effort to suggest or implement the most needed support measures.

Because parents generally serve as the first role models for students, living with uneducated parents may devalue education in the eyes of their children. Similar to the opinion of Floyd (1996), findings from this study suggest positive adult role models can be significant for resiliency, as well as maintaining a warm and stable home, and enhancing academic outcomes. At the same time, lessened exposure to education or high income does not automatically imply children will have negative values or that family discussions about the need for academic success or employment will be absent from the home.

Family systems have tremendous impact on children, as evidenced by the shared perceptions of African-American males in this study. In relation to thoughts about dropping out of school, students perceive conversations with parents to be invaluable assets. However, Rothstein (2004) reminds us that many African-American families do not adopt 'family-time' types of conversations as a typical childrearing practice, therefore we can expect to see many of those talk missing from Black homes unless they are guided toward new practices. Consequently, when students are influenced by factors from other systems, such as poor relationships with teachers (school experiences) or are characterized by low academic achievement and limited social engagement (student characteristics), they may not have the option of having a discussing concerns with their parent (family experiences). The result could be related

to a negative apex (i.e. dropping out of school). Another important factor that arose from data was peer relationships (personal experiences), which add another dimension to the discussion regarding Black boys dropping out of school.

Personal Experiences

Findings revealed that some males in secondary school perceived maintain relationships with or hanging out with friends who “are not interested in school” is related to dropping out of school. Likewise, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue peer relationships are strong, making the case that peers have power to dissuade academic success. Still, findings from this study suggest peers have the ability to persuade participation in other negative behaviors, including dropping out of school. Additional findings included the general perspective that a Black male students’ involvement with gangs is related to dropping out of school. Interestingly, gang membership typically is viewed as an alternate family system for most of its members. Although gang affiliation is categorized within the system of personal experiences, it could represent a double threat because it is valued within the system of family experiences, as well.

The survey instrument listed multiple factors within the “personal experience” category, including at least ten factors that could permeate another operating system with bi-directional influence, have direct impact upon the student, or remain stagnant yielding no influence. The experience measure where multilevel environmental systems are operating simultaneously and have influence upon each other is consistent with ecological theory or the ecology of education described by Bronfenbrenner (1976). As we discuss personal experiences, findings regarding that system must be noted. African-American male students perceived the primary factors related to dropping out of school to be laziness, lack of motivation, and failure to understand the importance of

school. These variables may be tied to high other factors that illicit stress for teenagers, such as drugs, becoming a father, experiencing a tragedy, bullying behavior, and/or non-involvement with extracurricular activities (lacking a sense of belonging).

These variables have incredible power because they inevitably involve someone else and extend to other *systems of experiences*, impacting their views of multiple factors. Students' world views and personal beliefs can impact school-related activities as evidenced in research by Sing, Chang, & Dika (2010). When multiple factors are operating and maintaining influence upon the student, increased reactive options are available, one of which may be dropping out of school.

Changing the Apex: Deciding to Remain in School and Earn a Diploma

The goal of this research was to explore the perceptions of African-American males in an effort to identify what factors are related to dropping out of school. Knowing what factors influence decisions to drop out could facilitate a change in Black boys making a healthier decision to graduate instead. Therefore, efforts for the development of dropout prevention strategies are needed (Bridgeland, Didulio, & Morrison, 2006; Dynarski et al, 2008; Schargel, 2007). America cannot afford to maintain alarmingly high rates of African-American male students dropping out of school. The actual economic costs are detrimental to our society (Balfanz, et al., 2009; Thorstensen, 2004).

African-American male students should experience similar rates of success as White peers and be afforded the same social-emotional benefits. Research related to the achievement gap has direct impact on schooling practices, school guidance support, and family influence. The educational system should be used as a vehicle to promote the academic advancement of minority populations (Freire, 2000). Including the

perspectives of African-American male students is necessary to foster impactful change. Students should be given the opportunity to help shape their education (Cook-Sather, 2006). Their insights may significantly impact educational reform and help resolve the dropout epidemic portrayed by Black males. Our greatest challenge is improving the academic achievement of Black students (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

From the narrow perspective of five students who were interviewed during the pilot study, we captured a glimpse of perceptions held by Black male students in regards dropping out of secondary school. The interviewees insisted that students were falling behind in classes, lacked encouragement (especially from family members), and became preoccupied with things outside of school. Moreover, they specified Black male students' preoccupation with drugs and teenage pregnancy, and concluded Black boys often lacked self-confidence. The interviews also revealed that falling behind in school further perpetuated negative feelings about school and differences in work ethic, level of self-confidence, peer group associations, and family support were the primary factors that differentiated successful and unsuccessful students.

Although several factors can be related to dropping out of school, findings demonstrate all experiences are not similar in terms of having strong relationships with dropout. Furthermore, Cooper (2009) reiterates the basis of the theoretical framework outlined for this study when stating that factors within the process are alterable and could lead to academic success. The process follows the framework of ecological risk/protective theory that predicts Black males students are capable of participating in an area of healthy development (Bogenschneider, 1996). The findings of this research

substantiate the idea that participants do not succumb to beliefs that dropping out of school is related to every environmental or systematic factor.

Responses undoubtedly indicated that Black boys need to willingly devote effort toward academic success and use programs that were already in place to assist students with tutorial and remediation opportunities (e.g. making up credits). Student perceptions regarding African-American males ability to exhibit good academic performance is synonymous with research which focused on the highly successful academic outcomes of Black students and their resiliency to systematic challenges (Marsh, Chaney, & Jones, 2012). Furthermore, programs and other strategic measures are in place to assist African-American youth who are interested in achieving school success despite disproportionately high numbers of Black males still dropping out of school (Schargel & Smink, 2001).

Additional data from the interviews regarding social-emotional factors, family influence, student -teacher relationships and communication, teaching methods, and school environments can be found in the transcriptions and summarized results (Appendices D & F). Their responses led to the development of the survey instrument and did not veer far from the summarized perspectives of an additional 261 Black male students.

The challenge of helping African-American students come a conclusion other than dropping out of school is enormous. The rate at which Black boys are currently participating in school dropout is overwhelming. However, by understanding the relationships between systems that influence them, we have a greater chance at helping Black boys come to another decision. This assertion coincides with the social-

psychological research theories that embrace ideas of building frameworks from which a person views the world (Bandura, 1986; Cross, 1971; Sue & Sue, 1990). Ultimately, we want African-American male students to share their perceptions about school, family and personal factors that play a major role in the dropout crisis, realizing their perceptions are formed by their experiences. Marsh & Shavelson (1985) concur with the idea that student perceptions are shaped by their experiences and the surrounding environment, they further expound by saying those perceptions are also influenced by how others evaluate their environments. Without individuality, only one student would need to share in the discourse regarding dropping out of school. The differences of Black males' experiences are what make their collective perception valuable. Findings derived from the student perceptions of Black males in this study are valued and trusted because they are viewed as "experts" in regards to how they are individually influenced by their surrounding environments (Certo, Cauley, & Chafin, 2003; Cook-Sather, 2002; DeFur & Korinek, 2010; Mitra, 2004; Smyth, 2006; Steinberg & McCray, 2012)

Implications for Research

The African-American male students in this study have clearly identified factors they perceive to be associated with dropping out of school, consistent with findings by Cooper and Jordan (2003). Their perceptions provide implications for future research. Additional studies are needed regarding how social/emotional factors are tied to dropping out of school. Much of the educational research regarding students who drop out of school focuses on academic/instructional factors (school experiences) and familial support (family experiences), but school reform research cannot leave social/emotional factors (personal experiences) to psychologists alone.

Middle and high school students chose to answer additional questions. Findings indicate their heightened perception of drugs, gangs, incarceration and teenage pregnancy being related to decisions to drop out of school, consistent with findings by Cooper and Jordan, 2003. Often, educational policy negates conversations about how schools must address these issues. Although each factor mentioned is extraneous to school *systems of experience*, they each have significance as they bear weight in the minds of African-American male students, and thereby, should have greater emphasis in school reform literature. Negative factors highlighted in the system of personal experiences, such as drug use, are often linked with low self-esteem, low self-concept, depression and other mental health concerns that should be addressed in future educational studies. That type of research is supported by Robinson and Brown (2006) who shared that responding to the psycho-social development levels of students is a necessity when trying to increase academic performance outcomes.

The findings of this study confirm our need for the current body of research as it relates to teacher relationships, but what is of utmost value is continual study of the perceptions African-American male learners have about that relationship . While enrolled in secondary schools and expecting to complete the same requirements for graduation, Black male students' perceptions about what limits any student who looks like them (in terms of becoming dropouts), is priceless. Future research should consider additional Black male perspectives.

Future Research Questions to Consider:

- What demographic factors (student characteristics) are most related to Black boys dropping out of school according to the perceptions of African-American males?

- What social-emotional/mental health factors (i.e., self-confidence, self-identity, depression, disability status, personality construction, etc.) are related to lack boys dropping out of school according to the perceptions of African-American males?
- What motivational factors are related to Black boys dropping out of school or attaining success academic achievement outcomes according to the perceptions of African-American males?
- What factors of academic/social levels of engagement are related to Black male students dropping out of school according to African-American males?
- What concerns with dropout prevention/intervention programs are most related to Black males dropping out of school as perceived by African-American male students?
- What factors are most related to Black boys dropping out of school according to African-American females?

Future research should include in-depth conversations with students to explore student expectations. However, consideration for conversations with adults is considered to get perspectives from past vs. present schooling experiences of African-American students. Additionally, an increased number of students should participate and additional demographic variables should be included when surveying students for richer responses to be collected. Lastly, the view point of women good provide strong data as many of the male students grow up in female-headed households, attend school with female educators, and simply are surrounded by a lot of girls/women throughout life.

Implications for Practice

After considering student perceptions and factors operating within the systems of The Apex Model, several suggestions are made for working with Black males students. However, it is imperative that we keep in mind that the systems themselves continue to evolve and changes may require new strategies about how to address student needs (Bronfenbrenner, 1976). The three *systems of experiences* are characterized by factors

that influence decisions to drop out of school. In an effort to frame suggestions within those contexts, implications for practices have been categorized in a manner that best addresses the factors of each individual system. However, interventions can also directly or indirectly influence another system; hopefully that yields better results in an unexpected area. Please consider the following as practices to facilitate students in the development of a better educational choice; persisting in school through graduation.

