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# African American Male Students' Perceptions of Factors That Contribute to Their Academic Success

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# AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

by

GERTRUDE ROLLAND

(Under the Direction of Cordelia Zinskie)

## ABSTRACT

This study sought to understand African American high school males' perceptions of factors contributing to academic success. The researcher gathered information by interviewing students and collecting their demographic profile data. This qualitative research method enabled the researcher to learn directly from students what factors African American male students associated with academic success as well as challenges to academic success and solutions for achieving academic success. Participants were three junior and three senior African American high school male students attending a rural high school in Georgia. Data collection occurred during the spring semester of 2011. Each participant was asked 16 questions to determine his perspectives on factors contributing to academic success and what solutions and challenges he perceived necessary for African American males to achieve academic success.

Among factors influencing student success were: (a) supportive parents, (b) caring teachers, (c) positive school environment, (d) peer support, and (e) community initiatives. Data suggested that to support the academic success of African American male students more African American male teachers and mentors are needed in schools. In addition, African American males desired for educators to understand their cultural background and avoid labeling them. Some challenges perceived by participants

included: (a) lack of after school community activities, (b) negative stereotypes, (c) lack of self-initiative, (d) negative images, and (e) lack of belief in self.

Among solutions cited were: (a) self-motivation, (b) role-models, and (c) mentors. Overall, participants had a need to feel cared about, understood, and supported. Findings from this research study can assist in the development of teacher education programs, school-based interventions and community programs for African American male adolescents. This research study is an attempt to provide additive information within the educational literature.

**INDEX WORDS:** Academic achievement, Academic success, Black males, African American males, Solutions for academic success, High school, Factors, Challenges for academic success

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by

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Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my mother who passed away August 26, 2007. I thank her for her belief in me and making me believe in myself. Although, she did not survive to see me complete my journey, I know she is watching over me and smiling for a job well done. Without her early encouragement during my educational journey, this task would have been impossible. When the road became a little rough, it is her voice and the sincerity in her eyes I remembered telling me to press on. Thanks for your encouragement.

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## Chapter 1

A major objective of a school system is to provide all students with a quality education to sustain them in school and life (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). Decades following the United States Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, academic success remains a challenge in public education for African American students (Bali & Alvarez, 2004; Ferguson & Mehta, 2004; Frankenberg, Lee & Orfield, 2003; Lee, Olszewski-Kubilius, & Peternel, 2009; Orfield & Lee, 2004; Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008). Many scholars indicate the educational system should shoulder part of the blame for this dilemma (Ferguson & Mehta, 2004; Haycock, 2005; Woodson, 1990).

Although some progress has been achieved with policy fundamentals centered on resources, accountability, and required standardized testing for students, academic success for all students has not been attained fully (Budge, 2010; Ferguson & Mehta, 2004; Hedges & Nowell, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 2006). However, some researchers suggested that with the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and adequate yearly progress (AYP) accountability measures, increased attention has been focused on improving the success rate for all students, especially African American male students (Ladson-Billings, 2006; McMillian, 2003; Powers, 2004).

### Role of Educators in Today's Diverse Schools

The roles of principals, superintendents, and other educational leaders have widened to include a larger focus on teaching and learning, professional development, data-driven decision making, and accountability. With the spotlight on student learning, instructional leadership could be defined as what leaders do in schools and districts to improve student learning (Institute for

Educational Leadership, 2000). Administrators are expected to lead schools in a way to show great improvements quickly, with fewer resources at their disposal. Leaders are expected to motivate teachers, create a safe and inviting environment for learning, and encourage parent groups and business partners to become active participants in the school system. Leaders are challenged to lead and teach simultaneously (King, 2002).

Instructional leaders must function in an environment that is constantly changing. The student population at all levels, whether it is at the K-12, community college, or university level, has become progressively more diverse since the 1990s (Roach, 2009). According to 2000 census report, 33.6% of Black males in the United States were under age 18, compared to 25.4% of Asian males and 34.9% of Hispanic males (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). Hobbs and Stoops (2002) reported a steady increase in African American population throughout the 20th century from 8.8 million in 1900 to 34.7 million in 2000. Reports from the 2009 census estimates show that Black males under the age of 18 account for 32.2% of total civilians that are not institutionalized. In addition, according to the 2010 census report, African Americans account for 30.5% of Georgia's total population, representing an increase of 25.6% since the 2000 census count.

As educators in public schools struggle to provide instruction for increasingly diverse populations in schools, administrators and teachers must take an aggressive role in addressing school conditions that result in low academic success among African American students. Administrators and teachers must equip them with the skills necessary to make the best of what their schools have to offer (Braun, Wang, Jenkins, & Weinbaum, 2006; Klauke, 1989). School officials must become aware and acknowledge the importance of meeting the educational needs of diverse student backgrounds (Klauke, 1989).

Educators' attitudes, behaviors, and expectations play a vital role in enhancing African American students' educational development (Byrd & Chavous, 2009). Lee and Burkam (2003) conducted a study of 3,840 students in 190 urban and suburban high schools. The researchers found that race/ethnicity was associated with dropping out of school, with Black students more likely to drop out (22.6%) compared to Hispanic (13.7%), and Asian (0.7%). Furthermore, students stay in school when social relations with teachers and administrators are positive. Sullivan (2002), in examining the academic achievement of African American high school males, found that nurturing, intelligent teachers, strong administrative leadership, and strong bonds between parents, school, and community offered the greatest impact on the academic attainment for African American males.

### **No Child Left Behind and African American Achievement in Georgia**

The Georgia Department of Education (2009) is working to comply with the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002) and accept the challenge of improving the educational environment of its students. Achieving academic excellence and closing the achievement gap in Georgia continues to be a major focus for education in the state. According to the 2008-2009 Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) report, African American students underachieved on the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT). For example, only 64.4% of African-American students met or exceeded the objectives for the Enhanced Math section of the GHSGT compared to 87.9% of White students. AYP results for the 2008-2009 school year indicated that African-American students performed better on the Enhanced English Language Arts section of the GHSGT, with 88.2% of African-American students meeting or exceeding minimum performance rates; however, this rate was

still lower than the percentage (95.4%) of White students meeting or exceeding objectives on the same test (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

The Schott Foundation for Public Education (2008) reported that in Georgia only 40% of Black males graduated with peers during the 2005-2006 school year, fewer than the national average of 47% for 2005-2006. During school year 2009, the Georgia high school graduation rate for African American students was lower than that of White students. The graduation rate for this reporting period indicated that 74.1% of African-American students received a regular diploma, while 82.7% of White students graduated with a regular diploma (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

Although most African American students understand the importance of graduating high school, many continue to experience poor school achievement and high rates of dropout (Barton, 2003; Holzman, 2006; Jordan & Cooper, 2003). A report from the Georgia Department of Education (2010) showed that during 2007-2008, the number of African Americans retained from grades K through 12 was 33,723 or 51.3%. Additionally, a report from the Georgia Department of Education (2010) showed the percentage of African Americans from grades 9 through 12 who dropped out of school was higher than White peers. During 2006-2007 school year, there was a .3% difference in the dropout rate between African American males and White peers in Georgia. A report from the Georgia Department of Education (2010) showed that by 2008-2009 school year, this difference had grown to 1.5%. The dropout rate of African Americans in Georgia increased to 4.7%, while the dropout rate for Whites dropped to 3.2%. Table 1 shows the dropout rates and graduation rates for African American students from 2006-2007 to 2008-2009 (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).



Table 1

*Dropout Rates/Graduation Rates by Race*

Indicators	<u>2006-2007</u>		<u>2007-2008</u>		<u>2008-2009</u>	
	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites	Blacks	Whites
Dropout Rates	4.3%	4.0%	4.0%	3.4%	4.7%	3.2%
Graduation Rates	65.5%	77.5%	69.2%	80.2%	74.1%	82.7%

**Disconnected African American Males**

The low graduation and high dropout rates of African American males can be attributed to their early experiences. They begin school with numerous literacy experiences from home and church; however, by the time they reach fourth grade they are among the lowest achievers in the school setting. It has been repeatedly documented in the literature that African American male students are failing in their academic endeavors and becoming disconnected from mainstream society (Braun et al., 2006; Ferguson, 2002; Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001; Stewart, 2008). Evidence suggested that African American males are disconnected with school as early as kindergarten and continue to be disconnected as they progress through school (Carter, 2003). The low academic success of African American students, especially males, has been a concern as the number of minority children in school have increased and their academic performance has decreased (Edwards & McMillon, 2000). The school is considered the place African American males develop their identity. Black males develop an identity of who they are, what they are to

do, and how they are perceived by others. These identities are shaped by their experiences with the church, family, community, media, and school (Davis, 2003).

Previous literature referred to the experiences of African American male students as a generation of disconnected youth who, without adequate education, are susceptible to involvement in the criminal justice system and its policy of mass incarceration (Benjamin, 2006). A report by the United States Government Accountability Office (2008) described disconnected African American male students:

While most youths successfully transition to adulthood, many youths become disconnected from school and work, or social supports, and experience challenges in making this transition. Some of these youths are more likely than others to remain low-income, to lose jobs during economic downturns, and to engage in criminal activities, antisocial behavior, and teenage parenting. (p. 5)

Some African American male students are more likely to be members of this disconnected group than others because of a lack of academic success, which denies African American male students the ability to navigate in a culturally biased environment (Cooper & Jordan, 2003; Jordan & Cooper, 2003). This student population often fails to see the connection between academic success and adult career success due to impoverished environments and surroundings (Boyd, 2007; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Jordan & Cooper, 2002). Western, Kleykamp, and Rosenfeld (2006) found that poorly educated African American men were becoming disconnected from mainstream society due to declining job opportunities, low earnings, and higher risks of incarceration. Findings from the study showed that approximately 16% of males ages 20 to 39 who were high school dropouts would enter prison each year by

2001. These males are often looked upon as members of a culturally deprived and dysfunctional part of society (Somers et al., 2008; Western et al., 2006).

Furthermore, the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reported the percentage of African Americans (13%) who were status dropouts was higher than the 8% for Whites. Dropouts have lower earnings, contribute little to the tax revenues of federal and state governments and receive a flow of cash from the government that is greater than their lifetime tax contributions (Levernier, 2003). According to the U. S. Department of Education (2000), high school dropouts are likely to be unemployed, and when they eventually secure a job, they earn less money than a high school graduate. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2008, median weekly full-time earnings for African American men stood at 75% of the median earnings for White men. In addition, African Americans classified as out-of-school youths had an unemployment rate of 23.7% in October 2008, compared with 12.4% for their White peers (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009a). The consequences related to leaving school early tended to be more severe among students of color, especially African-American and Latino students (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009a).

Educators' perspectives on academic success are different from students' understanding of achievement and what is necessary for navigating success (Wiggin, 2007). This difference often encourages African American students to walk away from their education, their hopes, and their dreams. Many students do not perceive the educational and social systems as places to advance. Others do not inquire about the challenges to or solutions for personal dilemmas (Gamoran, 2001; Wiggin, 2007). Subsequently, the youths become disconnected from school and society.

Some African American males give the impression that they have little or no interest in academic success and progressing toward graduating from school. Some researchers classify

African American students as having disengaged from the education process (Ogbu, 1991). However, other researchers have concluded that most African American students do have hopes and dreams of high achievement and desire to do well academically (Conchas & Clark, 2002; Noguera, 2001, 2003). African American male students need mentors, educators, and administrators to encourage and promote academic progress and success (Freeman, 1999; Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). Therefore, rather than evaluating the educational system, research suggested that the focus of school staff members is often on the student and how the student must change in order to align with the culture of the school instead of finding ways for the school to adapt to the culture of the students (Carter, 2003; Noguera, 2003).

Hence, the responsibility of educators in school systems and policy makers in the business and government sectors should be to understand factors affecting academic success for African American male adolescents and to reduce the rate at which this population of learners drops out of school (Western et al., 2006). According to statistics, African American males have low educational attainment levels, and are more highly unemployed than males of other racial/ethnic groups (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009a).

Lee (1991) revealed that frustration, underachievement or ultimate failures often comprise the contemporary educational reality for scores of African American male youths. African American males from early childhood through high school tend to experience significant isolation in schools of America. The consequences of this isolation are major limitations on socioeconomic mobility, ultimately leading to high rates of unemployment, crime, and incarceration for massive numbers of young African American men. Lee's findings supported the theory that there is a high correlation between African American males' experiences at school and their economic conditions during adulthood.

### **Statement of Problem**

Completion of high school has a direct effect on the direction a student is able to take in society after leaving school. Therefore, the challenge for the educational system is to determine the best way to improve the academic success of all students. Understanding and knowledge concerning student achievement have grown considerably over the years and research and theories have been presented on improving academic achievement (Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Haycock, 2001; Heck, 2000).

Improving academic success among African American students is a concern on the national, state, and local levels. It is vital for educators in the schools of the nation to increase academic success among African American students because education not only impacts dropout rates, which eventually impacts the economics and welfare of communities, but it increases life chances for African American students. Policy, such as the NCLB Act (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002), requires school districts to address low academic achievement; however, low academic achievement continues to exist. One of the solutions to low academic success is informed leadership for the 21st century.

Few studies have documented African American male students' perception of their academic success, even though the perceptions of African American students are critical in helping educators further understand why African American male students continue to be underachievers in academics. School leaders must be aware of how culture and climate in schools, cultural diversity, parental involvement, poor curriculum, role of principal, students' relationship with teachers, and changing demographics impact the success of African American male students. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to explore African American male students' perceptions of factors contributing to their academic success.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question guiding this study was: What factors do African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success?

The sub-questions that assisted in the research were:

1. What does academic success mean to African American male students?
2. What roles do peers, parents and educators play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
3. What role does school environment play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
4. What are some challenges and solutions for accomplishing academic success?

### **Significance of Study**

The provision of the NCLB Act (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 2002) mandated that educators in schools improve the academic performance of their students. The low performance of African American male students is reason for educators to be concerned with seeking instructional methods and strategies to reach groups of students who are performing below average. Numerous studies have addressed low academic success, but few have documented African American male students' perceptions of factors contributing to their achievement or underachievement in Georgia. This study is significant to the educational profession because it addresses academic success through the eyes of African American male students in hope of finding answers to factors contributing to their academic success as well as challenges to and possible solutions for improving academic success. Findings from this study could provide educational administrators, including building principals, and superintendents, as well as administrators in Colleges of Education, leadership preparation programs the opportunity to

collaborate on how to work with, and best support the academic development of African American male students. African American students can affect the African American community by obtaining a quality education and contributing to the community in which they live. In addition, findings from this study will begin to address a noted gap in the professional literature.

This research is significant to the researcher because, as an educator, the researcher has observed low academic results and high dropout rates of African American male students. This research provides an opportunity to gather first-hand knowledge, data and understanding from African American male students about their perceptions of academic success; each of which will enable the researcher, personally, to be more effective in the future.

### **Procedures**

A qualitative research design was used to gather information from African American male high school student participants about their perceptions of factors contributing to their academic success. In this qualitative research, semi-structured interviews and demographic profiles were used as data collection methods. One retired elementary teacher and one retired high school librarian evaluated interview questions. Parental consent forms and minor assent forms were obtained prior to conducting interviews. The researcher performed a pilot study to test the research questions. The analysis of the data in the research study included transcribing the audio taped interviews to find common themes and patterns throughout all the interview responses.

### **Limitation**

Since this research involved a select group of African American male students at a Georgia high school, no generalizations can be made to all African American male students at Georgia's high schools.

### **Delimitation**

The researcher has delimited the data collection process to interviewing three African American male junior and three African American male senior high school students in Georgia and included data from self-reported demographic profile sheets.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Academic achievement.** Academic achievement is defined as a student's attainment of a certain level of competence after completing a particular phase of education, whether it is a classroom unit or 12 years of schooling (Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001).

**Academic success.** Academic success is the measurement used to associate positive outcomes assessed for students. To be successful in academics means to take charge of learning by working hard at academic courses in middle school and high school while preparing for higher education (Rentner & Kober, 2001).

**African American.** African American is used to identify American students whose parents are of African descent.

**Annual yearly progress (AYP).** AYP is a series of performance goals set by the state for each school district and school, as well as for the state as a whole. AYP refers to the minimum levels of improvement set by each state, based on student performance on state standardized tests, those school districts and schools must achieve within time frames specified in law in order to meet the 100% proficiency goal.

**Disconnected youth.** Disconnected youth refer to those students who do not make a successful transition into adulthood by becoming self-sufficient through education and employment.

**Dropout.** A dropout is a student who left school before earning a high school diploma.



**Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHSGT).** The GHSGT is an assessment used to determine a student's eligibility for graduating from a Georgia high school.

**Graduation rate.** Graduation rate is the percentage of students who received a high school diploma after completing Grade 12.

**High achieving students.** High achieving students are students who meet or exceed the requirements for student performance and achievement based upon the standards set by the Georgia Performance Standards Commission.

**High-minority schools.** High-minority schools are schools in which 75% or more of their enrollments are minority students (U. S. Department of Education, 2000).

**High performing schools.** High performing schools are schools whose students meet or exceed the requirements for student performance and achievement based upon the standards set by the Georgia Performance Standards Commission.

**High poverty schools.** High poverty schools are schools in which 75% or more of students are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch program (U. S. Department of Education, 2000).

**Low achieving students.** Low achieving students are students who do not meet or exceed the requirements for student performance and achievement based upon the standards set by the Georgia Performance Standards Commission

**Low minority schools.** Low minority schools are schools with a minority enrollment of less than 10% (U. S. Department of Education, 2000).

**Low performing schools.** Low performing schools are schools in which their students do not meet the requirements for student performance and achievement based upon the standards set by the Georgia Performance Standards Commission.

**Skills needed for success.** Skills needed for success include: teamwork, problem solving, interpersonal skills, oral communication, listening, personal career development, creative thinking, leadership, goal setting/motivations, writing, organizational effectiveness, computation, and reading (Ryan, 1999).

**Successful student.** Successful students are those who expect to succeed, are goal oriented, intrinsically motivated, and are able to balance effectively the social and academic aspects of the school environment (Scheuermann, 2000).

**Teacher certification.** Teacher certification refers to the issuance of a certificate or document to a teacher verifying that specific academic or professional standards have been met.

### **Summary**

Researchers have documented low academic performance of African American students as a critical issue in American education. Data collected from the Georgia report card during the period 2006-2009 indicated African American students continued to have lower high school graduation rates and higher dropout rates than their White peers. The consequences for low academic performance for African American males are disconnection from school, work, and possible involvement with the criminal arena. Educators should understand African American male students' perception of factors contributing to their academic success as an effort to begin to understand how school systems can intervene to effectively assist African American male students who are struggling academically.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Review of Literature**

The purpose of this study is to collect, analyze, and report African American male students' perceptions of factors that contribute to their academic success. In the review of literature, historical events affecting African American education in the South are first examined. Next, the importance of academic success for African American males and factors contributing to African American males' academic success will be explored. Finally, the researcher will investigate the literature to discuss differential treatment of African American males, African American male students' perceptions about the quality of instruction they receive, solutions they believe to be necessary for improving school success, and programs that have aided in the academic success of African American male students.

#### **Historical Perspective of African American Education in the South**

In the south, following the Civil War, the educational plight for African Americans was one of long suffering and agony as they struggled for freedom, social equality, and the right to an equal education. Education for slaves was forbidden because of fear of slavery uprisings and desertions of field workers. Between 1800 and 1835, most southern states made it illegal to teach African American slave children to read or write (Anderson, 1988). Southerners rejected universal schooling for rural African Americans because it might raise the aspirations of African Americans and ruin them as plantation laborers (Anderson, 1988). Most southern plantation owners strongly believed that if African Americans became educated, the institution of slavery would become nonexistent (Wright, 1977).

The American Civil War, as reported by Ratteray (1992), resulted in over 3 million enslaved African Americans gaining their independence. This was the beginning of a new phase

for the freed people; however, “they were, for the most part, illiterate and without the basic skills needed to support themselves” (pp. 138-139). The freed people sought to improve their social status by deciding first and foremost that their people needed an education. Many African Americans took great interest in learning and sought ways to educate themselves (Anderson, 1988; Patton, 1980).

Black southerners entered emancipation with an alternative culture, a history that they could draw upon, one that contained enduring beliefs in learning and self-improvement. They convinced their compatriots that a perceived common interest in literacy and schooling did not depend for its existence upon dominate-class culture (Anderson, 1988, p. 281).

The ex-slaves took immediate interest in expressing their desire for an education. The dominant group who once looked upon African Americans in a negative way was forced to recognize the deep commitment to education of African Americans (Anderson, 1988). In the reality of the aftermath of slavery, many African Americans gained physical freedom but realized that they had not gained civil, political, and economic freedom to truly be considered American human beings. Having their rights denied allowed for mental bondage. African Americans were caught in a web of “vagrancy laws to hold Black labour to the land, and an apartheid public policy to assure White dominance and a persistent shaming of the under-race” (Wyatt-Brown, 2006, p. 26). Robinson (2000) noted this systematic demoralization of African Americans:

No nation can enslave a race of people for hundreds of years, set them free bedraggled and penniless, pit them, without assistance in a hostile environment, against privileged

victimizers, and then reasonable expect the gap between the heirs of the two groups to narrow. Lines, begun parallel and left alone, can never touch. (p. 74)

Kunjufu (1988) noted, “Mental slavery is more sophisticated, because when the chains are removed from the ankles and wrists and placed around the mind, it becomes more difficult for the oppressed to recognize the source of their plight” (p. 12). It is no coincidence that African Americans were made to feel inferior in mental ability and economic development long after being emancipated. The freedmen status had the obligation and appearance of citizenship but without the privileges of citizenship. They could not vote nor serve on juries, but they were obligated to pay taxes (Bell, 2004).

From an economic standpoint, the freedmen were relegated to domestic work, and to maximize their value, performed every form of labor, including that of skilled craftsmen. Prejudice was strong; free African Americans not only were excluded from jobs considered appropriate for White workmen, but were often the victims of insult and physical attack. Bell (2004) said, "Blacks were segregated in the worst areas of the towns where they lived, their children were often barred from the public schools, and on certain occasions they were even forbidden to appear in public places” (p. 52).

According to Wynes (1971), the superior White race because of its deep roots in law and government, had the responsibility of teaching and preparing the inferior African Americans with its “history of four thousand years of barbarism, the precious knowledge of citizenship” (p. 104). On the other hand, the African American race “had corresponding obligations: implicit obedient, deference, loyalty, and hard work” (p. 105).

It was by design that freed African Americans were led to believe that segregation protected them, that segregation was in their best interest and believed it was their contractual

obligation to obey the rules. African Americans were indoctrinated to believe that government was meant for the intelligent, educated and the wealthy and that the uneducated, laboring class was best at performing menial tasks and should be excluded from political participation or matters pertaining to his own welfare (Anderson, 1988; Wynes, 1971). Therefore, numerous laws were passed to keep the freed man as near the conditions of slavery as possible for fear of an uprising (Dabbs, 1958).

Black people were not brought to this country to be given an education, citizenship, or democracy. They were brought to this country to serve, to labor, and to obey...When servants are educated at all they are educated to serve, but never to share in power, thus planting the seeds of our present day educational crisis. (Clarke, 1973, p. 17)

Dubois (1977) dispelled the design which had been imposed on the Negro race without permission. Dubois noted, "The very feelings of inferiority that slavery forced upon them fathered an intense desire to rise out of their condition by means of education" (p. 638). Dubois believed that this very treatment of the freed Negro race led them to establish and sustain their own institutions for framing moral, educational and religious guidelines for its people. Anderson (1988) expressed, "Black education developed within this context of political and economic oppression" (p. 2). Gates and Oliver (1999) quoted W. E. B. Dubois' acknowledgment that the American Negro has had to live a life of "two-ness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings, two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (p. 11).

The freed African Americans, in order to protect their emancipation, saw the need to develop their own unique educational system in order to advance themselves and rise above oppression. This attitude gave rise to the beginnings for the early African American schools. The

foundation for the freedmen's educational system was a burning desire and self-determination to create a plan for educating themselves and their children. Following emancipation, the freedmen's schools came into existence (Anderson, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2006). The early African American schools in the south were organized by abolitionists, emancipationists, and antislavery ministers and businessmen. Many teachers from the north came south to open schools, often in unusual circumstances (Butchart, 1975). No doubt, this movement helped define America's race relations and helped define African Americans' position in what was known as the *New South* (Anderson, 1988; Butchart, 1975).

### **Importance of Academic Success for African American Male Students**

History has documented the struggle of African American males in the fight for a quality education as well as economic, political and civil equality in America. The educational experiences of African American males were delayed because African American males had a distinctive cultural beginning, and their unequal education has continued for many years following their emancipation. Although their early purpose for existence was labor exploitation and subordination to the dominant race (Anderson, 1988; Ladson-Billings, 2000), education has long been viewed as African Americans' passage to enjoying all the rights of freedom America has to offer (Anderson, 1988; Bell, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Therefore, academic success plays a major role in African American male students' educational growth and their gaining passage to social, economic, and political freedom.

Academic success is the measurement used to associate positive outcomes assessed for students. To be successful in academics means to take charge of learning by working hard at academic courses in middle school and high school while preparing for higher education (Rentner & Kober, 2001). Statistics show that adults with advanced levels of education are more

likely to be employed and to earn higher wages (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Workers 18 and over with a bachelor's degree earned an average of \$51,206 a year, while those with only a high school diploma earned \$27,915 a year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). The labor force and unemployment statistics are strong indicators of the difficulties African American males encounter in the job market. According to the U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2010), first quarter median weekly earnings during 2010 for Black men stood at 73.1% of the median earnings for White men. The unemployment rate for Black men 20 years and over as of June 2010 was 17.1%. Western et al. (2006) noted that the consequences of economic inequality for Black men are major limitations on socioeconomic mobility, ultimately leading to high rates of unemployment, crime, and incarceration for massive numbers of young African American men.

Western et al. (2006) stated, "Labor market trends might influence the scale of imprisonment in two main ways: Failing wages and unemployment could increase crime at the bottom of the economic ladder, generating more arrests, convictions and prison admissions" (p. 2291). Wray (2001) found that approximately one-fourth of all prime age African American males who have not graduated from high school were incarcerated or under the control of the correction system. At midyear, June 30, 2009, statistics showed that an estimated 841,000 Black males under the age of 18 were incarcerated in state, federal prison or local jails. For every 100,000 U. S. residents, Black males were incarcerated at a rate of 4,749 inmates, 6 times higher than White non-Hispanic males (West, 2010).