School Experiences (Teacher Leaders and School Guidance Programs)

Student-Teacher Communication - Communication skills between students and teachers must be further developed. Similar to the findings by Decker, et al. (2007), this study encourages further development of positive student-teacher relationships and interventions to improve the quality of academic achievement. Freire (2000) further supports the idea of student-teacher dialogue to build relationships, but suggests teachers be willing to give up some control. Findings imply staff development is needed for teachers and school guidance programs may be essential to help students build better relations with teachers (Moule & Higgins, 2007; Sleeter, 2001).

Character Building Units – Assumptions made from data collection indicate school guidance programs should provide strong character building units about self-awareness, self-esteem, positive attitude and communication in secondary programs. Many of these traits are often left as the focus of elementary and only sometimes found in middle school programs. Because the data continue to reveal the importance of relationships with Black male students, implications for relationship building is implied in the study; it is suggested that school guidance departments and student services' teams assist with this goal. Myint, et al. (2008) delivers core dropout prevention strategies that include social and emotional learning curriculum.

Test Preparation/Study Skills - Students would benefit from test preparation sessions and learning how to study correctly, building a skill set for devoting effort toward academic achievement that was considered a factor of dropout according to student perceptions; Dynarski, et al. (2008) fosters support for including extra study time as an intervention for dropping out of school.

Tutorials/Academic Assistance - Tutorial sessions should be available for students in an effort to provide academic assistance, especially when work is difficult. Findings from this study indicated students perceived teachers not encouraging students to work hard as a factor related to dropping out of school. Similarly, students who gave little effort were perceived as closely related to dropout. In response, providing tutorial sessions, gives teachers an additional opportunity to encourage students. Furthermore, to combat underachievement, teachers should challenge students in curriculum areas despite socioeconomic status in an effort to raise achievement expectations and promote hardworking students (Garibaldi, 1992; Noguera, 2003; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003; Schargel, 2007). If teachers are willing to help students and provide rigorous instruction there should not be a problem; however, teachers should recognize that their failure to believe that they can effect change generally inhibits change from taking place in relation to academic achievement (Davis & Jordan, 1994).

Personal Experiences (Community Influence)

Community Mentorship – Findings from this study highlighted the importance of relationships among all variables, student-teacher, family, and peers. In cases where students may have broken relationships or poor roles models, an mentor could serve as a benefit. In addition, mentorship by community members may be a great way to infuse

support for students without requiring more work from faculty/staff members at school. Also, mentors can provide support and encouragement needed by students, thus building a stronger foundation for positive relationships and fostering school-community relations. Decker, et al. (2007) contend trying to understand the feelings of students at early ages is helpful in building relationships.

Counseling Services – Poor peer relations and lack of encouragement were perceived as factors related to dropout by student responses, lending to the notion that counseling services would benefit students.

Family Experiences (Parent Education and Communication)

Family Counseling – Findings indicate students estimate Black males tend to listen to their family members more than anyone else; therefore, building healthy forms of dyadic communication is warranted. Myint, et al. (2008) suggests engaging and supporting families, as well as case management coordination as a core prevention drop out strategy.

Family Night Gatherings/Adult Courses - Schools should consider creating opportunities for parents to visit schools to learn more about ways to assist with academic excellence for their children. Schools could offer adult education courses, technical skill classes, educational technology information, and/or career information for adults. Parents may foster greater value in education when schools assist them as adults, even if only offering space on campus for classes or by advertising appropriate places to get assistance. In turn, students who see parents' pursuit of education may devote more effort to their own schooling. The research by Sampson (2002) values the family and school, hence their interaction is significant. Additionally, Schargel (2007)

shares fifteen effective strategies for dropout prevention that includes school-community relations.

Parent Workshops - Schools should provide opportunities for families to engage in discussions about factors related to education. Because students reported little connectedness between education and future job attainment, parents should be invited to attend sessions about graduation requirements, college entrance requirements, financial aid opportunities as well as receive information about good study habits.

Richardson and Gerlach (1980) interviewed Black students for the purpose of dropout prevention and they found that the greatest cause of dropping out of school was students not perceiving education as vehicle for future opportunities, yielding support for this intervention. Furthermore, Schargel (2007) provides fifteen effective strategies for dropout prevention, including family engagement

The greatest implication for practice discovered through this study is to increase the number of discussions held with students about educational concerns. The first it of data received was collected through interviews; from it we learned that having even one student report that they never had anyone ask for, or earnestly listen to, their thoughts about student success for African-American students is one too many. It is evident that our Black male students are willing to talk to us. Therefore, we must take the initiative to invite them to participate in possibly the most revolutionizing conversation in American history.

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT FOR PILOT PARTICIPANTS

Protocol Title: Factors Associated with African-American Male Students Not Meeting Minimum Requirements for Florida High School Graduation

Please read this document carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: To understand African-American students' perceptions and attitudes toward the dropout phenomena and how his/her experiences provide or limit motivation to continue towards success. The results will provide information for the future design curriculum and educational practices.

What you will be asked to do in this study: You will be asked to answer approximately ten questions in an interview about personal experiences related to school, information about the school environment and any support structures that exist or are desired in relation to student achievement. The interview will be audio taped and transcribed.

Time Required: 45 minutes – one hour

Risks and benefits: The benefit of this research is to describe and understand the perspectives of various key factors in the dropout phenomena of our Black male students and to predict possible outcomes for future students enrolling in high school. Results will direct implementation of strategies for success. No more than minimal risk anticipated.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this research.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by the law. Your interviews will be coded with pseudonyms. The list connecting your name to the pseudonym ("nickname") will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's file cabinet. When the study is complete and the data has been analyzed, the list will be destroyed. It is possible that the final results of this study will be presented in educational conferences and may even be published.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

Agreement:

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily agree to participate in the procedure and I have received a copy of this description.

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PILOT PARTICIPANTS

“Hello. My name is _____ and I will be conducting the interview today on factors associated to African-American dropout among male high school students. I am very interested to learn about your thoughts regarding this phenomenon and understand your perspective about strategies you feel will help students graduate. Hopefully, your feedback will allow me to get a clearer understanding of how various persons in a learning community feel regarding this topic. The insight you provide may guide the way future strategies are used to support African-American males succeed. I will be audio taping the interview session for clarity and as to not forget the very important information you share. Please make yourself comfortable. Are you ready to begin? Ok, let’s start.”

1. Please share your thoughts about the connection between high school dropout and African-American students.
2. What factors lead to high school dropout?
3. What differences do you think exist between successful and unsuccessful African-American students?
4. Are you currently failing any classes? / Why are you failing classes now or in the past? (if you have not failed courses, what has led to your constant academic success?)
5. What can be done to help students get back on track in order to graduate from high school?
6. What do you believe influences student performance on exams/standardized tests?
7. How do teachers impact learning?
8. Think about a period of time when you were successful in school. What factors contributed to your success?
9. If there is one thing you could change about the school day or school environment to help you succeed, what would it be?
10. Describe a person in your life outside of school that motivates you to achieve in the classroom. What do they do to help you?
11. Describe a time when someone asked for/earnestly listened to your thoughts about student success for African-American students.

APPENDIX C
TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEWS WITH PILOT PARTICIPANTS

Renard

Investigator (I): Please share your thoughts about the connection between high school dropout and African American students.

Renard: Um, well I think African-American students probably drop out more than the Caucasian students because they don't have like the parent guidance that they need since they were little and their parents probably have like more money to help guide them through high school and college, uh aah, on the other hand African-American students parents probably not that rich and probably don't have enough money and their parents tell them maybe they don't need to go to school they need to work to help take care of the family

I: So when you go to school you really feel like more White students have more money than Black students?

Renard: oo, yes ma'am, sometimes cuz some students just walk around here and be like yeah whatever I ain't goin to college and I don't want to go to college and then some students are like yeah I'm the first one that's tryin to go to college in my family and then some kids parents tell them they don't need to go to college.

I: Ok. Clears throat. What factors lead to high school dropout?

Renard: Um, parents not being around , um, the males can tend to get a female pregnant and they just want to run away and not take care of their child and drugs and abuse can have somethin to do wit it

I: Do you know people where that has actually happened or is that just an idea that you have?

Renard: Just an idea from what I have seen

I: What differences do you think exist between successful and unsuccessful African-American students?

Renard: Going to school and paying attention and actually listening to the teacher and then you have some students in the class that just want to be class clowns and just think they all above everybody else, really when they're not

I: So the class clowns are the ones who are what, successful or unsuccessful?

Renard: unsuccessful and the ones who sit at the front of the class and listen and pay attention and ask questions to understand the work are successful

I: ok. Are you currently failing any classes?

Renard: No.

I: Ok. Um, have you failed classes in the past?

Renard: No. I've always been a good student.

I: What do you think contributed to you being a good student? Does your family have a lot of money?

Renard: Not really, but just going to school and not being a class clown and know what it takes to be dedicated to hard work and having good parent guidance behind you.

I: Ok. Clears throat. What can be done to help students get back on track to help them graduate from high school?

Renard: Some students be scared to ask for help and they really know they need it and they be scared to ask for help and when and sometimes they don't want help they just want to try to do it all by themselves and really that that's not what they need, they need some guidance to help them.

I: What kind of guidance?

Renard: Like, like studying tips and parents at home can also help.

I: Ok. You've alluded to twice now parents needing to help at home. What do you, what is it that you think that parents should be doing?

Renard: like paying more attention to their kids and like asking them how they're doing in school and what kinds of grades they are making and do they need help, do they need tutors.

I: Ok. What do you believe influences students' performance on exams, like tests they take in school or standardized tests like FCAT? (uh) or ACT, SAT

Renard: get enough rest, um, eat a good breakfast. Come to the testing site prepared and ready and not putting too much pressure on yourself about what's my score? Or am I going to fail, just take the test, focus, and be confident that you are going to do well.