In addition to unemployment, wages, and incarceration, academic success is important for the Black male student because of the advanced training needed to handle technological occupations of the 21st century for increased economic productivity (Gottlob, 2009).



Furthermore, the number of jobs requiring productive workers with higher levels of education is expected to grow considerably during the 21st century (Fleetwood & Shelley, 2000; Rentner & Kober, 2001; U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009b).

As noted by Ryan (1999), Fortune 500 companies require employees who are to succeed in the 21st century to have skills other than reading, writing, and arithmetic. The top 13 skills needed for success include: teamwork, problem solving, interpersonal skills, oral communication, listening, personal career development, creative thinking, leadership, goal setting/motivations, writing, organizational effectiveness, computation, and reading. Educators' conceptions of the successful student seemed to parallel those of the Fortune 500 companies. Scheuermann (2000) maintained that educators believe successful students are those who expect to succeed, are goal oriented, intrinsically motivated and are able to balance effectively the social and academic aspects of the school environment.

The effect of the multitude of African American males leaving school each year before earning a high school diploma translates into millions of individuals who are out of school without high school credentials needed to be productive in the labor force or to further their education. Wray (2001) stated, "In 1998, there were just over 1.3 million prime-age, non-institutionalized, Black males without a high school degree. Of these, just over 600,000 were employed; almost 200,000 were counted as unemployed and a shocking half a million were out of the labor force" (p. 528).

The lack of job skills puts dropouts in a position of being more likely to engage in petty crime and gang activities (Freeland & Tucci, 2003; Western et al., 2006), thus becoming disconnected from mainstream society. Lee (1991) revealed that frustration, underachievement or ultimate failures often comprise the contemporary educational reality for scores of African

American male youths. Finally, the consequences related to leaving school early tend to be more severe among young men than women and greater among students of color, especially African American and Latino students (Rumberger, 1983).

Haycock (2005) made this observation: “After more than two decades of effort, far too many young Americans exit school without the skills they need to secure a foothold in the knowledge economy” (p. 258). Consistently, African American males have lower educational attainment levels, are more chronically unemployed and are many times more likely to end up in jail or prison than males of other racial/ethnic groups (U. S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009a; Western et al., 2006). According to Kirkland (2006), this subgroup encounters exceptional barriers and gaps in educational achievement. Therefore, African American males require specific focus within the educational arena in order to succeed and improve their levels of academic development. The National Alliance of Business, Inc. (1998) research showed that students who are academically successful are more stable in their employment, less dependent on public assistance, less likely to engage in criminal activity, more active as citizens and charitable volunteers and are more healthy.

It has been documented that the educational outlook for African American males has been systemically more devastating than the outcomes for other racial or ethnic groups or females; therefore, the work of education in a democracy should be to provide opportunities for this population of males to participate fully in the political, social and economic ideals of society. These ideals can never be realized fully if significant portions of society are excluded from high-quality education and the opportunity to factor African American male roles into the formula of success in society (Ladson-Billings, 2000). By researching and reporting on African American males perceptions’ of factors associated with their academic success, policymakers and educators

will be better equipped to develop and implement solutions. Therefore, it is beneficial to educators to understand factors that African American males perceive to contribute to their academic performance and understand how to support the academic development of African American males (Somers et al., 2008). For African American males, a quality education is a means for upward social and economic mobility (Anderson, 1988; Fitzgerald, 2006; Howard, 2003; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Rowley, 2000).

### **African American Male Students' Perceptions about Academic Success**

African American males' cultural identity has been shaped by stereotypes placed on them down through history. Some stereotypes associated with African American males include incompetence, laziness, and aggression. African American males' academic performance is often affected because of these stereotypes (Bell, 2004; Bogle, 1994; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Mincey, 1994; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; Ogbu, 2004; The Staff of the Washington Post, 2007). The literature generally concludes that African American male students' educational aspirations, occupational expectations, cultural identity, and attitudes toward school are related to academic achievement (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Goldsmith, 2004; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Smerdon, 2002; Sullivan, Riccio, & Reynolds, 2008).

Wright (2007) examined the relationship between racial-ethnic identity and high academic achievement of five young African-American men in grades 11 and 12 in an urban pilot high school in the Northeast. The study revealed that effective youth development has a positive effect on the way adolescents use strategies of assertiveness to achieve school success.

Cultural mistrust for African Americans revolves around their belief that institutions, including public schools, cannot be trusted to provide an adequate education when the schools they attend are poorly maintained, serviced by ill-prepared teachers, and underfunded (Jordan &

Cooper, 2003). This belief leads African Americans to undervalue the educational structure and lower their expectations for a quality education. Ogbu (1991) noted that some African American males direct their focus away from academics and toward nonacademic endeavors such as personal dress and grooming, athletics and dating, which give them a feeling of success. A study conducted by Irving and Hudley (2008) of 115 African American male students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 in an urban, multiethnic high school in Southern California measured cultural mistrust, academic outcome expectations, outcome values, cultural attitudes and ethnic identity affirmation. The findings revealed that as students' mistrust increased, students were less likely to anticipate achieving educational outcomes. Therefore, the researchers suggested that educational institutions should design programs to help students who have experienced discrimination and difficulty in educational institutions, provide additional resources, improve teacher training, and direct curriculum to the needs of the students. These steps could develop positive educational experiences in African American male students.

A research study commissioned by the African-American Male Initiative, a task force of the University System of Georgia (USG) Board of Regents, conducted a statewide study to explore African American males' attitudes toward college and the USG in particular. The results revealed that many of the African-American males surveyed in the statewide study perceived specific and significant barriers to their achieving success. These barriers included concerns about the lack of academic preparation, poor grades, low Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, lack of adequate high school guidance from school counselors, teachers, high-school faculty and administration, peer pressure, and parental and societal expectations. The participants believed that White male students were better prepared academically for college than African American male students. The majority of the African-American males in this study blamed their high-

school counselors, teachers, high-school faculty, and administrations for steering them toward remedial or vocational courses at greater rates than either females or White males. Students perceived teachers did not care and were not responsive to the needs of African American male students (The University System of Georgia, 2002).

Cultural consideration, social factors, cohesion between teachers and students, and strong leaderships are important considerations for educators of African American male students. African American students maintain that encouragement from schools, parents, and community can enable their educational progress. Therefore, challenging students in school, avoiding negative attitudes, increasing expectations could lead to improved success among African American male students (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Goldsmith, 2004; Jordan & Cooper, 2002; Tomlinson, Gould, Schroth, & Jarvis, 2006; Trotter, 1981).

### **Factors Contributing to African American Males Academic Success**

Research studies have documented evidence that a variety of factors influence the likelihood that African American males could achieve in school (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Barnett, 2004; Borman, Stringfield, & Rachuba, 2000; Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008; Schwartz, 2001; Stewart, 2008). Teacher preparedness, parental involvement, teacher expectations, student-teacher relationship, school climate, size, and school culture have been positively linked to academic achievement among African American male students (Barnett, 2004; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Wiggan, 2007). This section will review factors that impact educational outcomes for African American male students.

### **Teacher Certification in High Poverty/High-Minority Schools**

Schools classified as high poverty have increased in the past decade. More than three quarters of students are eligible for free or reduced price lunches at high poverty schools.

Between 1999-2000 and 2007-2009, the percent of high poverty schools increased from 12% to 17%. The poverty rate for children increased from 17% to 18% (Aud et al., 2010). Research showed that the majority of teachers teaching in poverty stricken neighborhoods were ill-prepared to work in urban schools (Aud et al., 2010; Writ et al., 2004). These teachers were often asked to teach out of their subject area and some had no prior educational training (Howard, 2003). Out-of-field teachers are teachers who lack expertise and certification in the subject they teach (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

In high-poverty and high-minority public high schools where more than 75% of the students are eligible for free-reduced lunches and 75% of students enrolled are minority students, statistics show students are more often taught core classes (English, science, and mathematics) by out-of-field teachers than their peers who are enrolled in low-minority and low-poverty public school. For example, during 1999-2000, 13.7% of high-poverty students were taught mathematics by teachers with neither major nor certification in field and 15.2% of students in high-minority schools were taught mathematics by teachers with neither major nor certification in field compared to 6.6% low-poverty students and 6.8% of students enrolled in low-minority schools (Writ et al., 2004). Table 2 shows percentage of public school students taught by out-of-field teachers in middle and high schools according to class subject (National Center for Education Statistics, 2003).

Table 2

*Percent of Middle and High School Students Taught by Out-of-Field Teachers, 1999-2000*

<b>School</b>	<b>Math</b>	<b>English</b>	<b>Science</b>	<b>Foreign Language</b>	<b>Social Science</b>	<b>Physical Science</b>	<b>Art and Music</b>	<b>Physical Education</b>
<b>Middle School</b>	23%	19%	17%	19%	15%	42%	5%	3%
<b>High School</b>	10%	7%	7%	15%	7%	18%	5%	5%

Nationally, children considered poverty stricken and those of color are far more likely to be taught by inexperienced, underprepared, and unqualified teachers (Barnett, 2004; Haycock, 2001). Twenty-two percent of teachers working in high-poverty secondary schools had less than three years of teaching experience compared to 15% of teachers working in low-poverty secondary schools (Aud, et al., 2010).

Evidence suggested that minority students are assigned to the least effective teachers, as measured by teacher preparation and experience (Barton, 2003). In addition, teachers are more prone to turnover in schools that enroll predominantly African American students (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 2001; Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 2007).

### **Individual-Level Characteristics and African American Male Students' Academic Success**

Although the certification of teachers is closely related to students' achievement, parental involvement, caring and concerned teachers also influence student outcomes (Wiggin, 2007). Parental involvement could be key to the academic success of students. Stewart (2008) stated, "The family is the basic institution through which children learn who they are, where they fit into

society, and what kinds of futures they are likely to experience” (p. 20). Parental involvement in a child’s education impacts academic achievement through higher grades, higher test scores, course credits earned, attendance, school readiness, and behavior (Simon, 2001). Students with involved parents, regardless of background, are more likely to earn higher grades and test scores, take advanced courses, be promoted, have better attendance rates, be better behaved, graduate and go on to college (Brown & Fiester, 2003). Parental academic involvement that includes frequent school contacts, high expectations for postsecondary education, firm and supportive parenting skills leads to high educational outcomes for the African American male child (Maton, Hrabowski, & Greif, 1998).

In addition, parents' collaborating with teachers was rewarding and beneficial for the academic outcome of the student (Wilson-Jones, 2003). Six face-to-face interviews with 16 African American males in Grades 3-6 in a rural school over a 3-month period revealed positive results (Wilson-Jones, 2003). The purpose of Wilson-Jones' study was to investigate factors that promoted and inhibited academic success of elementary African American male students. Interview questions centered on parents’ involvement with homework and study strategies. Wilson-Jones reported that the majority of students indicated that having an adult show interest in their school work, paying attention in class, and completing their homework helped them to make better grades. Students further indicated that they were excited when their teachers and parents worked together on their behalf for academic success. The students who indicated that their parents visited the school regularly to check on them or have lunch, had fewer behavior referrals, better test scores, and made better grades in their classwork than those students whose parents did not visit the school. In addition, Wilson-Jones’ study revealed that for those students who had not repeated a grade, parents were more active in their education than the ones who had



repeated a grade. Her investigation provided evidence of the importance of parental involvement in the academic achievement of elementary African American males.

Successful African American males attributed their high achievement to self-discipline, positive school experiences, motivation, excellent teachers, and supportive parents (Barnett, 2004; Trotter, 1981; Williams, 2002). A historical qualitative case study of academically successful African American males who were graduates of a high school in Gary, Indiana was conducted by Sullivan (2002). The focus of Sullivan's research was to explore factors contributing to the academic success of African American males graduating from an urban school high school in Gary, Indiana. In addition, Sullivan's research sought to determine from African American administrators, teachers, and the school community what they felt contributed to graduates' academic success. In addition, participants were asked to provide a clearer understanding of the important issues critical to African American males' academic success.

Significant findings from Sullivan's (2002) study revealed that African American males were successful because of their individual responsibility and supportive commitment of influential persons at home and school. Participants stated that supportive peers and role models in the community such as doctors, lawyers, engineers, professors, and teachers made the difference in their academic success. Many participants felt that with so many role models, they were able to envision themselves as African American professionals. In addition, participants felt their teachers expected them to produce above average work, nurtured them, were concerned and inspired them to do their best. One participant expressed the most significant contribution to his success was "a combination between strong administrators and very strong and committed teachers" (p. 107). Students perceived that the school climate is an interconnected environment with student-teacher relationships and teacher expectations as important factors contributing to

successful academic outcomes. These are strong indicators that school initiatives should incorporate individual-level and school structural factors to improve academic success among Black male students.