I: How do teachers impact learning?

Renard: Teachers give you guidance to help you throughout your whole high school career and in college because they can help you like if you're not doing so well in a subject, and they've already been in college and they can help you out with what you want to become when you grow up

I: Do you think they are able to impact it negatively in any way?

Renard: No ma'am. The only reason the students say it is negative is cause if they, if they are not willing to learn, but teachers are a positive help throughout students' life

I: Ok. Think about a period of time when you were successful in school. What factors contributed to your success?

Renard: Hard work. Going home studying, um, asking my teachers for help and even sometimes asking other classmates because they understand it more than I do, then I can go get help from them.

I: Ok. If there is one thing that you could change about the school day or school environment to help you succeed, what would it be?

Renard: More one on one help with students cuz like some students want to want to learn and want to go to college and if they can come and get that one on one help with the teacher then they can help them and give them more guidance to go and pursue what they want to be in life.

I: What hinders that from being available now?

Renard: It really doesn't, but some students just don't want to go and ask for the help when they know it's right there waiting on them

I: Ok. Describe a person in your life outside of school that motivates you to achieve in the classroom. What do they do to help you?

Renard: My aunties, because both of them, well one of them have gone to college and she has graduated and my other auntie she is in college right now and she's about to graduate and I know I can go to them for help and that's my personal experience from my family to see someone in my family is doing well it makes me want to do well and go to college to.

I: Ok. Describe a time when someone asked for or earnestly listened to your thoughts about student success for African-American students.

Renard: Silence. Uuummm. like in the classroom? Like, you mean like (uumm) like in the class, having a classroom discussion?

I: Like anyone who has listened to your thoughts regarding success for African-American students.

Renard: Well, mainly it would be during Black History Month when when in class when having classroom discussion and like the whole class gets involved about African

Americans and they and we just talk about the history mostly about Martin Luther King, but it's other successful African Americans out there.

I: Umm huh. Ok. Is there anything that maybe I did not ask that you feel is important for me to know regarding success or lack of success for African American males in school?

Renard: No ma'am.

I: Ok. Thank you.

Jamal

I: Please share your thoughts about the connection between high school dropout and African-American students.

Jamal: uhh. Drugs, peer pressure, uuh, or they just don't want to go to school anymore.

I: Ok. How do you think drugs or peer pressure affect dropout?

Jamal: Cuz they find something that they want to do, basically money and if you go to school you basically ain't makin' no money so

I: Ok. What factors lead to high school dropout?

Jamal: Uhh. (what kinds of things do you think lead to high school dropout in general?) Like, they just quit coming to school (umm hm) like they grades low and they just give up.

I: Ok. What differences do you think exist between successful and unsuccessful African-American students?

Jamal: Successful people are like confident about they self and they want to succeed in life. Unsuccessful people, African-Americans they just don't care, they just live to live.

I: Ok. So you think students who are unsuccessful in school who are African American is because they don't care about school at all and finding success?

Jamal: Well they probably care but they think they can't do it

I: Ok. Are you currently failing any classes?

Jamal: No.

I: Ok. Why are you failing classes now or have you failed classes in the past?

Jamal: I haven't ever failed a class.

I: Oh, o, ok. If you haven't failed any classes, what has led to your constant academic success?

Jamal: My parent.

I: How so? How does your parent help you to be successful the entire time that you have been in school?

Jamal: Like, umm, she sometimes stays strict, like stays strict on me and makes sure I do what I gotta do, not be like some these people, like on the streets so I can be like a successa, successful person

I: Ok, umm, so when you say strict do you mean just academics or like

Jamal: Academics-wise

I: Ok. What can be done to help students get back on track to help them graduate from high school?

Jamal: Like (pause), what you mean?

I: Anything you feel would help students get back into a place where they might be able to graduate from high school, like for instance if they felt like they couldn't do it, like you said earlier they wouldn't be able to graduate so they wanted to quit. What things do you believe could be done to help them get back on track and help them graduate?

Jamal: Ummm(pause). Like classes on their level, that that can help them. Like build up build up their confidence so they can come back to regular class and be able to work. (uh hmm). So it's like not like easy class, but like classes they would understand better before they be on regular in classes, basically like ESE or something

I: Ok. What do you believe influences students' performance on exams, like tests they take in school or standardized tests like FCAT, ACT, SAT, what kinds of things do you believe influence how a student performs on those kinds of tests?

Jamal: Uh (pause), what you mean?

I: What kinds of things do you believe influence their performance, how well they do?

Jamal: Uh (pause), basically their classes, but not necessarily their classes, but how they learn things in class that's pertaining to the FCAT that would help them get it.

I: Uh hmm. So if they didn't learn a lot of information in their classes, then they wouldn't do well on their tests? Is that what you're saying?

Jamal: Kind of.

I: Ok. Could you explain it to me a little bit more clearly please?

Jamal: Like, uhm, but uhm, let me see (pause) uhmm. (pause). I don't know.

I: Ok. That's fine. Can you tell me how do you think teachers impact learning?

Jamal: (Pause). If they're, if they know how to get along with a kid, well not necessarily how to get along with them, but like know how to communicate with a kid, the kid like wanna, a wanna go to class cuz they'll like the teacher and, but some teachers, they, they just think they have the authority, I ain't sayin they don't, but sometimes they try to overuse their authority because they're grown ups and like try to control you (um huh) and some students don't don't like don't like that so if the teacher try to get along with a kid and help them you'll be successful than tryin to like (pause) overuse your authority (uh hmm)

I: Ok. Think about a period of time when you were successful in school. What factors contributed to your success?

Jamal: (Pause). Mmm. Long pause. I can; think of a time. Uhmm. My eighth grade year. Uh hmm. I had like all A's and B's the whole year and mmm mhhm (that's good). I guess I like what helped me keep, what helped me make all A's and B's the whole year was I was tryin' to see what, personally I was tryin' to see if I could make all A's like going into my freshman year (mm huh) cuz I thought the GPA kept goin' with you (uh hmm) so I could have the highest one like uhh that and playing sports helped me keep my grades up too.

I: How so?

Jamal: If you don't have the grades you can't play.

I: Ok. So you were motivated by sports and you were competitive because you wanted your grades in eighth grade to be higher than anyone else's (yeah). Ok. If there is one thing that you could change about the school day or school environment to help you succeed, what would it be?

Jamal: Long pause. I probably wouldn't change anything. I like how it is.

I: Well, what is it that you like about it that helps you succeed now?

Jamal: Like all my classes, they are small right now (hm hmm) and it's a better learning environment cause you're with kids who are like on you're level so you can like learn more (hm hmm) and I just like it. I don't know.

I: Ok. Describe a person in your life outside of school that motivates you to achieve in the classroom.

Jamal: My mother.

I: What do they do to help you?

Jamal: She like, pause, like I said earlier, she try to stay strict like wit' my academics, so. And then she gives, like. Pause. Gives, like not tell stories, but gives examples of people who like get good grades and you do, and like, you go to college and be successful like that (hm hmm) and people like, who don't have good grades they they be harder for them to get in college, so basically she sayin' that if I kee, if I keep my good grades up, I'll make it easier on me to go to college and like get money and be successful like *unclear statement*

I: Ok. And this is our last question. Describe a time when someone asked for or earnestly listened to your thoughts about student success for African-American students.

Jamal: Right now.

I: Not a time prior to, a time before now?

Jamal: Uhhhhmmmm. Never, I don't think. None I remember.

I: Ok. Are there any other things that you feel I should have asked you or insight that you can give about African-American males and students who drop, uhhh, or students who dropout of school that you haven't already said?

Jamal: Mmmhhhhm. (Like I'm surprised she didn't ask this or that) No.

I: Ok. Alright, thank you.

Whitton

I: Please share your thoughts about the connection between high school dropout and African-American students.

Whitton: Well, I think that with African Americans, we, I think that we sometimes, how can I say uhm, pause, uhm, long pause

I: Whatever you truly think is fine, you can say whatever you think. It doesn't matter. There is no right or wrong answer. Pause. Share your thoughts about the connection

between high school dropouts and African-American students. How do you think those two things are connected? How do you feel about African-American students and high school dropout?

Whitton: Well, a lot of times, sex. Us Black people or Black males, we uhmm, a lot of us play sports and I think that we get caught up on, not only sports, but things on the outside of school which causes us to fall behind (uh hmm) and in our credits and things like that, so when it's time, around your senior year or anywhere in your high school career. I think that we uhmm find ourselves slipping and I guess we just decide to dropout.

I: Ok. What factors lead to high school dropout? What kinds of things?

Whitton: Well, pregnancy. I will say credits, uhm, the environment, and I guess you could say, say where you come from. (mm huh) Cause a lot of times you can have students who, I guess if their parents have, I guess you can say their parents went to school and didn't finish school and they look at that as well, my mom and my dad didn't finish school why do I have to finish a school.

I: Uh hmm. You said earlier the environment. What kinds of things about the environment?

Whitton: Well you can, I mean, the environment based on, like, you can have a school who, that's really not I guess you can say uh clean or the people around it, in the school. It can be the people, like, have different clicks (uh hmm) and things like that. You can have this click over here who, I guess the guys who always talking about this and that person (uh hmm). It can be that type of thing, environment which causes a kid to not wanna be at a school like this and it could cause them to drop out (uh hmm. Okay.)

I: What differences do you think exist between successful and unsuccessful African-American students?

Whitton: Uhmm. What do you mean by that?

I: For those kids who succeed academically in school who, for Black males, Black kids who succeed, what do you think the differences are between them and the ones that don't Like what's the differences between the ones who succeed academically and get good grades and the ones who do not?

Whitton: Well. Pause. Difference? I really think it could have a lot to do with who you hang around (uh hmm) and...pause...well, that's what I think, it could be who you hang around, well again, where you come from also (uhm hmm).

I: How does who you hang around influence whether you are successful in classes or with grades or not?

Whitton: Well, you could be around, like I said earlier with the click who loves to joke around and pick at other people, which most of the time those be the type of kids who aren't doing so well so they have nothing better to do (uh hmm) so they find something they could do to try to, I guess be over other people since they don't have the brains (uh hmm. Okay).