### **School Structural Characteristics and African American Male Students' Academic Success**

Research suggested that school-level concepts of school climate, size, school poverty, school location, school social problems, as well as, school cohesion and a feeling of belonging as felt by students and teachers alike may contribute to successful student outcomes (Goldsmith, 2004; Johnson et al., 2001). Among the goals specified in the NCLB act for schools was the goal to increase the high school graduation rate to 90% by the year 2000. Unfortunately, after 2000, educators in schools are continuing to seek ways to meet this goal and to address the academic performance of students. One such intervention is smaller learning communities. Smaller learning communities (SLCs) are schools' redesigned initiatives with the intent of creating smaller theme-based units of organization, including schools within schools, academies within buildings. These communities include structures such as freshman academies organized around career interests or other themes. A group of core-subject teachers teaches small groups of students, keeping students and teachers together throughout the student high school experience. This effort is designed to address or remedy the low graduation and high dropout rates. Schools creating smaller learning communities help students create a sense of connectness to faculty and school, sense of identity, improve self-esteem, as well as improve academic success.

Jordan and Cooper (2002) noted that school reform initiatives such as smaller learning communities and class size reduction are structural reforms aimed at changing the social and or physical organization of the school. Studies have shown that smaller learning communities (SLC) might provide personal learning environments that provide a sense of belonging for

students, increase school safety, and foster greater student engagement in learning (Cotton, 2001; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Metzger, 2006; Shear et al., 2008; Tasker, 2007). When schools are restructured into self-contained, small learning communities, it becomes easier for teachers and administrators to facilitate a school climate that leads to a closer connection with students and a warm and caring environment for students (Cotton, 2001; Sergiovanni, 1995).

The administrator, faculty, and staff at a South Carolina High School sought to address the problems of being labeled a failing school by NCLB criteria and AYP standards by utilizing a small learning community, the Freshman Academy Program. The intervention of a Freshman Academy Program in 2007 separated freshmen students from upper-classmen in core classes. The school's Academy Program offered a Freshman Focus Class to build peer-relationship skills while teaching students basic life-surviving skills such as balancing a checkbook. The school had the lowest test scores in the county, lagging behind the county's rate by almost 12 percentage points and a 58.5% graduation rate during 2007-2008 school year (Sellers, 2009; South Carolina Department of Education, 2009). The African American student population amounted to 48% with 51% of the school population being eligible for free /reduced lunches (South Carolina Department of Education, 2009).

The Freshman Academy Program was led by the Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (JROTC) instructors. According to the Lead Teacher in the school, the JROTC program was well-attended by students, making it the most popular extracurricular activity in the school. The JROTC instructors built team cooperation and students were willing to go beyond what was required of them (Sellers, 2009). After the first year, administrators reported tremendous success. The school surpassed district averages on its MAP (Measures of Academic Progress) scores in

math, reading, and language Arts on ninth-grade benchmark tests. The district average scores for spring 2009 were Math-231.7, Reading- 218.1 and Language Arts 219.0. The High School scores for the same period were Math-233.6, Reading-222.2; and Language Arts-222.9. In addition, out of a freshman class of 101 students, only three were retained. During the 2009-2010 school year, the graduation rate for African American students was 63.3% (South Carolina Department of Education, 2010). The Lead Teacher made the following observation in reference to the school's immediate success with the Freshman Academy Program: "When you are able to motivate those students, it drives you crazy and it breeds competitiveness among the students. They support each other, and it's not such an individual goal anymore" (Sellers, 2009, p. 8A). The school recognized that simply identifying the achievement problems would not alone improve academic success; instead, schools must be aware of alternative learning methods and school policies that have a positive effect on how African American youths learn.

School climate is an area educators might concentrate on for implementing strategies to help student achievement. School climate consists of the attitudes, beliefs, values that underlie students' academic success. School climate helps to shape the communication between and among students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community. The continued promotion of the expectation that diverse groups of students can be successful and the maintenance of a school climate conducive to academic productivity are important initiatives toward improving student achievement.

According to Schwartz (2001), the recognition of the many unique cultures within a school and incorporating the characteristics of these cultures into the learning environment contribute positively to the success of students as well as develop the skills for students of these cultures to be social successes in adulthood. A safe, orderly and healthy school climate also

promotes mutual respect between students, teachers and administrators and emphasizes a well-publicized, fair, and uniform code of conduct

Sergiovanni (1995) introduced the expression “school as a community” to suggest that schools be thought of as a group of individuals who are bonded together by a common will and a set of shared ideas and values. Sergiovanni proposed a climate where everyone knows each other. His idea was to have schools where students and teachers can connect to the school and feel responsible for themselves and others. Schools must become caring and learning communities. It is important to impress a caring attitude upon students early before they become unreachable. Hoy and Miskel (2005) noted the general school climate not only impacts students, but teachers and administrators. Stewart (2008) analyzed data collected from 1,238 African American students found within 546 high schools. Forty-eight percent of the sample was male. Data from school officials (administrators and teachers) and students provided information about school social problems and school cohesion. The results indicated that school climate is extremely important to student academic success. African American students who attend schools that are supportive and caring have significantly higher achievement, as perceived by their teachers, and school administrators. Furthermore, the study concluded that poverty in school, social problems, as well as location and size of school do not have a significant bearing on achievement. The schools’ characteristics that correlated with higher levels of achievement, as reported by the researcher, were cooperation among teachers and administrators, support for students, and clear expectations about the mission of the school. Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) conducted a study with a population of 60% African American students and concluded that poor and minority students are more likely to excel when there is a school climate promoting academic excellence.

A study conducted by Toldson (2008) included 5,779 school-aged African American males who completed the Health Behavior in School-age Children, National Crime Victimization Survey, School Crime Supplement, National Survey of America's Families and National Survey on Drug Use and Health. The purpose of this study was to analyze academic success indicators from data obtained from surveys to determine factors that may improve educational outcomes for African American males. Findings clearly revealed that high-achieving African American males perform best when they have a positive perception of school, have a friendly relationship with their teachers, and when they perceive the school environment as safe.

### **Differential Treatment of African American Students**

Differential treatment and instruction in school can impact the African American student's perceptions of school as well as his or her expectations from society (Haycock, 2001; Wiggan, 2007). It has been documented that African American students are lagging behind peers in academic achievement (Barnett, 2004; Ferguson, 2002). Similarly, the issue of differential treatment of African American students by schools and teachers seems particularly important as such practice might hinder African American students from gaining access to academic success (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002).

Wiggan (2007) stated "It is evident that all students do not receive the same treatment with regard to their education, but they are all expected, nevertheless, to produce similar outcomes" (p. 322). To maximize the academic growth of African American students, including those from low-income, culturally diverse backgrounds, differentiation must address students' learning styles, interests, and readiness for learning. Administrators must identify the academic needs of African American students and ensure that these needs are met by encouraging teachers to master and use appropriate instructional tasks to accomplish the academic objectives

(Ferguson, 2002). School leaders will fail in their responsibility and students will continue to be at high risk of failure unless educators in schools and decision makers realize they must enhance the development of the academic potential of African American students (Borman et al., 2000). The responsibility of building principals is to focus attention on the success of all students.

Researchers indicated that school leadership and effective administration play a significant role in the effective operation of successful schools (Dimmitt, 2003; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Grove, 2004; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Toldson, 2008; Tomlinson et al., 2006). High expectations of students and teachers, higher-quality principal leadership, frequent monitoring of student progress, and positive student and faculty attitudes lead to higher than expected student achievement gains (Heck, 2000). Much of the research on attaining academic success highlights the importance of strong principal leadership, a caring and supportive school staff, and a school culture of high expectations. In addition, values and respect as well as the culture and learning style of the African American student were highlighted as necessary means of making possible a high rate of academic success for African American students (Maryland State Department of Education, 2006; Ragland, Clubine, Constable, & Smith, 2002; Wilson-Jones & Caston, 2004).

However, educators in schools often perpetuate the difficult challenges African American students face in their educational development. In 2007, the national percentage of public school students in grades 6 through 12 who had been suspended, expelled, or repeated a grade was higher for African American males than for White males. African American male students were suspended at a rate of 43% while only 16% of White peers were suspended. Equally as alarming, 13% of African American students had been expelled from school while only 1% of White peers were expelled. In addition, the percentage of African American male students repeating a grade

more than doubled that of White students. Almost 21% of African American students versus 9% of White students repeated a grade (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

In addition, the districts with predominately African American students tended to operate racially segregated schools, achieved poorly on the National Assessment of Education Progress, and a higher number of African American males were suspended and expelled. More Black than White boys are assigned to special education programs and prevented from receiving a high school diploma with their peers. Black children are labeled “mentally retarded” nearly 300% more than White children and only 8.4% of Black males are identified and enrolled in gifted and talented classes (Holzman, 2006).

A report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) provided data showing the disparity in achievement levels by racial subgroups. This data is significant because although African Americans represented only 17% of the total school population, they accounted for 32% of the suspensions and 30% of the expulsions in U. S. Schools (Skiba et al., 2002). In addition, the percentage of African American male students repeating a grade more than doubled that of White students. Almost 23% of African American males versus 10.0% of White male students repeated a grade. In a 2005 report, the U.S. Department of Education reported the percentage of African Americans (11.6%) who were status dropouts were higher than the 7.2% of Whites (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Expulsions and suspensions mean absenteeism from the learning process. Absenteeism has a negative impact on academic success and graduation rates. Thus, these practices aid in African American males’ academic failure. Therefore, paying closer attention to African American students being suspended or expelled, repeating grades, and dropping out of school before graduation and the relationship of these factors to poor academic performance should be a



major goal of America's and Georgia's public educators (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Skiba et al. (2002) reviewed disciplinary records of 11,001 students in 19 urban Midwestern middle schools for the 1994-1995 school year. Of the number of students in the study, 56% were Black and 42% were White, and males accounted for 51.8% of the students in the study. Data showed that 65.3% of students were from low socioeconomic level families based on their eligibility for reduced cost lunch.

Findings from the Skiba et al. (2002) study showed that Black students and males were overrepresented in all three measures of school discipline consequences (referrals, suspensions, and expulsions). In the case of office referrals, the rank order was Black male, White male, Black female followed by White female. In the case of Black males, the reason for office referrals catered to the subjective judgment of the referring agent, such as loitering, excessive noise, or threat; whereas, the reasons given for White students' referrals to the office consisted of smoking and vandalism, which indicated an objective view by the referring agent.

In addition, results from the Skiba et al. (2002) study showed that the socioeconomic indicator appeared to be somewhat less important than gender or racial disparity. The researchers concluded that there was indeed a robust pattern of Black students being disproportionately disciplined based on a higher rate of office referrals. Black students perceived this racial disparity in discipline as a cause to have them removed from the classroom. For example, they identified a lack of interest on the part of the teachers, differences in communication style, and lack of respect from teachers as underlying causes of referrals. In addition, Black students contended that a purposeful plan existed to push them to the point of being disrespectful and hostile, thereby, leading to office referrals. Researchers suggest that school leadership develop

alternative methods to suspensions and expulsions for dealing with disruptive behavior and to help educators learn how to focus on positive classroom management techniques to improve academic performance of students (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000; Morgan, 1991).

### **Programs Designed to Help African American Males Achieve Academic Success**

Principals and community leaders have acknowledged the problem of low academic performance among African American students. One of the challenges facing administrators is how to ensure a quality education and assure equitable distribution of education resources to all students. Therefore, various learning strategies and intervention programs that might potentially equip minority students, especially African American males, with the needed skills to be successful in school and society have been explored.

Successful programs addressing the needs of youths while preparing them to be successful adults in society are connected with the school and the community. Role models and mentors not only have a positive effect on students' grades, but positively affect behavior, attendance and self-esteem (Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine, 1997; Wyatt, 2009). The potential to put more Black males in the classroom, improve the African American community, and advance the nation as a whole exists in a Program in the South Carolina educational system. The Call Me Mister (Men Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) Program was designed to help African American males become change agents, develop pride and dignity, and simultaneously create successful and effective educational experiences. The Call Me Mister Program focuses primarily on students in lower grades. The goal is to train African American men to become school teachers and role models. The mission of the Mister program is to improve achievement among African American students by utilizing the leadership ability of

African American male teachers. In conjunction with historically Black Benedict College, Claflin, Morris College, and South Carolina State University, the Program had about 150 Black males in teacher training programs and 20 teachers on the job in 2007. These Black male teachers served as role models and male influences in the classroom. It is believed that this Program over time will impact academic performance, especially in Black males. The Mister Program is supported financially by the federal government and organizations such as Bavarian Motor Works (BMW), Michelin and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation (Holsendolph, 2007; Richard, 2005; Smiles, 2002).

Studies have found that African American males' academic success, to some degree, depends on the development of same-race peer relationships and same-race support on campus. These studies showed that not only does peer connection play an important role in African American males collegiate success, but it also enhances the quality of college experience (Harper, 2006; McClure, 2006). Warde (2008) conducted a study of 11 African American male graduate students enrolled in higher education in New York City. The focus of the study was to determine factors that contributed to African American males successfully completing a baccalaureate degree. Findings revealed that peer mentorship played an important role in the successful completion of African American males receiving their baccalaureate degrees.

Wyatt (2009) reported that the Brotherhood male mentoring program goal is to improve the graduation rate of African American males within Chicago Public Schools. The program is guided by a membership of 105 men, incorporating the American School Counselor Association standards, empowerment theory, and the seven principles of Kwanzaa Nguzo Saba. These principles incorporate unity, self-determination, collective work, responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith as taught through weekly student engagement. Weekly

topics are developed based on issues affecting adolescent African American male development. Over 90% of males participating in the program were of African American race.