I: Are you currently failing any classes?

Whitton: No ma'am.

I: Have you failed classes in the past?

Whitton: No ma'am (okay).

I: If you have not failed courses, what has led to your constant academic success?

Whitton: Well, I guess. Pause. Where I come from and my motivation to succeed, it's uhmm. Pause. Well, I guess uh, once I set back in ninth grade, and when I really found out, I never was a failing student, but when I found out when I got in ninth grade I and realized I could make A's and B's it gave me more confidence in myself that I could uhmm I can succeed and be better (uh hmm. Ok.)

I: So when you found grades then you, it motivated you to wanna have to continue to get good grades?

Whitton: Yes ma'am. (Okay.)

I: Uhmm, what can be done to help students get back on track in order to graduate from high school?

Whitton: Well. Pause. What can be done uhh? Well really. Pause. There are some things that that are kind of , uhmm, that they can do like, for instance the CROP Program, the credit retrieval, that is something that can help them get back up, uhmm, on track, but it's kinda up to them whether they want to or not. You just have to have, you just gotta be willing to want to do better (uh hmm).

I: What do you suppose would keep people from having that willingness or desire to do better? Like what would make somebody who is an African-American male say. Pause. I don't even want to do better. I, there is no reason for me to succeed or do well.

Whitton: Well, it could be, uhmm, it could be, they could be going through something at the time or maybe they just don't want to be in school or they just (uhm hmm) or they have those things outside of school that they want to do (uh hmm) like maybe selling drugs or (uh hmm) or using them (uh hmm) that could be why (uh hmm, okay.).

I: Where there any other things you were going to say in terms of helping students get back on track to graduate from high school? You said they could do CROP. Is there anything else they could do to get back on track?

Whitton: Well there is, there's also night school, which they can uhmm. Pause. They can do that to, to get back on track. And uhmm. Like I said, it's, it's really up to them if they really want to they can even, like talking to different ones in there, like staff (uh hmm). Different things like that they can do different stuff if they really want to get back on track I do believe they can (Okay.).

I: Uhmm, what do you believe influences student performance on exams, like tests in their classes or on standardized tests like FCAT or ACT or SAT? What influences how well they do on those kinds of tests?

Whitton: (Pause). Well, I think what influences them to do, you said well right? (uh hmm). I think what influences them to do well is the way they walk into the room, the way they, me in, whether they're saying or having in their mind that they're gonna pass and whether they are goin' in there with a bad attitude, saying "man, I'm gonna fail this". I think if you go in there which your head on straight believe in your self that you can do this (uh hmm) and get it done, then you can succeed (Okay.).

I: Uhhmmm. Does that mean that because there are so many people or African-American males who are not doing well that you perceive that many of those students are going into those kinds of exams saying I am going to fail?

Whitton: (Pause). Well, I guess you can say that or either they're not preparing themselves for the test. (Uh hmm). So, either one of those. (Okay).

I: How do teachers impact learning for, for African-American males? How do teachers impact learning?

Whitton: Whether they're good or?

I: However you feel like they influence or impact or have anything to do with the learning process. Where do teachers fall with that? Pause. In that, how do they impact it? Whether it be good or bad.

Whitton: Uhmm. Pause. Well, you, I guess you say they. We have different teachers with different subjects and they. I think it's based on the way they teach (uh hmm), they can really have an impact on you, uhm. Pause. Like for instance, uhmm, Mr. Kalis, out here, I believe he's a really good teacher. He, not only does he just talks, loud, and yells at you, and gets your attention, just to make sure you understand, but you just, you just, well, I've had him ever since tenth grade (uh hmm) and to me he's, he's a good teacher (uh hmm) and uhmm, I guess just the way, basically, just the way you teach (uh hmm).

I: In terms of getting attention oor when you say the way you teach are you talking whether they write on the board or stand up and talk or just sit behind their desk or because they give you activities or the way they teach and how they treat you as a person or yelling at you or not yelling at you? What do you mean, the way they teach?

Whitton: Well, like you sayin', standin' up writtin' on the board. Those type of things helps out cause it also allows students to be able to to to see and show them (uh hmm) and so they see you give them examples (uh hmm) so they can understand it themselves and if they don't, then you can you know, I guess you can get with them one on one, and those type of things, I guess makes a teacher, I guess, better (Okay.).

I: Think about a period of time when you were successful in school. What factors contributed to your success?

Whitton: Uhhh. Pause. Motivation. Self-confidence. (uh hmm. Okay.)

I: No outside factors? It's all about how you've, you've

Whitton: Well, no, it umm, basically where I've come from, ummm, my mother, she always stayed on my case through, since I was a child. Everyday I would come in and I would have to sit at the table and and do my work before I could go outside and do anything and those types of things (uh hmm) helped me to be successful (uh hmm) today (Okay).

I: If there is one thing you could change about the school day or school environment to help you succeed, what would it be?

Whitton: Hhhm. Our school environment (uh hmm. Yeah.) Well...

I: Or general schools, it doesn't necessarily have to be your school, but that is what you know. Uhhh, the schools in general, anything you can change about the school day or school environment to help you succeed, what would it be?

Whitton: Well. Pause. It's not a whole lot that I could think of that I would want to change if I could because to me everything is fine to me (uh hmm) so, I would, well the lunches (laughter, ok), the lunch, I would change that if I could (Okay).

I: Are there things you hear your friends say that, that they know they would do better or just people in general would do better if this one thing could be changed?

Whitton: Well, I hear them talk about different teachers a lot. I wish we had this teacher or I wish they get rid of her or him (uh hmm), those types of things. (Okay.)

I: Describe a person in your life outside of school that motivates you to achieve in the classroom. What do they do to help you?

Whitton: Hmm. Well, like I said, my mother. She is that person who has uhmm, pause, that person who motivated me (uh hmm) throughout my whole school career and she still do today. Like the things that she, she has done, like I said earlier, like she stayed on my case about doing my homework before I do anything else and she was just always there for me, by my side, just, just telling me, even when I did go, go through with different things, uhmm, such as grades, never was bad grades, but different things, but she felt that I could do better, she just always told me do to better, that you gotta have faith in everything you do (uh hmm. Okay.)

I: Describe a time when someone asked for or earnestly listened to your thoughts about student success for African-American students.

Whitton: There isn't, there really wasn't any time when. Well, a time when I remember anyone asking me about African American, well the success of them (uh hmm. Okay.)

I: Is there anything you feel that I have not asked or should've asked or you just wanted to be able to say regarding, uhmm, dropout and African-American males that you can add now?

Whitton: Not at all.

I: Thank you.

Whitton: You're welcome.

Robbie

Robbie: I believe that most Africa- American students drop out because of money. You know what I mean? They are influenced by the drug dealers in the neighborhood (uh hmm) I mean school just ain't gonna make the money faster.

I: Oh ok, wow! So you think that kids is that o-o do you feel as though or are you saying that those kids maybe are poor (pause) or don't have as much money and that's why they need fast money

Robbie: Naah, I mean in this age people want to look good and an and and believe that they think hustling gonna get them the money faster an that school just slowin 'em down.

I: Ok. What factors lead to high school dropout?

Robbie: Uhh failing classes (uh hmm) and influence by people in the hood (uh hmm) I mean like the drug dealers you see on the corners with the nice cars and all the jewelry and the girls. I mean they easily influenced.

I: Ok. What differences do you think exist between successful and unsuccessful African-American students?

Robbie: Well successful African-American students I mean they go farther (uh hmm) I mean its like you drop out of school its only that much that you can go (uh hmm) I mean you still have to go back to classes if you plan on succeeding (uh hmm...pause...ok) that's the way I feel

I: What about those that are already in high school? When you look at the difference between the ones that are succeeding right now in classes and the ones are not, why do you, like why do you think there is a difference there?

Robbie: I believe like some people have different work ethics (uh hmm) I mean some people work slowly and some people work faster. I mean it's like, I believe it's up to the person (uh hmm) and the way, how they're how they teachin' since they been in elementary (uh hmm). There's different work ethics I believe.

I: Ok. Are you currently failing any classes?

Robbie: Not now.

I: Ok. Why are you failing classes now or have you failed classes in the past?

Robbie: Like this past school year?

I: Any any (or present?) time ever (oh) in school. Why would you have failed classes before?

Robbie: Being lazy not doing homework (laughs, not doing homework?) well not this year, but (laughter) past years.

I: Ok. Clears throat. What would cause one to be lazy and not do it, what's what's required or requested of them in school?

Robbie: Just getting home and wanting to get home and get on the computer and play games (uh hmm) just easily distracted.

I: Ok. What can be done to help students get back on track in order to graduate from high school?

Robbie: Stay focused and listen to all your teachers and get good and like get on good standards wit' teachers (um hmm) I mean that's the main point (uh hmm).

I: Explain to me get on good or get in good standing.

Robbie: Like, like nowadays like teachers, talk to teachers like all types of ways like cursin 'em out and everything (Uh hmm) like just have your manners like how your mamma taught you (uh hmm) and you'll succeed.

I: What do you believe influences student performance on exams of standardized tests?

Robbie: Uhh. Not enough sleep (uh hmm). Not enough sleep and then breakfast (uh hmm). I mean sometimes they just get here ready to take the exam, but not fully ready (uh huh). Well, so they just take it and hope they do good (just walk and just) just (take the test) just walk in (ok).

I: How do teachers impact learning?

Robbie: Well the teachers here (hmm huh) they focus a lot on the same thing to make sure you get it right (uh hmm) well so, I mean like Ms. Dandelion, she hits that same spot (hm huh) until you get it in your head (uh hmm) and its like, it helps me out, I'm pretty good in it.

I: Ok, good. Umm. Clears throat. Is there any way teachers impact learning in a negative way or do you think they are all positive?

Robbie: I think they are all positive. I mean like Mr. Karate might have a negative name for it (laughter). Laughter. But, it' positive (laughter).

I: think about a period of time when you were successful in school. What factors contributed to your success?

Robbie: Uh, well now and when I was in middle school aah it's like family (hmm hmm) being real like close to me and stayin' on me and making sure I get my work done (uh hmm. Ok) that's the main factor.