After the 30 week Program, data were collected from Grade Point Averages (GPA) and a questionnaire completed by 36 members and program alumni to collect perception data about the impact of the program. Results showed the Brotherhood members' grade point averages (GPA) was 60% higher in 2006 and 48% higher in 2007 than other non-Brotherhood males. Data from the questionnaires suggested a need to provide continuous academic, personal/social, and career development support to males through the use of mentoring groups (Wyatt, 2009).

A review of the literature suggested that cultural identity, socioeconomic disadvantages, and oppression have an effect on the development of young African American males. In addition, two primary criteria are indicated as being significant for the socialization of African American men in America: education and job skills (Wyatt, 2009). The job of the high school principal, counselors and staff members is very difficult. However, a study conducted by Grove (2004) concluded that administrators do influence student outcomes through the facilitating of goal setting and communication of those goals as they relate to state standards. The need for quality school leadership remains to be an important factor in the education of all students.

Educational opportunities shape the lives of students for employment, and general well-being, while lack of educational opportunities contributes to school failure, dropout and poverty. Theoretically, schools are designed to provide educational opportunities and prepare students for life after school. According to Sizer (1999) there is no phase of schooling of higher profile than the curriculum. Curriculum development, instructional strategies design, learning activities, and the assessment system must be aligned with intended learning outcomes. The responsibility of the building principal is to focus attention on the achievement of all students. Principals are in a

unique position as school leaders to implement curriculum strategies that will empower African Americans males and all students to develop positive attitudes, behaviors and values necessary for educational accomplishments.

### **Solutions Believed to be Necessary for Academic Success**

Based upon the data presented in the reviewed literature, a conclusion is that African American students' educational aspirations, occupational expectations, cultural identity, and attitudes toward school are related to students' achievement (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Goldsmith, 2004; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Smerdon, 2002; Sullivan et al., 2008). Research findings suggested that African American students maintained that schools, parents, community and the school environment play an important role in their educational development.

Ferrer and Garlington (2007) conducted a study for the Mountain View County School District. Forty-two African American students enrolled in honors, advanced, or advanced placement (AP) courses were selected from two community high schools for this study. The purpose of this study was to find out from African American high school students the reasons for their lack of academic achievement on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). The African American participants perceived that they were hated and nobody cared about their educational success, including people from the home, school, and community. African American students perceived that they were viewed only as being successful in sports. Students felt that parents would support a sporting event of the school before supporting an academic event. African American students saw the school as rewarding, celebrating, and recognizing sport participation and not recognizing efforts in school achievement. In addition, African American students perceived that they were ill-prepared to pass the FCAT test, and that by being academically successful, peers would classify them as *nerds* making them an outcast from the

normal school population. Participants in this study made numerous suggestions to aid in improving their school performance. Students believed that the school should focus more on motivating them to achieve academically, that teachers should be highly qualified, caring and willing to make a difference in their lives. Furthermore, participants believed that the school should be a place where students would want to go to learn. The school facility should be clean, attractive, and safe for learning. Students also believed that educators in schools should promote mentoring programs, sponsor educational fieldtrips, present motivational speakers, publicize student achievements to the community, offer more rewards, and use less punishment. Students also believed that there should be strong collaboration between school, community, and parents.

Basden (2006) studied the impact of socialization upon African American high school males' academic achievement. Home, schooling practices, peer influence, self-esteem, contemporary music, socioeconomic status and role models were considered as influences within the school environment. The study consisted of 42 African American male participants: 21 high achievers with 3.00 GPA or higher and 21 low achievers with 2.00 GPA or lower. Participants were interviewed and given a 51-item survey that included a Likert scale. High achieving students showed greater gain due to spending more time in the library with parents. African American students felt their grades were reflective of their attitudes and behavior and were less reflective of how nice their teachers were. Students were comfortable being African Americans, listened to hip/hop music, and had few people in their household. These socialization skills were thought to be important influences in leading to academic success in African Americans.

African Americans', especially males, academic performance is often affected because of stereotypes (Bell, 2004; Bogle, 1994; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Mincey, 1994; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; Ogbu, 2004; The Staff of the Washington

Post, 2007). Wright's (2007) study examined the relationship between racial-ethnic identity and high academic achievement of five young African-American men in grades 11 and 12 in an urban pilot high school in the Northeast. The study revealed that positive youth development, identity theory, socio-cultural theory have a positive effect on the way adolescents interviewed used strategies of assertiveness to achieve school success.

### **Summary**

Educational trends for African American males are linked directly to early struggles of African Americans. African Americans have suffered disproportionately through the years in their quest for an equal education. Many African Americans were denied the right to learn how to read and write and often had to educate themselves. The struggle for educational advancement continues. African Americans are exposed to inadequate learning environment, poor school structure, and differential treatment.

It is important for African American male students to be equipped with an adequate education so they will be able to contribute to the social, economic, and political development of society. In addition, it is important that educators equip themselves with knowledge concerning cultural differences among students, perceptions African American males have about schools that hinder their achievement, and programs that best serve African American male students. School leaders are increasingly more accountable for the achievement of students, so there is a need to conduct this study using the target population to enhance educators and policymakers' awareness of the educational needs of African American male students.

## CHAPTER 3

### Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore African American male students' perceptions of factors contributing to their academic success. This chapter includes a description of the research design, participants, instrumentation, pilot study, and data collection and analysis. The study addressed the following research question:

*Overarching Question:* What do African American male students perceive as factors contributing to their academic success? Additional supporting questions that guided the research were:

1. What does academic success mean to African American male students?
2. What roles do peers, parents and educators play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
3. What role does school environment play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
4. What are some challenges and solutions for accomplishing academic success?

### Research Design

In conducting this study, a qualitative research method was used to gather data concerning African American male students' perceptions of factors contributing to their academic success. Marshall and Rossman (1999) contended, "Qualitative methods help find the natural solutions to problems-the solutions that people devise without policy intervention" (p. 15). Qualitative research is also "a broad approach to the study of social phenomenon; its various genres are naturalistic and interpretive, and they draw on multiple methods of inquiry" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 2).



In this study, the researcher gathered information by interviewing students and collecting demographic profile data. The qualitative research method allowed the researcher to learn directly from students factors that influenced their academic success as well as challenges to and solutions for their academic success in school.

### **Community Portrait**

The Ivory Community (pseudonym) portrait gives the reader an opportunity to understand the student population at Ivory High School from several perspectives: the demographics of the community, the educational level of the community, per capita income, median household income, and crime rates.

In 2010, the Ivory Community had a population of 5,834 of which 61.7% was Black and 36.9% was White. The median age was 43.1 years; 23.4% of the population was under 18 years and 17% was 65 years and older. In 2009, females accounted for more than half of the population (54%). The U. S. Census Bureau (2011) reported 20 persons living within a square mile radius. In 2010, 76% of people 25 years and over had graduated from high school and 5% had a bachelor's degree or higher. Only 1% of the population spoke a language other than English (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011).

In 2009, the median income of households in this community was \$30,056. During the period 2005 through 2009, 72% of households received employment earnings and 13% of households received retirement income other than Social Security. The average income from Social Security was \$12,656. Persons living below poverty level were 27.4% (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). In 2005-2009, for the employed population 16 years and older, the leading industries in the Ivory Community were manufacturing, 28% and educational services, health care, and social assistance, 20% (U. S. Census Bureau, 2011). As of June 2010, the Georgia

Department of Labor estimated a 17.1% unemployment rate in the county labor force. This figure was not seasonally adjusted (Georgia Department of Labor, 2011).

According to the 2009 Georgia Bureau of Investigation crime statistical report, there were 40 criminal offenses reported in the Ivory Community: one robbery, seven assaults, 12 burglaries, 18 larcenies and two vehicle thefts. The community experienced a drop in criminal activities for 2010. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation (2011) reported only five crimes: one assault, one burglary, two larcenies, and one vehicle theft.

### **Study Site**

Ivory High School (pseudonym) had a total enrollment of 225 students for the 2009-2010 school year. The school reported 96% African American students enrolled, and 83% of students eligible for free-reduced meals during the school year. The researcher selected Ivory High School for this study because of its African American population, students' continued gains in graduation rates, and efforts conducted by school staff and administration to decrease the dropout rate of African American students in Grades 9–12. In addition, this school was selected because it has had been under the same leadership for two consecutive years. The graduation rate for African American students increased from 68% for school year 2008-2009 to 75% for school year 2009-2010. The dropout rate for this population in Grades 9–12 decreased from 6% for school year 2008-2009 to 4.5% during the school year 2009-2010. The researcher used the Georgia Report Card to determine that this school met the above criteria (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

The professional staff consisted of two full-time administrators and one part-time administrator. The educational attainment of teachers included 14 teachers with Bachelor's Degrees, six teachers with Master's Degrees, four with Specialist's Degrees, and one teacher with

a One-and Two-Year Vocational Certificate. Experience among teachers included 17 teachers with 1-10 years of experience, four teachers with less than one year of experience, two teachers with 11–20 years of experience and two teachers with more than 30 years of experience (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

### **Participants**

The researcher solicited the assistance of the counselor and principal in selecting the participants for this study. The counselor and principal served as key informants who had knowledge of African American male students at this study site. These key informants were useful in providing additional insight and understanding (McMillan, 2004) about African American males at this school. The counselor and principal recommended six African American male junior and six African American male senior students as possible participants for this study. To be considered for inclusion in this study, participants were classified as a junior or senior student; attended this school for at least two years; had an “A” or “B” overall average; enrolled in advanced core classes (English, math, science, social studies); and were on track for graduation. A self-reported demographic profile (see Appendix A) provided additional information about participants.

Consent letters were used to inform the potential participants and parents of the purpose, intent and importance of the study, and procedures and conditions of students’ participation. The researcher obtained signed parental informed consent (see Appendix B) and signed informed minor assent (see Appendix C). Students were willing to participate on a voluntary basis. Parents and students provided demographic information (see Appendix A) about the student. From the nine returned signed parental consent forms, minor assent forms and demographic profiles, three junior and three senior students were randomly selected to participate in the research.

## **Instrumentation**

The researcher used a semi-structured, qualitative, general interview approach to interview three junior and three senior African American male students. Marshall and Rossman (1999) stated, "The most important aspect of the interviewer's approach concerns conveying the attitude that the participant's views are valuable and useful" (p. 108). The interview process generated a wide variety of information and provided the opportunity for immediate follow-up and clarification (McMillan, 2004). The researcher used the data from research studies on academic success as a basis for constructing interview questions (see Appendix D). The researcher presented 16 open-ended questions to explore the participants' views. According to Patton (1982), "The truly open-ended question does not presuppose which dimensions of feeling, analysis, or thought will be salient for the interviewee" (p. 170). The interviewee was free to choose whatever words or thoughts to convey his or her perceptions to an open-ended question without being guided or manipulated by the researcher. deMarrais (2004) suggested "The researcher listens more than talks, but offers supportive, encouraging nods, smiles, and verbal expressions" (p. 64). The purpose of interviewing was to find out from the participants those feelings, thoughts, and intentions that cannot be observed (Patton, 1982). The researcher's role was to obtain rich descriptions of participants' experiences (deMarrais & Tisdale, 2002). Eyring (1998) suggested that people speak of experiences that have been significant to their times of interest and the relationships they have with others. The interview questions in this study explored perceptions of factors students believed contributed to their academic success as well as challenges to and solutions for academic success.

## **Pilot Study**

Prior to IRB approval, the researcher contacted one retired elementary teacher and one retired high school librarian to evaluate interview questions for completeness and clarity. Based on the evaluation of the interview questions, adjustments were not necessary.

After IRB approval, the researcher conducted a pilot study of two African American male students from the target population to test and revise the interview questions for clarity, appropriateness, and omissions. The target population consisted of five juniors with signed consent/assent forms and four seniors with signed consent/assent forms. The researcher randomly selected one junior and one senior African American male student from the target population for the pilot study. McMillan (2004) stated “ Often two pilots are conducted to be sure that there will not be surface problems or costly mistakes” (p. 196).

Pilot study interviews took place at the study site. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. Following the pilot study, participants commented on the interview questions for clarity, appropriateness, and omissions. Based on the pilot study feedback, no adjustments to the interview questions or interview process were made. The pilot study results were not included in the research findings.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

Data were obtained from demographic profiles and semi-structured interviews. After receiving IRB approval (see Appendix F), the researcher contacted the school district superintendent for permission to conduct research study. Based on the criteria for selecting participants, the principal and counselor identified and recommended students who were eligible to participate in this study. Based on their suggestions, parental consent forms, minor assent forms and demographic profile instruments were sent home with 12 African American male

students. Nine parental informed consent, minor assent and demographic profile forms were returned.

The researcher contacted the nine students and parents by telephone to verify their consent and inform them whether or not student was selected for participation in study. The researcher then arranged interview dates, informed students about the meeting place, and set appointment times for interviews. Two of the nine students were utilized to do a pilot study and six students were selected to participate in the actual study. The appointments were set to occur during non-class activity periods. The principal identified a meeting location within the school. Following final arrangements, interviews commenced. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. A pseudonym was used in place of actual school's name and each participant chose a pseudonym for identification purposes.

The researcher informed all participants about the research, the need for individual privacy, and protection from emotional harm. Furthermore, each participant was told there was no right nor wrong answer and his personal views should be freely expressed. During the face-to-face interviews, participants were asked 16 questions to explore their perceptions of factors contributing to academic success. The researcher used follow-up questions to probe for additional responses or more information when not provided, not clear, or more details needed.

The researcher's task allowed participants to build upon their experiences (Creswell, 1998) while they explored responses to the interview questions without leading participants to a particular answer (McMillan, 2004). Individual interviews were audio taped with permission from participants and parents. Professional care was taken to assure participants were comfortable with audio-taping (McMillan, 2004). A professional transcriptionist had access to audiotapes for the sole purpose of transcribing. Transcripts of tape-recorded interviews were

coded and stored safely in a locked cabinet. The researcher properly secured interview logs, tape recordings, transcripts, and notes during the course of the research. The researcher was responsible for establishing the trustworthiness of this qualitative research by allowing key informants to select participants in order to rule out researcher's bias and using a school study site in which the researcher had no connection.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed the data for this study by using the Creswell Data Analysis spiral approach (Creswell, 1998). This approach sought to provide understanding of participants' experiences by reflecting on the whole data set to form initial categories, synthesizing each category while moving in analytic circles to explain and support each category. As suggested by Creswell (1998), "In this loop, category formation represents the heart of qualitative data analysis" (p. 144).

After each interview, the researcher labeled field notes with pseudonyms chosen by participants. The researcher used a professional transcriber to transcribe audio-taped interviews. The following steps were used to analyze the data for this study:

1. Organized data by using a computer database program. Data were broken into smaller units of individual words, key phrases, sentences, similarities and differences.
2. Listened to the entire data set several times to identify categories and subcategories for interpretation of themes.
3. Assigned general descriptions to the themes and color-coded them for ease of management to represent each participant's significant statement. As suggested by Creswell (1998) "Classifying pertains to taking the text or qualitative information

apart, looking for categories, themes, or dimensions of information" (p. 144).

McMillan (2004) noted, "The goal of the analysis is to discover patterns, ideas, explanations, and understanding" (p. 267).

4. Integrated, summarized and presented color-coded significant statements and themes in final matrix format providing a visual reference to specific themes. Miles and Huberman (1994) noted that a visual display of data permits the analyst to organize, compress and assemble information into a format that will aid in the understanding of what is happening and draw justified conclusions.

### **Summary**

The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to explore factors African American males perceived contributed to their academic success, to identify challenges to their academic success and to develop a better understanding regarding solutions for improving African American male students' academic success. Two educational professionals reviewed and evaluated interview questions prior to pilot study. The researcher conducted a pilot study with two African American male students to test and clarify interview questions. The interview guide consisted of 16 questions. The interviews of six students took place in a designated location at Ivory High School. Research data were transcribed, organized and coded to find common themes and patterns in the interviews. Audiotapes and printed transcripts were stored for security.



## Chapter 4

### Report of Data and Data Analysis

The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to explore factors African American males perceived as contributors to their academic success. In addition, challenges to academic success and solutions for improving academic success were investigated. The researcher interviewed three African American male junior and three African American male senior students to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of academic success. This study is guided by the overarching research question: What do African American male students perceive as factors contributing to their academic success? Additional supporting questions were:

1. What does academic success mean to African American male students?
2. What roles do peers, parents and educators play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
3. What role does school environment play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
4. What are some challenges and solutions for accomplishing academic success?

This chapter contains demographic profiles of each participant and an analysis of the data collected from interviews with three African American male junior and three African American male senior students. The qualitative research design used in conducting this study allowed the researcher to gather actual accounts of perceptions and experiences from each participant. A pilot study was conducted with two African American male students to test and revise the interview questions for clarity and appropriateness. Both respondents judged the interview questions to be suitable for future use on participants. All questions were deemed appropriate and usable for the actual study. None of the questions needed alteration before the interview study took place. Prior

to the interviews, the researcher informed each participant of the need to express his personal views on academic success.

### **Demographic Profiles**

#### **Light**

Light, age 18 and a product of a single family home, is a senior with a self-reported 4.0 GPA. He stated, “I have a 4.0 GPA. I maintained straight As all throughout high school. I have been on the Principal’s Honor Roll, ‘A’ Honor Roll.” Light further commented concerning his academic performance. “I’ve always been a studious person. I don’t think I could apply myself more, but, for now, it’s like, I’m doing what I need to do to get what I need to get.” Light participated in Future Farmers of America (FFA), Key Club, marching band, concert band, Principal's Council, and the Youth Apprenticeship Program at Ivory High School. Outside of school, Light was active in 4-H, church choirs, Watson Brown Junior Board, and Relay for Life.

Light set many goals for himself. “I wanted to be a valedictorian, but I was a salutatorian. I wanted to attend Morehouse, and I got accepted. I’m going.” Light expressed confidence in his ability to succeed by setting long-term goals for himself. “When I get to Morehouse, I am going to major in biology. I want to either become a science teacher or a sports medicine physician.”

#### **Wiz Khalifa**

Wiz Khalifa, age 18, is a senior with a self-reported 3.8 GPA who lives with his grandparents. He reported being ranked “number 8 in my class for undergraduates”, and “making the honor roll ever since ninth grade.” Wiz Khalifa stated his goals were “to at least get accepted into two colleges, get a job so I can work, and get all my credits. I need to graduate to receive my diploma.” Wiz Khalifa believes his dedication and hard work towards his academics led him to reach his goal of being accepted into two colleges: Savannah State University and Georgia State

University. He remarked that he “set his goals at the beginning of this school term. I think since I’ve been doing a lot of schooling and academics in high school, it really helped me become a positive person, to set my goals.”

While at Ivory High School, Wiz Khalifa stated he participated in “Science Club, Future Farmers of America (FFA), football, basketball, track, cross-country [running], Youth Apprenticeship Program,” as well as served as “the Junior Marshal.” Wiz Khalifa emphasized that while serving as a Junior Marshal, he had the opportunity to “help out with graduation.” Outside of school, Wiz Khalifa participated in the summer Upward Bound Program. Wiz Khalifa credited this program for teaching him about college life. “Over my years in high school I was in the Upward Bound Program. It’s a program that helps students realize how colleges are.” In addition to participating in extra-curricular activities, Wiz Khalifa held a job working at the courthouse as part of his youth apprenticeship community service experience. The Youth Apprenticeship Program “helps us get experience for work at [a] job site. So I worked at the courthouse for my community [service experience].” When asked if he found it hard to balance extra-curricular activities and academics, Wiz Khalifa responded, “It’s been easy to do both. I can balance both of them.”

### **Nascar**

Nascar, age 18, is a senior with goals of completing his high school education and attending college. Nascar, while attending Ivory High School, was very active in extracurricular activities. He participated in the Youth Apprenticeship Program, football, basketball, track, 4-H, and Future Farmers of America (FFA). Outside of school, he participated in the 4-H Club.

Nascar expressed that he grew up in a single parent, stable home. “I grew up in a pretty nice stable home. You know, single parent. My mother raised me into the man I am. I always

thought of myself as a great person, a leader.” Although Nascar considers himself a leader, he credits his ability to follow as a contributor to his school success. “I do follow, but I’ll follow the best. I think that’s why I got to where I am today.” According to Nascar, he has few role models in his life.

I got very few role models. There haven’t really been one person in my life that I could say I give a lot of credit to, but I can say there are many people who helped me that I can give credit to. I give them credit for my success, where I am now, and where I’m going.

He described his academic performance at Ivory High School as being great.

I think this has been the greatest semester and year of my high school. I am trying to stay on task and make sure I do all the things that are necessary for me to graduate. I feel that, as far as being in school, I always do my best. I always stay on task and try to let no one down, especially my mom and my little sister. I want them to know that I am doing it. I am just trying to stick this out for everybody who is watching.

Nascar stated he set many goals for himself during high school.

As far as high school, I have many goals: to finish high school and be an honor graduate. Because in this day and age, you have a lot of students dropping out, and I did not want to be a statistic. I did not want to be one of the ones who dropped out and not finish school. So, I’ve already finished school and in the top of my class.

### **Scooby Doo**

Scooby Doo, age 16 and lives with his parents, is a junior with aspirations of attending college. “I plan to go to college right after school and at least go for my bachelor’s first and I plan to go for a physical therapist degree right after college; I mean away to college so I can at least go further with everything. I just love learning.”

At Ivory High School, Scooby Doo participated in Math Club, baseball, and football. Outside of school, he volunteered at a local antique shop. He expressed that during his high school years he “realize how much the world can be difficult. You meet a lot of different people, a lot of different types of environments and everything.” He remarked that after graduating college he plans “to make as much money as I possibly can. I plan to have a nice family, a nice house, just be successful, [and] provide for my family. For one, get my family out of this town and somewhere nicer and fitting for us.”

### **Stitch**

Stitch, age 17, is a junior and a product of a single parent home. He stated he has “a brother from my mother” and “three more brothers on my father’s side. My father is not in my life.” He has goals of attending college and pursuing a career in human resources. “My goal is to graduate Ivory High School, attend Valdosta State University and major in business administration and computer science.” When asked why he chose those two fields of study, Stitch replied, “I want to be in human resources, and when I looked up Georgia Colleges it said those are the required majors you need in that field [Human Resources].” Stitch stated he has taken a Business Essential Class at Ivory High School, participated in dual enrollment at a local college and took a class titled Computer in the Modern World.

He stated he is willing to help in any area required of him. “I love to plan stuff and to help with group activities and community service, and any other activity that you ask me for.” Stitch stated he has participated in “Band, 4-H, Future Farmers of America (FFA), Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA)”, and served as “president of his junior class.” Outside of school, Stitch stated he worked as a “rest home helper.” Stitch describes his academic performance as “on a scale of one to ten I would give myself an 8 1/2. Sometimes I do struggle

in between, but I always pick it up and bring it to where it needs to be.” When asked to describe himself as an “A”, “B” or “C” student, Stitch described himself as a “B” student. He further pointed out that he did not always get good grades. “My first year when I started in ninth grade, I had Cs because I wasn’t really focused and wanted to stay immature. And then I buckled down and been keeping Bs.”

### **Unknown Critic**

Unknown Critic, age 16, is a junior and lives with both parents. He stated he was a member of the football team, FBLA, and 4-H Club. He served as an officer of the Key Club and an officer of his Junior Class. He stated he “attends church every third Sunday.” His goals were “not to be a statistic and drop out of high school, to make honor roll, to be top of my class in males or females, or just be in the top 5% of my [graduating] class.” He stated “It’s very important I’ve obtained those goals that [I] have set for myself in high school.” Unknown Critic realizes that it is not easy reaching those goals. “I had maintained a 3.5 average but when I got to eleventh grade, all the tests and pressures dropped me to a 3.3 [average].” Unknown Critic’s attitude toward this drop in his average was “It didn’t really affect my drive. It just affected my grades. It’s all about your drive to get to whatever point you want to in life.” Unknown Critic further noted, “I am trying to be more responsible. To put work before pleasure” and pursue his ambition to attend college. He saw himself as a leader because “they [students] usually come to me if they have any problems, and it motivates me to keep doing what I’m doing, because they look at me as a leader.”

### **Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the factors African American male students perceived as contributors to their academic success as well as investigate the

challenges to academic success and solutions students believed to be necessary for improving academic success. The participants discussed their perceptions and experiences based on the overarching question: What do African American male students perceive as factors contributing to academic success?

The data derived from the analysis of the interviews with the students are presented to correspond with the supporting research questions of the study. The researcher has taken particular care to present the perspectives of each participant in a logical and sequential order as guided by the supporting research questions.

**Supporting Question #1: What does academic success mean to African American male students?**

During the interviews, the participants associated academic success with future achievement and having an industrious lifestyle. They believed being academically successful meant setting goals, working hard to accomplish goals, having a great job, high income, a better lifestyle, and fulfilling their dreams. In addition, self-motivation played a major role in achieving future goals.

Light believed to be academically successful meant gaining knowledge as a prerequisite to success. "Doing what needs to be done in order to achieve the knowledge you need in order to make it where you want to be in life." He further believed academic success is an individual goal.

Some people might want to go all the way up to their doctorate, and they might consider that academic success. But others might just want to stop at their high school diploma, and that may be where they consider their academic success.

He believed that working hard to reach his goals while in school would allow him the freedom to enjoy life and make his own decisions.

I have always been taught to work hard now so you can play and do whatever you want later. So I think that by working hard now, by achieving the goals that I have set for myself, I will put myself in a position where later in life I [will] be able to enjoy the finer things in life and I'll be able to do what I want to do and go when I want to go.

Nascar perceived academic success as providing opportunities for accomplishing his dreams. He stated, "Academic success usually is defined as getting your diploma and getting as many of those diplomas as you can possibly get. The more you learn, the more successful you become and in turn the more money you can make and live a good life." He believed being academically successful will "open up more doors, more opportunities for me and I'll be able to do a lot more and actually fulfill the dreams I have."