I: Uh huh, so it sounds like you're sayin' that as long as they know what's goin' on with you and asking questions, you stay focused more. (yeah) Ok. And I want to succeed and (uh hmm – *unclear statement*) Ok. If there is one thing you could change about the school day or school environment to help you succeed, what would it be?

Robbie: Hmm. Nothing (nothing?) It's, hmm, I'm comfortable how it is, it's cool.

I: Ok. Can I go back for a moment to when you expressed about family, if your family was uninterested in what you ere doing or didn't ask any questions at all how does that cause you to become unmotivated?

Robbie: Well if it was like that then I'll, I'm the type of person that I'll find a way (hm hmm) and I'll just motivate myself (hm hmm) like I'll go to church a lot and find the motivation I need.

I: Alright. Describe a person in your life outside of school that motivates you to achieve in the classroom. (Pause). And what do they do to help you?

Robbie. (Pause). It's like. Pause. My my father (mm hmm) Like he never finished high school (hmm hmm), but he always made sure like, cause he's real smart (hmm mm) like he just made stupid choices (uh huh) so he'd always influence me to get my work done and everything and don't end up like him (hm hmm), but everything's cool wit' him though. He just wanted, he just wanted to make that diploma (right) so, my father.

I: Ok. What exactly is he doing though to encourage to not make that mistake or to help you like

Robbie: It's like, he's helped me. Right now he's helping me with my scholarships and everything (hm hmm). And like he's helped me with essays and everything (hm hmm) and basically my school work. Everyday I call him if I need help (ok) Cause like my family's back in South Carolina. I'm here wit' my grandma (ooh, ok, so you're able to pick up the phone and call him and) yeah (just get help with work and stuff, he's dong over the phone - tutorial) yeah – smile (laughter. ok)

I: Describe a time when someone asked for or earnestly listened to your thoughts about student success for African-American students?

Robbie: No. This is the first.

I: Laughter. Your eyebrow went up high. Laughter. Ok. Is there anything else you feel is tied to uhmm African-American success in high school or related to dropout I guess fro African-American males that maybe we didn't discuss that is important?

Robbie: Uh I believe like that uh since some, some like families don't make that much money (uh hmm) some are encouraged to drop out and go work (hmm) yeah, so that's another factor (ok, uh huh).

I: Ok. Anything else?

Robbie: That's it.

I: Well, thank you very much.

Waldo

I: Please share your thoughts about the connection between high school dropout and African-American students.

Waldo: Well, most of 'em are Black and most most of 'em are Black cause like I guess most of e';m start getting' caught up wit drugs and e'rythang and most of 'em are in high school who dropout.

I: So you think most kids who drop out of school who are Black are kids who get caught up in drugs?

Waldo: Yeah, influenced by their friends (ok.)

I: How do feel like they are influenced by their friends?

Waldo: That, like their friends try to persuade 'em in doin' somethin' they know, they know ain't right and like everything and they think it's cool and then all of sudden they start doin' it (uh hmm)

I: Do you think drugs are the only reason that kids drop out?

Waldo: uhmm hm. They they can be smart and just probably bad parenting, bad parents (uh hmm) and they start doubtin' theyselves and everything and I guess they end up dropping out (ok.)

I: Uuhhmm. Pause. What factors lead to high school dropout? Like, what kinds of things do you think cause them to start dropping out of school?

Waldo: Uhmm, like they start getting influenced by their friends, drugs, and also probably also hang out, hanging out with the wrong crowd (uh hmm).

I: What kinds of people would be the right crowd to keep them in school?

Waldo: Like people that do their work, don't doubt themselves and (uh hmm)

I: You're saying doubt is one of those things, when when you say that kids doubt themselves, what do you mean by that?)

Waldo: They they let umm, *unclear* that the work is too hard for them and they can't do it (Ok.)

I: What differences do you think exist between successful and unsuccessful African-American students?

Waldo: Actually, uh well, su-su-successful African Americans they probably do their work, stay on task, follow directions and have a positive attitude while the unsuccessful have a bad attitude towards something, act like they didn't want to do it (uh hmm) because they thought it was too hard and they they said what ever with it and just didn't do anything about it (okay.)

I: Are you currently failing any classes?

Waldo: No.

I: Have you failed any classes in the past?

Waldo: No, not really.

I: What do you mean by not really?

Waldo: I probably had like a "D", but I brought it up to like a "A" (Ok.)

I: Umm. What do you think contributed to you being a good student?

Waldo: Following directions, doing my work, turning it in on time, not getting caught up with the wrong people and having having good study habits, I guess. (Ok.)

I: What can be done to help students get back on track to help them graduate from high school?

Waldo: Uh. They can get rid of they old friends that they hang wit that got in trouble and get new friends start, start believing in their self that they can do something instead of doubtin' themselves and start doin' their work and try hard (uh hmm).

I: What do you believe influences student performance on exams like the tests they take in school or standardized tests like FCAT?

Waldo: Ummm. What influences them, uh, I guess, I can't really say, uh, never really

I: You know, like what kinds of factors? Say you have to take a test in a class or you have to take the FCAT or ACT or SAT, what kinds of things do you think lead to kids doing good versus doing not so well?

Waldo: They're like, they take it real serious and not be real nervous and study, study for the and uhmm test (uh hmm. Ok.)

I: Kids who don't do well, you don't think they study (No.) or they don't have confidence maybe?

Waldo: They they, may study, they may study real well, but they might be too nervous (uh hmm) about it (ok)

I: Uhmmm. How do teachers impact learning?

Waldo: Uhm, uhm, teachers try to teach us the best way they can, like the simplest way for students to understand it and like if students don't understand it like they umm,

they they tell 'em again like ina more simpler way like t-t-to the student gets it to learn (ok.)

I: Do you think teachers affect students in negative ways at all?

Waldo: Now, it depends on the teacher. If the teacher is not really teaching at all, then I guess the students uhmm not gonna know, but if the teacher is always tellin' them about it and teach 'em how to do it, they'll be better at it. (okay). *unclear*

I: Were you about to say something else?

Waldo: No. (ok).

I: Think about a period of time when you were successful in school.

Waldo: Probably recently when I had my report card. I had all "A"s and one "C" (okay.). I had did all my work and everything and stopped hangin' around the people I used to hang around (hm hmm)

I: So you go better grades because you had a better crowd of people (yeah) and you were doing your work? Okay. Clears throat. Are those the only things that you helped, that you think helped you be successful in school?

Waldo: No. I always had a positive attitude and think I could do it (ok) and not doubt myself. (ok).

I: If there is one thing you could change about the school day or school environment, what would it be?

Waldo: You. I'd probably add like study groups and like if people, students were having trouble like in math, we could have like someth somebody like a tutor and get 'em all together and like help, like ask 'em what what they don't get (uh hmm) and go over go over it for 'em and they come back e'ryday and say like homework and they sit there and do it wit the person and help 'em out (okay)

I: Umm. Describe a person in your life outside of school that motivates you to achieve in the classroom and tell me (my mom) what does she do to help you?

Waldo: she always tell me to do good and say do my best and never doubt myself and always like do my work on time (h hmm)

I: So she gives you a lot of positive encouragement (yeah) about that good attitude you were talking about earlier (yeah). Ok.

I: Describe a time, I believe this is our last question, okay? (okay). Describe a time when someone asked for/earnestly listened to your thoughts about student success for African American students.

Waldo: Uhhh, well, I, mostly every, I tell 'em since mos most of us dropout and I tell 'em like don't doubt yourself whatever, and then somebody, some people won't listen, but some of 'em will and often they start doin' better again. I'll keep helping 'em out whatever, I keep helpin' 'em out on their work and then they do better.

I: So you're saying students ask you about your opinion (They they ask me for help on stuff) is there. Ok (like) to keep them from dropping out of school? What about any adults? When has there been a time when an adult has asked you about the success for African-American students?

Waldo: Uhm, no, not unclear has ever asked me. (ok.)

I: Alright. That's all. Thank you.

Waldo: You're welcome.

I: There's just one other question I needed to ask you and that's. clears throat. Is there anything else that you feel contributes to the discussion about African-American male students and dropping out of high school that I have not asked you, but you think is important?

Waldo: That, I guess, I can say that that uhm that they shouldn't dropout or don't doubt themselves, try hard, keep trying the best they can (uh hmm) and try to succeed instead of dropping out and having a hard time (okay).

I: Thank you. Alright. You have a good day.

Waldo: You too

I: Alright.

APPENDIX D
PERCEPTIONS HELD BY PILOT STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Renard

Renard is a sophomore who has attended the same school since sixth grade. He is a student athlete who is enrolled in college preparatory courses. At the end of his first semester in tenth grade, Renard had an overall grade point average 3.33 and was on track for graduation, having earned adequate credits. Renard performed well on both sections of the FCAT last school year, but received below average scores on the reading portion this year (Table E-3). In addition, he has had six referrals throughout high school, all resulting in detention. Renard is living in a single parent home where his mom is head of household, but his father was still in his life. Renard is the eldest of two children. Both parents work and have contact with the school. In addition, both parents support his athletic events.

Renard believes Caucasian students may have a better advantage of succeeding in school because they tend to have parents who guide them. He thinks Black students do not receive as much guidance at home about school. In addition to not providing guidance, Renard contends that African-American families may not have as much wealth as White families. He thinks they may need their children to go to work to help support their household. Overall, he does not believe African-American parents push their children to attend college as much because they may not be able to afford their enrollment in post-secondary institutions. He shares that the lack of guidance received from parents in relation to school success either persuades children to become further disinterested in school or makes a select few try harder to overcome the “impossible”:

some students just walk around here and be like yeah whatever I ain't goin to college and I don't want to go to college and then some students are like yeah I'm

the first one that's tryin to go to college in my family and then some kids parents tell them they don't need to go to college

Renard perceives additional factors may lead to Black males dropping out of school, including absent parents, teenage pregnancy, and drugs. Renard shared that students who do not take school seriously have more problems with academics than those who remain focused. In his opinion, becoming side tracked by factors outside of school may lead to academic failure.