Scooby Doo believed academic success would enable a person to advance in life and improve his lifestyle as well as the lifestyle of his family. According to Scooby Doo, a person who is academically successful is "someone who is able to actually make something of themselves and actually go further in life than what normal people would expect them to." As far as academic success affecting his future, Scooby Doo stated, "Most of my family really has not had education success and going somewhere with education. I know it [education] could increase our lifestyles a lot better."

Stitch saw a connection between academic success, knowledge, a high salary and future employment. He believed getting an education would lead to a future job. "If you have a great education, you will have a great job in the future. The better your education is, the higher your



salary will be and the more knowledge you will have.” Stitch summarized academic success as “basically... striving to do your best and get an education.”

According to Unknown Critic, academic success is not measured by grades, but instead one's determination to succeed. Unknown Critic believed self-motivation is an important component of academic success.

Well for me, it is the drive. I think, from my standpoint, your grades don't determine how smart you are. It determines how willing you are to do the work in the classroom. It doesn't determine how smart you are. [Grades are important] “to get in college...to get where I need to go.

Wiz Khalifa defined academic success as hard work. “I would define it like...a lot of hard work built up that will...get you into a positive view in life. Just doing hard...work all through your years of high school and then using it for the afterlife.” He understood academic success is importance for career achievement. “If I didn't have the academics...to achieve, I won't be nobody. It won't be no point of doing anything in life. Academics in high school...really helped me become a positive person.” Wiz Khalifa further noted that involvement in extracurricular activities helped with academic success. “Extracurricular things really helped out. The activity helps kids to stay off the streets so they can do something like school, stay on the positive mind.”

**Supporting Question #2: What roles do peers, parents and educators play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?**

During the interview sessions, the researcher sought to find participants' understanding of the role peers, parents and educators played in African American male students' academic success. Participants identified many factors they perceived as contributing to African American

male students' academic success. Peers serving in the roles of motivators, mentors, decision makers and trusted friends was a key factor noted by the participants influencing African American males' academic success.

Participants perceived parental involvement, parental encouragement, and parental educational support influenced their desires to succeed. Many of them expressed having parent(s) who had high expectations for their academic success. Participants reported parents who valued education and supported them in their extracurricular activities gave them motivation for continued hard work and success.

Participants noted that educators could help African American male students succeed by dispelling negative stereotypes, displaying strong leadership, and having a caring attitude. In addition, participants stated it is important for educators to maintain communication with students, focus on their individual needs, and be aware of their cultural background. Participants perceived African American male students need educators and administrators who will encourage, motivate, and promote their academic success.

*Role of peers.* Overall, participants in this study agreed that peers were influential in their academic success. Five of the six participants stated peers influenced them. They found peers to be influential in decision making and keeping each other motivated and focused on school studies and their goals. Findings revealed that peers listened, and encouraged each other, as well as served as study partners and mentors. In addition, peers played a positive role by exhibiting cooperation and trust in one another.

Scooby Doo noted the importance of friends supporting each other and having confidence and trust in each other. Light indicated friends motivated and encouraged each other to achieve

academic success. He noted the impact friends have on each other could be far greater than the impact of a family member or a teacher.

Friends can motivate each other. It may be more [of an] impact to hear the encouragement from a friend than it is from a family member or a teacher. People always say your friends are the ones who are going to get you in trouble. They are the ones that will have you on the streets doing this and doing that. Most students can relate to friends and will listen and value the opinions of their friends.

Light gave an example of trying to motivate a friend to achieve in academics.

Let's just say I have a friend who is not as academically sound as I am. If I can get him to see that this is where you need to be, you can be this or you can do this, then the friendship will probably be the encouraging factor.

Light recalled that friends tend to listen to friends more so than they listen to parents or teachers when it comes to doing work in school because they identify with each other.

I think as teenagers we forget that our parents, or older people, were once where we are....Everything they are telling us is to help us out, because they know what it is like, and they have been through it. But when you are with your friends, you feel you can relate to them. [Because] we are going through the same thing right now, so I can listen to you because you know what you are talking about. But we forget that we are just learning together.

Friends, according to Stitch, helped with academic achievement by serving as mentors, by giving encouragement, and by serving as a study partner.

We can get together, study, help each other before our graduation test. Me and Mic (pseudonym) had study sessions at each other's houses. We brought food. If you see one

of your friends down, you can ...help him study or mentor him. Help them out with their work a little. It's cool.

He remarked that by hanging with like-minded friends who are focused and doing their schoolwork will have positive results.

The type of peers that you associate with is important in helping you achieve academic success. If you hang with bad peers, sometimes they have bad influence on you and you start behaving like they are, but if you hang with peers that are straight-minded and doing their work, you also want to be straight-minded and do your work.

Unknown Critic made this comment: "We [friends] really encourage them in a positive way." He believed friends serving as mentors, encouraging and motivating each other would help African American male students achieve.

I have a friend that is currently enrolled at Land University (pseudonym) and I kind of look up to him as a big brother. He motivated me and I think that's where I want to go. So motivation even from students who have graduated, if they could come back to this school and help, that would be a big thing,

Wiz Kahlifa believed friends kept each other focused because each had a goal. To help friends achieve academic success, he remarked: "I guess you just help them [friends] out and...tell them positive things. Keep them going on the right track. They can be able to influence them." When asked who would have the greater influence on his mindset, parents or friends, Wiz Kahlifa commented: "I think my parents would, but my friends, we do positive things. We have a goal in our life: to go to college and do right. But for my family, I got a positive mind set on my family."

Nascar believed his friends played the biggest role in his academic success. He expressed his friends were very influential in his decision-making.

Friends may be the biggest role. Those are the people who are most influential to you, or to decisions you make. They say peer pressure is something that is hard....Your friends can determine your success or they can determine your failure. You can let them run you over and you can let them run you down. It is your choice. But your friends...have a say-so in that.

*Role of parents.* Participants in this study reported parents who took an active part in education made an impact on their academic success. Participants reported doing better in school when they were motivated and encouraged by their parents. In addition, participants liked parents to be involved in their extracurricular activities.

Many participants perceived their parent(s) or grandparents valued education and had high expectations for them to complete high school. Some participants indicated they were aware of their parents' expectations for education and this encouraged them to want to go as far as they could. A participant indicated that his parents' expectations were the same as his expectations.

Unknown Critic was aware of his parents' expectation for his educational success. However, his motivation for achieving success was based on his desire for a better lifestyle.

They play a big role because they expect a certain level from me. My parents do not accept Cs in my household. If I were to get a C, they would take my cell phone or something away from me to motivate me more to do better in class.

Unknown Critic knew his parents wanted him to succeed, but their desire did not affect his drive and his goals. His self-determination to succeed was just as great as their expectation for his academic success.

As a young Black minority, I want to actually make it out of Ivory County. Not saying that I'm going to make it out and not look back. I'm going to remember where I came from, but I just want to make it out of this type of environment

When asked to explain what he meant by 'this type of environment', Unknown Critic replied "I see drugs and crack heads and gangs and people houses being robbed and I don't want to live for the rest of my life seeing that every day."

Wiz Khalifa's grandparents played an important role in his education since he was a small child. His grandparents valued education and conveyed to Wiz Khalifa the importance of school. In addition, his grandparents motivated him to continue in school.

They play an important role, because they always been on me since I was little. They taught me to stay in school, and...have a positive mindset. They really respect an education, so they really help contribute. They encouraged me a lot.

His grandparents stayed involved in his education by seeing that he completed his homework assignments. "They made sure I was doing my homework. They know that when I come home, I always do my homework first before I do anything." Wiz Khalifa remarked his grandparents' involvement in his schoolwork "helped me do better in school." With their encouragement to stay in school and their interest in his grades, he developed a positive mindset toward school. "That just stuck in my mind and I [said] I got to do good in education."

Light's mother supported his academics, athletics and extracurricular activities. His mother volunteered at Ivory High School and was a positive force in his life.

My mother has always encouraged us to do the best we can in all that we do and she's always been supportive. She volunteers a lot at school. She has been named parent volunteer of the year for the second year in a row now. She has always been active in

academics, athletics, and extracurricular endeavors. So with her, I think that's a huge motivation.

When asked did it make a difference to have your parent involved in your school activities, Light replied "Yes, Ma'am. I think everyone likes to make their parents proud, and to see that your parents are proud of what you're doing, I think it makes a big difference in the way you address certain stuff." According to Light, making parents feel you value their opinion can make a major impact on their involvement in the school. To get parents involved in academics, Light stated:

Well, I think first, they must feel comfortable in the environment because a lot of time our parent, well people in the community, feel pushed away from the school system. It's like, you should bring your children here, but when they ask you for your opinion, we may or might not support your opinion...By asking for a parent's opinion, and then going the complete opposite, you are basically telling them your opinion doesn't matter. So I feel that by making the parents feel important in the school system can make a major impact on the involvement.

Stitch's mother fully supported him in his education. She encouraged him daily to attend school and to try his best. Stitch's mother made sure he had the necessary school material for completing his daily assignments. She stayed involved in his education. Although his mother encouraged him to be successful, Stitch did not feel pressured from his mother to succeed.

It was encouragement on a daily basis. She encouraged me, first and foremost to come to school everyday, and she tells me to do the best I can. She never fusses, she just tells me to try my best, and if I get it, or I don't, it's just her basic way.

According to Scooby Doo, his mom and grandfather spoke of the value of an education. They were the driving forces keeping him focused on school. "My mom and my grandfather are

extremely fond on getting a great education. My parents graduated from high school. Neither of them actually went to college and had success in it, so that's the major drive for me to actually get further."

Nascar's mother reminded him daily not to succumb to the pressures of school. She constantly encouraged him to do what was necessary to succeed. She played a big role in his education and he appreciated his mother pushing him to succeed in school.

She is the one who pushed me everyday...Don't give up. Well, she says I don't have a choice, which is good. I am glad she keeps pushing me and telling me that I gotta do this and this is something that I will need in order to be successful.

### **Role of Educators**

Participants perceived the role of educators as encouraging, caring, supporting and praising African American male students in their academic success. Some African American males in this study were aware of stereotypes associated with their race. This awareness, as noted by participants, can have an effect on the self-esteem of African American males, thus having an effect on their school performance. They perceived educators should make efforts to understand the African American culture and find ways to eliminate negative stereotypes within the school culture.

*Principal.* According to participants, principals should be proactive and get to know African American male students in an effort to improve their academic success. Principals should discourage negative ideas about African American male students and praise them when they do a great job. In addition, participants perceived principals to be leaders and expected them to lead by example.



According to Scooby Doo, African American male students feel insecure about their performance. He believed negative stereotypes make African American males feel inadequate about what they can and cannot do. Scooby Doo believed the principal could dispel some of the stereotyping African American males face by praising them for their performance.

At least tell them [African American males] some facts of what is going on, how great they are doing. I mean not all...African American males are below standards. People put stereotype on us and that makes a lot of people feel insecure about what they can and can't do.

Nascar noted that the principal could help African American males succeed by being a great leader and setting an example. He believed the principal should lead by example and be willing to explain life's choices to students. He stated the principal at Ivory High School often used her successful career as an example of what could be accomplished with hard work and determination. He expressed how he appreciated his principal motivating African American male students. She used herself as an example to demonstrate how she got where she is today because of hard work and her desire to succeed. Nascar classified this principal as a great person and a great leader.

She [the principal] is a great person. She is a great leader and academic wise. She tells us every day that the choice is ours. She tells us that if we want it, we can do it, we can go get it, and she leads by example. She shows us that you should let no one stop you...She shows us by her success, what she does, that it doesn't matter where you come from, you can be very successful. As she talked with us, she told us she came from [a place] just like us, maybe even worse. ...Look where she is now. She has lived a very successful

life. She said if one day we want to be like that, all we got to do is push and stay, and keep working hard and don't let nothing hold us back or keep us down.

Wiz Khalifa remarked the principal was instrumental in bringing the Graduation Advantage Program (GAP) to Ivory High School to help students review for the graduation test. Under this program, strategies were used to help students strengthen their skills. Through review of materials, they "filled the missing gaps."

She [Principal] played a good role. She makes programs like the GAP Program available at Ivory High School. It is used to help students study for the graduation test. The teachers would come in this room here and they'll talk about what's all on the test and we'll study a good 2 or 3 weeks straight. We'll come here every Friday for the GAP and that really helped us out a lot. Everybody had to go who was eligible to take the graduation test. It really helped increased our scores.

According to Unknown Critic, the principal can help African American male students realize their academic ability by just talking with them. "Probably just sit down and talk with them and make them realize the potential they have to reach it and make it in life." He felt his principal took the time to talk, listen and motivate students. "If a student has gotten in trouble, she [Principal] would sit down and ask them [African American male students] why they would do it, and try to motivate them not to do it again."

Light indicated that students would benefit if the principal shared encouraging words, but he realized the encouragement should come from within each individual. "In my opinion, that starts inside of yourself, but the Principal could encourage, they could share encouraging words or thoughts, but if you don't believe it inside of yourself then it won't mean anything.

When asked if the Principal played a part in reversing the thinking of young African American male students, Light thought a lot of African American male students perceived intelligence as something that must be hidden in order to be popular, but encouragement could change this mentality.