Parents not being around, um, the males can tend to get a female pregnant and they just want to run away and not take care of their child and drugs and abuse can have somethin to do wit it

Renard does not have an incredibly wealthy family, but believes that the guidance his parents provide for him contribute to his academic success. In addition, he thinks that he has not failed classes because he has remained focused on his studies and is not afraid of asking questions. He thinks his hard work has led to good grades, but adult contributions should also be acknowledged. Renard referred to the guidance of parents, teachers, and family members as being very impactful to his academic career.

Jamal

Jamal is an eleventh grade student who participates in sports and other community activities. Jamal is preparing himself for college. He is one of two students at the high school who paid to take the PSAT off campus. Jamal ended the first semester of his junior year with an overall 3.67 grade point average and 16.5 credits (1.50 credits above the total required). He passed the math section of the FCAT last year, in 10th grade, meeting graduation requirements (Table 4-3). However, Jamal performed below grade level on the reading portion and did not meet graduation requirements until he retook the exam in October of this school year (Table 4-3). Jamal

lives in a single parent household, where his adopted mother cares for him. She works at the school that Jamal attends and is very visible in his life.

Jamal thinks drugs, peer pressure, and lack of desire to attend school are the primary reasons that Black males drop out of school. He thinks that students feel school does not bring forth the financial profits that they want. Ultimately, according to Jamal, their lessened interest in school leads to worse grades and after time the students begin to give up. He feels the more successful students are those who possess more confidence in the ability to succeed. Jamal thinks that students who get low grades and drop out school probably care about succeeding, but have no confidence.

Jamal believes a great contributor to his academic success has been his mother. He says that because she has been strict, he has stayed off the streets and always done well in school. She has kept him focused, on track, and confident about his ability to succeed.

Jamal thinks teachers also impact success for African-American male students. He thinks they should teach on a level that helps students understand the material and become best prepared for exams. Furthermore, Jamal emphasized the importance of good communication with students and not overusing authority as adult because it diminishes the learning environment

(but some teachers, they, they just think they have the authority, I ain't sayin they don't, but sometimes they try to overuse their authority because they're grown ups and like try to control you (um huh) and some students don't don't like don't like that so if the teacher try to get along with a kid and help them you'll be successful than tryin to like (pause) overuse your authority (uh hmm)

Jamal has continued to work well in school because of his competitive nature. He desires to get better grades than some of his peers. In the same vein, he wants to keep his competitive edge in sports and knows that can only happen if he keeps his grades up because they make him eligible to play sports. More or less, Jamal's mother plays the primary role in motivating him to achieve. She has shared multiple stories and scenarios about others who were able to make it and motivates him through encouraging stories.

Whitton

Whitton is a senior who is mature and very well respected by peers and faculty members. He is a member of the basketball team. Although both parents attended school functions where he is recognized, Whitton lives with his older brother and sister-in-law. He began attending this high school at the start of his ninth grade year and has been successful, having appropriately earned 21.0 credits and maintaining an overall cumulative grade point average of 3.43. During his 10th grade year, Whitton passed the math portion of the FCAT, but he had to retake the reading portion both last year and again in October of this school year (Table E-3). He failed to meet requirements at any time and utilized concordant scores on the ACT to satisfy the graduation requirements. Throughout high school Whitton has only received three referrals, all for tardies to school, all resulting in detention.

Whitton thinks Black males are overly focused on sex and sports. He believes both are large distractions to school. He thinks kids become so consumed with things outside of the curricular day that they do not regain focus until their senior year when they recognize how far they are from truly graduating. Until that point, it appears

Whitton does not feel Black males pay much attention to their overall grades and credits needed to finish school and lack the motivating force to complete school. However, Whitton notices that some students may give up prior to their senior year, but for the same reason; lack of motivation to finish.

Whitton agrees with Renard that teenage pregnancy impacts Black male students' completion of high school. He thinks that getting girls pregnant is a large factor contributing to dropout. As mentioned by Jamal in his interview, the males may not know what to do so they run away. Whitton thinks a couple of other factors are related to the dropout phenomenon, kids not earning credits and their family background. He says many Black males often say "my mom and my dad didn't finish school" and conclude "why do I have to finish a school?" Therefore, there seems to be no true feeling of purpose in finishing school when parents have not presented graduation as a model, according to Whitton.

Whitton says that successful students focus on school and make good selections about the peers they hang around with at school. He thinks unsuccessful students are those who act like class clowns and make fun of others. Whitton implies that such behavior is merely a façade that unsuccessful students present to distract others from recognizing they struggle academically. Whitton's statements reveal peer influence as a strong motivation in high school student behavior.

Well, you could be around, like I said earlier with the click who loves to joke around and pick at other people, which most of the time those be the type of kids who aren't doing so well so they have nothing better to do (uh hmm) so they find something they could do to try to, I guess be over other people since they don't have the brains (uh hmm. Okay).

Whitton accurately identifies several methods for making up credits. His responses make it clear that Whitton has been attentive to guidance provided by school. It is very likely that the information was reiterated by his mother whom he said is very involved and constantly encourages him to do well in school. More than anything, Whitton thinks students must be willing to do better in school. Otherwise, he presumes they are less likely candidates for graduation. He concludes that life's circumstances may become overwhelming ("they could be going through something at the time"), preventing kids from focusing on futuristic goals. Besides that, Whitten says kids might be involved with "maybe selling drugs or using them". Inevitably, factors outside of school possibly impair students' academic achievement.

Robbie

Robbie is a twelfth grade student who moved to this area from North Carolina. He has had to acclimate to the differences in this area. Robbie lives with his grandmother. However, he keeps in close contact with his father, speaking to him on the phone on a regular basis. Robbie has 3 disciplinary referrals this year and had 2 last year, in which one resulted in a five day suspension for fighting in school (Table E-2). Other than those five events, Robbie has no other disciplinary actions chronicled in his school records. Robbie has earned the necessary 21.0 credits by the end of the first semester of his senior year. Also, he has barely met the minimum GPA requirement with an overall 2.07 cum grade point average. Robbie has failed to meet the minimum required score of 300 on both the math and reading sections of the FCAT (Tables E-3). Moreover, Robbie is not involved in extracurricular activities.

Robbie believes money is the primary reason students drop out of school. He says, "I mean in this age people want to look good and an and and believe that they think hustling gonna get them the money faster an that school just slowin 'em down." He attributes high school dropout to African American's desire to get money quickly. Moreover, he believes students who drop out of school do not deem school as progressive, but rather an inhibitor to other goals. Robbie continues by explaining that the preoccupation with money may come from students seeing drug dealers with expensive possessions such as cars and jewelry.

Robbie's personal experience with poor grades seems to set his foundation for the differences between successful and unsuccessful students. He thinks that the work ethic the student exerts exemplifies their level of success. He shared his own lack of hard work (not doing homework) and laziness led to him not doing well. He spent too much time going home and focusing on video games instead. Distractions of various kinds continue to stand out as problematic variables associated with academic achievement. Robbie thinks students need to refocus themselves on school work and build better relationships with teachers by showing them respect.

Like, like nowadays like teachers, talk to teachers like all types of ways like cursin' 'em out and everything (Uh hmm) like just have your manners like how your mamma taught you (uh hmm) and you'll succeed.

Robbie's aforementioned statement about respecting teachers indicates his belief in values being taught at home. Robbie presumes that mothers, especially, teach kids appropriate manners. In addition, his response indicates his value orientation toward respecting adults. Further conversation with Robbie provides his ideas for students getting help to perform well in school. He appreciates teachers who take time to teach

specific things and review until students understand the material. Again, teacher-student relationships are significant.

Because motivating African-American male students is revealed as a necessary component in enhancing academic achievement, responses related to student motivation are significant. In addition to family support, Robbie indicates he is self motivated, as well as motivated by church.

Uh, well now and when I was in middle school aah it's like family (hmm hmm) being real like close to me and stayin' on me and making sure I get my work done (uh hmm. Ok) that's the main factor.

Well if it was like that then I'll, I'm the type of person that I'll find a way (hm hmm) and I'll just motivate myself (hm hmm) like I'll go to church a lot and find the motivation I need.

Conversely to some of the other participants, Robbie's father did not have successful college stories to share. Robbie's dad was a high school dropout. However, he used his experience as a dropout as a non-example for his son. Similar to other interviews, Robbie discussed how his parent encouraged him to succeed by sharing stories. He has helped with essays and scholarship applications, remaining very involved with school although he was not nearby. The impact of his father's involvement has motivated him to succeed in school.

Waldo

Waldo is a freshman. He lives in a two parent household with his mother and father. Waldo has great success academically. In fact, his peers sometimes ask him for assistance/tutorial with school work. After one semester in high school, Waldo has earned a 3.83 GPA and 3.0 credits. Both last year and in this current year, Waldo made above average scores on the math section of the FCAT (Table E-3). Conversely, he

failed to meet minimum achievement level scores in reading and was enrolled in an intensive reading class as a result (Table E-3). Waldo has not yet become involved in extracurricular activities, but loves to draw as a pastime.

Waldo concludes that African-American male students who drop out of high school are most affected by drugs. Furthermore, he believes that those who are involved with drugs have gotten involved because they were. Waldo says, "That, like their friends try to persuade 'em in doin' somethin' they know, they know ain't right and like everything and they think it's cool and then all of sudden they start doin' it". His statement gives the impression that peer pressure is an incredibly strong force in high school and very difficult thing for students to overcome. It has the potential to cause students to walk away from values they hold, even if they are smart kids.

Additionally, Waldo believes poor parenting may affect students' desire to drop out of school along with choosing the wrong crowd to hang out with at school. He said the best crowd to be with if you want to finish school are those kids who finish their work and don't doubt themselves.

He shared that kids who doubt themselves are those that generally say, "the work is too hard for them and they can't do it". Those who make excuses about their ability to complete school work are deemed unsuccessful. Waldo clearly stated his ideas about the differences between successful and unsuccessful students:

Actually, uh well, su-su-successful African Americans they probably do their work, stay on task, follow directions and have a positive attitude while the unsuccessful have a bad attitude towards something, act like they didn't want to do it (uh hmm) because they thought it was too hard and they they said what ever with it and just didn't do anything about it (okay.)

Waldo has not been unsuccessful in school. He admits he has made a below average grade before ("D"), but says he worked to bring it up to and "A". He contributes particular behaviors led to his ongoing success in school: "Following directions, doing

my work, turning it in on time, not getting caught up with the wrong people and having having good study habits, I guess.”. He thinks these behaviors are key components to student success for all kids. He argues that if students want to graduate from school they must learn how to develop relationships with good students, believe they can accomplish things in school, and work hard to achieve academic success.

Waldo discusses the need for a positive attitude throughout school. He thinks kids will do better on tests when they walk into the testing environment with confidence and have been prepared by teachers. He believes teachers impact learning by reviewing materials so students can understand it. Waldo said teachers do the following to impact learning:

the simplest way for students to understand it and like if students don't understand it like they umm, they they tell 'em again like in a more simpler way like t-t-to the student gets it to learn

When asked what he would change about the school day, Waldo said “You. I'd probably add like study groups and like if people, students were having trouble like in math, we could have like someth somebody like a tutor and get 'em all together and like help, like ask 'em what what they don't get (uh hmm) and go over go over it for 'em and they come back e'ryday and say like homework and they sit there and do it wit the person and help 'em out”. He attributes building groups where students come together to help one and receive help would help lead to overall academic success. Again, hanging out with crowds that acknowledge the importance of academics is a key factor for Waldo. He emphasizes the need to boost positive attitudes for African-American male students as it relates to their academic achievement. He concludes his interview by sharing that Black male students should not give up when things get hard. He says

they should not drop out of school. Instead, Waldo thinks they must believe in themselves. He leaves us with this statement, “they shouldn’t dropout or don’t doubt themselves, try hard, keep trying the best they can (uh hmm) and try to succeed instead of dropping out and having a hard time”.

Five of the eight students participated in the study. Those who participated ranged in grades 9-12. Two students were seniors. The lowest grade point average of a participant was 2.07 and the highest GPA was 3.83 on an unweighted scale. Some students were enrolled in intensive reading classes due to poor performance on the FCAT while others were enrolled in honors courses and participated in other college preparatory coursework. The participants’ FCAT Reading scores were all categorized as an Achievement Level 1 or 2, even when they passed the test. None of the participants had above average achievement in the reading section of the state standardized test. Conversely, three of the participants scored above average on the math sections of the FCAT without having to retake the test to meet graduation requirements. Although some students faced some difficulties on the standardized test, each of those interviewed met minimum GPA requirements and were on track with credits for their corresponding grade level. All of the students attended the same school throughout their high school years. Some even attended the 6-12 school during middle school.

Three of the five participants lived in single parent homes. Two were reared by single mothers while others lived in a household with another family member. One student lived in a household with his brother and sister-in-law and the other with both mother and father. One student lived outside the zone and was transported to school

from a much further distance each day. For the most part, all participants lived relatively close to the school and were very familiar with the small community. They each reported their families had great impact on their academic achievement. However, the kids who represented the greatest performance were involved in extracurricular activities.

Those who participated in the study attended school on a regular basis. Each of the participants had six referrals or less throughout their high school career.

Disciplinary referrals were classified as tardy, classroom disruptions, minor violations, defiance, and one was logged as fighting (serious mutual altercation). The one referral for fighting resulted in a five day suspension from school. One of the referrals for defiance resulted in a 2 day suspension from school. There were no other suspensions for students who participated in the study. When students received other referrals they either were reprimanded, participated in a conference or were assigned In-School Detention (ISD).

APPENDIX E
DESCRIPTIVE DATA REGARDING PILOT STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Discipline and Academic Achievement Levels

Table E-1. Number of disciplinary referrals received by pilot study participants (2004-2008)

Type of referral	Number of incidents
Classroom Disruption	8
Defiance	5
Fighting	1
Other Violations - Minor	1
Tardy	4

Table E-2. Disciplinary action taken as a result of participants' referrals (2004-2008)

Participant name (pseudonym) and grade level classification	Number of referrals received	*Number of in-school disciplinary actions taken	Number of out of school suspensions (# of days)	Total number of days student was out of class due to referral
Waldo (freshman)	0	0	0	0
Renard (sophomore)	6	6	0	6
Jamal (junior)	5	4	1 (2days)	6
Robbie (senior)	5	4	1 (5 days)	9
Whitton (senior)	3	3	0	3
Total	19	17	2 (7days)	24

*In-school disciplinary actions include student conferences (1), reprimands (1) and in-school detention (15)

Table E-3. FCAT scores & achievement levels for pilot study participants: (06-07 vs. 07-08)

Participant name (pseudonym) and grade level classification	Reading score (2006-2007) - achievement level	Reading score (2007-2008) - achievement level	Math score (2006-2007) - achievement level	Math score (2007-2008) - achievement level
Waldo (freshman)	271 - 2	298 - 2	346 - 3	312 - 3
Renard (sophomore)	301 - 2	284 - 1	326 - 3	321 - 3
Jamal (junior)	266 - 1	318 - 2	333 - 3	*
Robbie (senior)	267 - 1	268 - 1	278 - 1	278 - 1
Whitton (senior)	234 - 1	242 - 1	312 - 2	*

*already passed math section of FCAT, meeting graduation requirement and exempting from test

APPENDIX F
SUMMARY OF RESULTS FROM PILOT STUDY INTERVIEWS

Results Implicating Need for Further Research:

Connections Between High School Dropout and African-American Males

Participants in the pilot study shared similar concerns about connections African-American male students have with the phenomenon of dropping out of high school. Three participants, named by the researcher as Renard, Jamal and Robbie, believe many students are overly concerned with making money. Renard said poor families may actually encourage their children to work to help support the family while Jamal and Robbie think the influence comes from greed. In fact, Robbie remarked that hustling to make money may help kids portray a better image. Participants agreed that some kids cannot wait to legitimately make money, but may be enticed by the drug culture to earn money early. Poor students may be more heavily influenced by desires to earn money, help families, or connect to others in their neighborhood even if connected by illegal means.

Waldo concurs with Jamal and Robbie. He feels the drug culture has stimulated poor decision making by peers. He thinks peer influence causes kids to get involved with drugs, often by selling them. Jamal makes mention of peer pressure influencing students negatively too. Furthermore, participants' responses about lack of family guidance and modeling lead to lack of encouragement for African-American male students. The lack of encouragement may be correlated with similar concerns participants shared about students' lack of confidence and motivation. Waldo believes many dropouts doubt themselves, while Jamal insists they may not envision themselves in college prompting them to work less diligently in secondary courses. African-

American males may be connected to dropout as a result of falling too far behind in school, not being encouraged, or being preoccupied with extraneous variables, according to participant responses.

Factors Leading to High School Dropout

Participants in the pilot study reported drugs, teenage pregnancy, low self-confidence, and poor school performance lead to higher rates of dropout among African-American male students. Renard and Whitton think guys may get someone pregnant and leave school because of uncertainties tied to the pregnancy. Two of the five participants discussed low grades and failing classes as reasons to leave school. As previously mentioned, participants share beliefs about drugs, perceiving it as one of the leading factors in high school dropout among African-American males. Again, peer influence and low self-confidence were acknowledged as primary factors contributing to students leaving school.

Differences Between Successful and Unsuccessful Students

Overwhelmingly, the participants agreed that successful students are those who are dedicated to working hard. They agreed that those who possess self-confidence and present a good work ethic are most likely to do well in school. Responses indicated the need to complete homework, prepare for tests, stay on task, create good study habits and follow directions. It was stated that laziness, lack of attention, poor attitude, and constant joking inhibit students from finding success in the classroom. Participants discussed the need for students to find peers that have similar interests in succeeding if they want to graduate. Poor choice in peer groups could cause students to lose focus and become disinterested in meeting the requirements for graduation.

Four of five participants made mention of hard work being a major contributor to their personal success in school. Some talked about their ability to stay away from the wrong crowd, those not interested in performing well in school. However, more participants agreed that family greatly impacted their personal performance. Some were influenced by stories of success or seeing their family members do well in college. Others feel they were motivated by strict rules and encouraging words. One student even discussed how his father's failure to complete school was the non-example needed to motivate him. His father's words of encouragement to strive for more helped him to remain focused on graduating. Student participants reflected strong belief in family support and encouragement being a foundation for setting academic goals and remaining focused until they are achieved. The participants in the study did not experience extended periods of academic failure. They attribute their constant academic success to exhibiting the characteristics of a successful student.

Getting Black Male Students Back On Track for Graduation

The most discussed option for helping students get on track is to help them get focused. Participants seem to attribute good grades in school as confidence boosters, thereby indicating the need for teachers to help kids understand the information being taught. Some responses allude to the idea that some curricular ideas are challenging and academic support is not offered, but such conclusions are merely an observation on the part of the observer.

Participants place much of the burden of getting on track on the students themselves. One report includes the need for kids to start working harder and stop being so fascinated with their peer group and other outside distractions. Suggestions

by one participant indicated that students need to pay attention in class and take time to check their grades and ask for tutoring if needed. Although personal problems are indicated as distractions from academics, one participant says other options are available to students to make up missing credits and get help outside of class (i.e. college program and district credit retrieval program). However, the participant says the student must be willing to get help.

Student Performance on Exams/Standardized Tests

Most participants made strong statements about coming in mentally prepared to take the test by believing that they could pass it. They talked about how nervousness and feelings of being inept will cause students to not do well. Responses suggest the need for students taking exams seriously and advocate for studying beforehand, getting plenty of rest and eating a good breakfast on the day of the test. Most of all, it becomes evident when reviewing the data that students feel that Black males should not put too much pressure on themselves. Instead, they should enter exams academically prepared and mentally fit. Possessing a good attitude seems to be their number one suggestions for good student performance.

Teachers' Impact On Learning

Two primary concerns were raised by participants concerning the impact that teachers have on learning, relationships with students and providing information in a manner that students can understand it. A couple of participants talked about student-teacher relationships. At least one participant conveyed that the overuse of authority by teachers minimizes the relationships with students. Similarly, participant interviews revealed that students must also give teachers well-deserved respect. Communication

between teachers and students is highlighted as an impactful factor in student learning. Additionally, the manner in which the instruction is given has great implications for learning according to this study.

Participants shared that many of the students need information broken down into pieces and often repeated until concepts are understood. Participants shared that teachers who take time to make information clear are appreciated by students in their classes. One participant explains that merely standing at the board or sitting behind the desk does not help students understand curriculum. Participants want teachers to provide exemplary instruction that helps them attain knowledge. Otherwise, participants seem to be satisfied with their school.

Changes Needed in School

When asked what they would change about their school day, one participant indicated he would improve relationships with teachers so students would not be afraid of asking questions and another participant talked about creating study groups to improve academic achievement. The only other factors mentioned were lighthearted statements about a cleaner school and better lunches. Relationships supporting curricular advancements were discussed in greater detail.

APPENDIX G
OPT-OUT FORM FOR SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

*Student Assent and Parental information
Opt-out form*

Protocol Title: African-American Student Voices About Why Black Boys Drop Out of Secondary Schools

Date of Proposed Research:

**There will be at least a week between the time the assent/information forms goes out to parents, and the time the surveys first start being implemented.*

Please read this document carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: To understand African American male students' perceptions and attitudes toward the dropout phenomena and their beliefs about experiences that may limit motivation toward academic success. The results will provide information for future curriculum design and educational practices for at-risk Black males.

What will you be asked to do in this study: You will be asked to answer approximately forty questions about why Black males drop out of school. The questions relate to demographics, teachers, school curriculum, family and personal experience.

Time Required: 20-30 minutes

Risks and benefits: The benefit of this research is to describe and understand the perspectives of various key factors in the dropout phenomena of Black male students and to predict possible outcomes for future students enrolling in secondary school. Results will direct implementation of strategies for academic success. No more than minimal risk anticipated. There are no direct benefits to you as a participant.

Compensation: There is no compensation for participating in this research.

Confidentiality: Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by the law. Your interviews will be coded with alphanumeric codes (combined letters and numbers used instead of names in order to keep students' names, e-mails, and/or other identifiers anonymous). After the study is complete and the data has been analyzed, it is possible that the final results of this study will be presented in educational conferences and may even be published.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. There is no penalty for not participating.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Whom to contact if you have questions about the study:

Whom to contact about your rights as a research participant in the study:

Agreement:

**No signatures are necessary for participation due to the lack risk to students already enrolled in SBAC schools. However, if you do not want your child to participate, please sign below agreeing to the following statement: I have read the procedure described above and have received a copy of this description, but do not agree to participate in the procedure. Students 18 or older may refuse consent independently.*

Participant: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX H
SURVEY INSTRUMENT



STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL... Student Voice Survey

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS ABOUT DROPPING OUT OF SCHOOL...Student Voice Survey



DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Question 1

How old are you?

- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22

Question 2

What is your grade level?

- 6th grade
- 7th grade
- 8th grade
- 9th grade
- 10th grade
- 11th grade
- 12th grade

Question 3

What is your unweighted Grade Point Average (GPA)?

- 4.0 and above (A)
- 3.50 - 3.99 (B+)
- 3.00 - 3.49 (B)
- 2.50 - 2.99 (C+)
- 2.00 - 2.49 (C)
- 1.50 - 1.99 (D+)
- 1.00 - 1.49 (D)
- Below 1.00 (F)
- I don't know.

Question 4

I live with...

- Mother and Father
- Mother and her significant other (boyfriend or girlfriend)
- Single Mom
- Single Dad
- Father and his significant other
- Grandparent(s)
- Other relative (i.e., aunt, uncle, sister, brother, etc.)
- Foster parent(s)
- Other

Question 5

What is the highest level of education your mother completed?

- Graduated from university (BA or higher)
- Graduated from community college (AA)
- Completed some college, but did not finish
- Graduated high school
- Dropped out of high school
- I don't know.

Question 6

What is the highest level of education your father completed?

- Graduated from university (BA or higher)
- Graduated from community college (AA)
- Completed some college, but did not finish
- Graduated high school
- Dropped out of high school
- I don't know.

Question 7

Extracurricular...I participate in the following activities...
Please click each activity you participate in (check all that apply).

- I do not participate in extracurricular activities.
- Band
- Baseball
- Basketball
- Football
- Golf
- School Club
- Soccer
- Service Learning/Volunteer
- Student Government
- Swimming
- Tennis
- Track and Field
- Volleyball
- Wrestling
- Weightlifting
- Other, please specify

TEACHERS

Question 8

Black males drop out of school because teachers do NOT encourage them to work hard.

- Strongly Agree** **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
- 1 2 3 4 5

Question 9

Black males drop out of school because teachers do NOT care about them.

- Strongly Agree** **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
- 1 2 3 4 5

Question 10

Black males drop out of school because they do NOT feel comfortable talking to teachers about problems related to school.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 11

Black males drop out of school because they are uncomfortable talking to teachers about their personal problems.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 12

Black males drop out of school because teachers are unfair.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

SCHOOL/CURRICULUM

Question 13

Black males drop out of school because classes are NOT interesting.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 14

Black males drop out of school because classes are too large (too many students) to learn.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 15

Black males drop out of school because they are failing classes.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 16

Black males drop out of school because classes are too hard.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 17

Black males drop out of school because they do not get tutoring assistance (extra help) with school work.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 18

Black males drop out of school because of too many behavioral disruptions during class/not enough classroom discipline.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 19

Black males drop out of school because they miss too many days from school.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 20

Black males drop out of school because their friends are not interested in school.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 21

Black males drop out of school because their classes are NOT relevant to their culture (classes do not relate to African American history, lifestyle, or current experiences).

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 22

Black males drop out of school because they do NOT feel safe at school.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

FAMILY

Question 23

Black males drop out of school because they would rather work to earn money than go to school.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 24

Black males drop out of school because their parents/guardians do NOT contact the school.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 25

Black males drop out of school because their parents/guardians need them to work to help support the family.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 26

Black males drop out of school because education is NOT important to their family.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 27

Black males drop out of school because their family does NOT talk about the importance of finishing school.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Question 28

Black males drop out of school because they do NOT believe school will help them get a good job.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 29

Black males drop out of school because they are NOT motivated to finish school.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 30

Black males drop out of school because they are culturally different (they are a minority).

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 31

Black males drop out of school because of drugs.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 32

Black males drop out of school because they are being bullied.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 33

Black males drop out of school because they got a young lady pregnant/will be a father.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 34

Black males drop out of school because of a family tragedy.

Strongly Agree **A g r e e** **Neither Agree nor Disagree** **D i s a g r e e** **Strongly Disagree**
 1 2 3 4 5

Question 35

Black males drop out of school because they are part of a gang.

Strongly Agree A g r e e Neither Agree nor Disagree D i s a g r e e Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5

Question 36

Black males drop out of school because they do NOT put forth their best effort in school.

Strongly Agree A g r e e Neither Agree nor Disagree D i s a g r e e Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5

Question 37

Black males drop out of school because they are lazy.

Strongly Agree A g r e e Neither Agree nor Disagree D i s a g r e e Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5

Question 38

Black males drop out of school because they are NOT involved in extracurricular activities.

Strongly Agree A g r e e Neither Agree nor Disagree D i s a g r e e Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5

Question 39

Black males drop out of school because they do not know why school is important.

Strongly Agree A g r e e Neither Agree nor Disagree D i s a g r e e Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5

Question 40

Please rank how important you think school is for Black male students that decide to drop out.

Extremely Important 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 Does not matter at all

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Question 41

What makes Black male students want to stay in school?

.....

.....

.....

Question 42

Why do YOU think Black male students drop out of school?

.....

.....

.....

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Anntwanique DeVonne Edwards was born in New Haven, Connecticut. She is the daughter of Beverly and Jeffrey Edwards and the eldest of three children. She moved to Florida after graduating from West Haven High School in 1990. In the fall of that same year she began studies at the University of Florida where she has attained several degrees, including an Associates of Arts (A.A.), Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in sociology, Master of Education (M.Ed.) and Education Specialist (Ed.S.) in counselor education with a specialization in mental health counseling, and a second M.Ed. in educational leadership. Anntwanique's passion for helping youth and professional work with the School Board of Alachua County have been the foundation for her continued education at the University of Florida in the Department of Educational Administration and Policy. An opportunity to earn a Ph.D. in educational leadership, specializing in elementary and secondary education, has been her much desired goal.

Anntwanique Edwards has worked in the field of counseling and education for approximately twenty years combined. Her career has been characterized by positions in mental health, drug counseling, school and guidance counseling, juvenile justice program coordinator, and school administrator. She is currently the assistant principal of Mebane Middle School. Her resume indicates strong service in ministry while balancing work and school. It further acknowledges that she became a licensed missionary/evangelist for the Church of God in Christ (COGIC). In addition, she founded Generation, COGIC, where she served as the pastor from August 2003 through May 2008. Furthermore, she self-published her first book entitled, "Daddy, Where Are You?" and founded a non-profit organization named Divine Ministry, Inc., in

2005. Anntwanique has the spirit of an entrepreneur and envisions creating business plans that will positively impact youth in multiple communities.

Divine Ministry is recognized as a charitable organization that grants scholarships, promotes education, and facilitates various services for spiritual growth. Additionally, her book has afforded her the opportunity to do mission work internationally and preach in other nations. Her international travel includes Botswana, Africa (April-May 2007) and Montego Bay/Kingston, Jamaica (July 2007). Anntwanique has consistently ministered in numerous cities in her home state (Florida), as well as in North Carolina and Maryland. She also served as a writer for MannaScript, a new Christian magazine (www.mannascript.com), as well as Sister Space (www.sistersspace.com), and she continues to invest in a wealth of other projects and organizations.

Anntwanique Edwards has devoted immeasurable time to her community and serves as a wonderful role model for young people. As you can tell her life of "school, work, and church" have kept her very busy. Upon completion of her Ph.D. Program, Anntwanique will be continuing in her administrative role at a public school, devoting time to her charitable organization and writing her second book.