A lot of African American males, in my opinion, feel that it's not cool to be intelligent. They feel that it's best to be, you know, seen but not heard. But I think if there was a way to encourage them to get away from that mentality of [thinking] if you're smart, then you can't be cool, or it's not cool to be smart. If there was a way that we can get each other away from that mentality, I think that a lot more African American males would achieve academically.

Stitch would like to see his school offer classes that will help African American males to mature, to help with everyday life situations and to bond with other African American male students.

I think we could have some more classes available. Black African American young men, such as myself, I like a fraternity type thing. We could have one of those in school, or either JROTC, what we've been trying to get for over a minute now.

When asked what additional classes he would recommend and why, Stitch replied:

Starting out, me and my science teacher, he's a male. He was telling me that...Home Economics would be a great class because you need that in life. I know that JROTC classes will help you to become more of a mature person and being able to respect yourself and others and listen and all, basically.

*Role of teachers.* Participants emphasized the need for encouragement from their teachers. They mentioned the need for teachers to have a caring attitude, help develop their

confidence, and help them discover their potential. In addition, African American male students may benefit when teachers have an understanding of their background, as well as committed to understanding their personal needs. Furthermore, African American male students benefit from teachers who take time to thoroughly explain material and give extra help after school

Light expressed teachers can help students realize their academic ability by instilling confidence. Light spoke of a younger brother who struggled in elementary school and middle school, but began to gain confidence when encouraged by his teachers.

I have a younger brother and coming through elementary school and middle school he wasn't as academically sound as he is now. ..I think that played a ...major part of his confidence. Now he knows he can do it, because he has teachers that constantly tell him... you can do it, you have a ... lot going for yourself. ..By encouraging each other and by their feeling it themselves, it is true that they can do it.

Light further remarked teachers sometimes give up on certain students instead of giving encouragement to those students. "I see this a lot where you might give up on certain people, but if you just keep your hand on them, I think that they will eventually come around"

Light further stated he noticed teachers would have disruptive students sit in the hallway, instead of finding an alternative method of isolating disruptive students within the classroom allowing them to continue getting classroom information. According to Light, this does not benefit the student; instead, it sends a negative message

When I'm walking down the hallway, I see a lot of people...sitting outside of the classes and I feel...if they are in the class and disrupting class, they are not doing any good for people inside the class. But if they are outside the class, then it's not doing any good for them. I feel that by putting them outside of the class, you [teacher] are really just saying

there is no hope for you, you are not getting it, so I am not going to let you stop everyone else from getting it.

Light felt students would benefit from class instructions if teachers worked with disruptive students who caused trouble in class instead of putting them in the hallway.

If there was a way to keep them in class, or get them in some sort of alternative situation, where if they get put out of class, they can be put somewhere else where they will still be getting information, but... isolated by themselves.

In addition, Light commented teachers who are not involved in after school activities are perceived by students as not caring about their extracurricular involvement beyond the school day and these teachers may have a harder time controlling their classes.

We have...a good bit of our teachers, I feel...are willing to go the extra mile. They will stay over. They will come early and help you...On the other hand, there are some teachers that seem to just come from 8 o'clock to 2:55, and after that, that is it. I do believe and I think that those teachers that are not as involved ...outside of the classroom, I feel...those are the teachers that have a harder time with their classes because the students see. You just hear, like, why are you here? So they, [students]...take it out on the teacher a little.

Light stated that his teachers at Ivory High School over the years have cared about his school performance and inspired him towards excellence.

I have a lot of teachers. Well, we don't have many teachers at our school, but I feel that the teachers I have encountered over the years have...cared about how I perform. I can't say the same for everyone, but it's the way you carry yourself and teachers...will see

something inside of you that will make them motivate you to continue to strive...towards excellence and a lot of teachers encourage me on a day to day basis.

Nascar believed teachers should help African American males discover their capabilities and abilities by encouraging them to have confidence that they can learn.

Teachers can help us by showing us our capabilities and abilities. They can show us how well we can learn because they work with us to learn and by working with us we can gain confidence about ourselves so we know that we are out there trying to do things on our own. We can do it and you don't have to worry about us saying, OK I can't do this, I can't do this. Ok, you have someone to show you, you can do it. So that's good, that's confidence in order for you to go out and get it.

In addition, Scooby Doo believed teachers need to understand the African American community and the conditions surrounding students in order to understand how to better serve African American male students.

Well, some of them [teachers] can actually understand where you are coming from.

Because the town that we live in is not all that much of a great town... just the people and the economy and everything that goes around here. It does make life a little bit harder for us to live. But if they [teachers] can actually understand where we come from and our background surrounding us, they could understand this a lot better.

Wiz Khalifa expressed the need for teachers to thoroughly explain the class material and give extra help to those in need of additional explanation concerning the class assignments.

Some teachers explain stuff but they don't explain it thorough. Sometimes they want us to be on a college level, but sometimes people need a little extra help. Some people do. They give extra help but some people need really, really a lot of help.

Wiz Khalifa indicated he has made mistakes in his life. He was grateful to his teachers and family members for showing him "what not to do and what to do." He expressed he does not want to look back but continue forward.

All this stuff that I've been through, I don't know, hard stuff, I mean, the teacher pushing me, and my family members [pushing me]. It really did put a positive effect on my mind. People learn by mistakes, and I made a lot of mistakes in my life. I just go forward [and] don't look back. I think all that help contributed to my academic success by my teachers pushing me and making me go harder and my family being on my back. Thank you very much."

Stitch felt his teachers were caring, wanted him to learn and were willing to stay after school and help him realize his academic ability.

First and foremost they teach you material, and you can have some who just need it for the check. All of the ones I have always had, tell you that they're not here for the money, they're here for us, because they care about us, and they want us to learn not only for themselves, and they try to teach.

Stitch's teachers were willing to rearrange their schedules, stay after school and put in the extra time to make sure he got the material.

They want us to get it. It's a variety of those who will stay if their schedule is clear. If their schedule is not clear for the day, they make a way to go over their schedule and plan so you can stay.

Unknown Critic stated teachers should focus on students' needs in class and give them personal attention when needed. Accordingly, teachers should not be in a hurry to proceed with class lessons when there are students afraid to ask questions. He believed if teachers would take

time to go to them personally and ask them if they understand rather than just going on with the lesson, African American male students would do better in school.

Focus more on the class instead of trying to get the lesson that need to be taught. Most students are afraid to ask questions in classroom. So [if a] teacher sees them, they will go to them personally and ask them if they do not understand anything rather than just going on with the subject. I think that would help African American male students.

**Supporting Question #3: What role does school environment play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?**

The participants' reflections on the importance of school environment were clearly stated. Participants perceived there was a connection between aspects of their school environment and academic achievement for African American male students. The school environment was conceptualized as contributing to components that increase the likelihood of African American males being academically successful. During the interviews, participants stated they learned best in a safe, well-mannered, and positive environment. Some participants viewed a positive environment as shaping their learning and behavior. They perceived having an environment with more African American male teachers in the classroom serving as role models and mentors would support their academic development because they could identify with these male teachers. In addition, the participants perceived an environment recognizing their academic achievement could encourage African American males to be successful in academics.

Light thought African American males would benefit from a school environment having more African American male teachers who could relate to African American male students. Having more African American male teachers serve as role models will give African American



students someone they can aspire to be like them. Light stated this will "motivate students to do better."

I've noticed coming up through school, there are hardly any African American male educators in the school and I think that without having somebody you can relate to is not as encouraging as if you would have someone you can relate to and be like, well he did it, and he's my teacher now, so I know if he can do it then I can do it, and I think that's big. That should play a big role in motivating the students to do better.

Nascar stated a well-mannered environment is considered a good environment for learning compared to a school environment where violence, drugs, and gangs are prevalent which may lead to a high dropout rate. A negative environment discourages one from wanting to be successful. He concluded that a good environment is a motivator for achieving academic success.

The environment plays a big role in achieving success. Because depending on where you go to school or what's around you, it kind of affects how you are. Like you're in a good place, like well mannered, you know, very educated...you tend to feel that effect, and you want to go out there and be just like that. But, if you're in a bad place, say for instance, somewhere like gang violence or people not wanting to do it [education], there's a high dropout rate. The students tend to feel like okay, since they're doing it [gang violence] then I've got a right to do it [gang violence]. And they're going to do it [gang violence], because where you are, affects your ability and what you can do. So a good environment is really the best place to get an education.

According to Stitch, a happy school environment that supported recognition of achievement and provided a well-stocked library will do a lot to further African American male

students' academic achievement. He pointed to the photos of good sports players displayed on the hallway wall. Speaking of Ivory High School environment, Stitch remarked:

The environment is...okay. It has our books available. If you walk along the hallway, you have photos of our good sports players. So they [school] give you recognition for your achievement and that make you happier. It is just very noticeable.

Furthermore, Stitch felt his school made an effort to give recognition for students' achievement. He felt this recognition was important because it reminded students if they wanted to participate in sports or other extracurricular activities, they must achieve academically.

If you are not focused and you start falling down on your grades, you will not be able to participate in some of the extra activities,...have your picture in the hallway for your accomplishments, so the recognition helps you [because] I want my accomplishment to also be up here, so, it helps you.

Unknown Critic stated a positive environment enhanced the academic achievement of African American male students. In addition, he believed certain types of environment can determine your behavior.

I'm not saying that all African American males are so easily persuaded but that the type of environment can kind of sway them to do what they see their friends doing and if they have a positive type of environment, maybe that will encourage them to do better.

He believed his interaction with the school environment motivated him as well as other students.

When asked what brings about a positive environment, Unknown Critic commented:

I don't regularly see anybody saying or trying to drop out. I see a smiley round face, mostly every day, and it...motivates me, because they usually come to me if they have any problems and it motivates me to keep doing what I'm doing.

Wiz Khalifa expressed the school environment at Ivory High School “feels like a safe environment. I mean I feel like doing class work. It’s a safe environment.” He further stated doing community service work possibly can help with African American academic success.

I take the program called service learning. We do community service. You know, we pick up stuff around school and we go in the community and help out. I think that can help achieve African American success. It can go down in their portfolio for doing something like that. We just go around doing community service, and it looks good on our portfolio for scholarships.

Wiz Khalifa also viewed other programs offered at Ivory High School as an asset to helping African American male students make career choices.

I mean the stuff we do at the school helping out Mr. D. (pseudonym) and the stuff we do with the plants and the agriculture, and the welding program and stuff. I think it really helps African Americans think what they want to do in life.

Scooby Doo referenced the females at Ivory High School to the school environment. He thought the females represented greatness. “When you really think of success at our school, the first thing comes to your mind is the females, because females are basically the top of almost every great thing in our school.”

**Supporting Question #4: What are some challenges and solutions for accomplishing academic success?**

Participants in this study were clear and knowledgeable about challenges to African American male academic success and the solutions for achieving academic success. The challenges hindering success and the solutions promoting success focused on the community and

the school. In addition, participants commented on self-determination and motivation as solutions for success.

*Challenges.* The participants presented many examples of challenges African American males face in academic development. Some participants mentioned the impact of mixed-negative images on academic success. Often these images leave students believing they can imitate a particular lifestyle. As Light said, “I think that a lot of times we get images of what we should be like. We see all of the rich people in their videos. There is alcohol and sex and all this is drug-related.” People accept negative images and begin to develop “the mindset that academic success is not cool.” According to Scooby Doo, society’s opinions concerning African American males may affect their self-confidence.

Just the...talking and stuff and the way people talk about African males, the way society looks at us or whatever. Just the bad things that placed in people’s heads about African males. Feels as though no one believes in them.

In addition, Nascar perceived if African American male students are constantly told they cannot be successful, then they begin to react and agree with the negative comment.

Basically, I think [what] will hinder people from success is someone telling you that you can’t. Saying you can’t do this or you can’t do that. Because most of the time we hear that enough and if you hear it so much, you start to believe it and if you believe it, then you won’t do your best and make something of yourself.

Participants perceived the lack of community initiatives as challenges to their academic development. Sixty-seven percent of the participants reported the community should become involved with education by mentoring, tutoring, and encouraging African American males. They perceived the community setting curfews and keeping African American males involved with

activities would deter violence, drug activities and foster academics. Furthermore, having the community involved, lets students know the community cares about their education.

Nascar perceived the community does not emphasize to African American males the danger of street life and reinforce to them what can be accomplished with an education.

The community can get involved with school. They can help the student and show the student what's in the streets and what they don't want him to be and with an education what they can go on to do. So the community plays a big role in what we do here [Ivory High School].

The lack of community involvement in academics could affect how African American males perceive the community. The community, as perceived by Light, could make an effort to show African American males' it cares about their academic development. Light emphasized the community placed a lot of interest on athletics, but little interest on academics.

One thing I noticed is that you always have an athletic boosters...people boosting the athletics. But when it comes to academics, it is hard to get people involved. I think by the community being involved not only showing up to a basketball or a football game, but coming to graduation, shows that you are interested in not only the athletics, but also the academics. Then you will get the point across to the students that you care about how they achieve academically

The community, as perceived by some participants, does not provide programs and activities to keep students involved and off the streets. Both Wiz Khalifa and Stitch noted many African American youths navigate to the streets as an alternative for after school activities. Wiz Khalifa emphasized "...A lot of African Americans stay in the street. And some of our neighborhoods

got crime in it. They [community] can find something for them to do so they can stay active instead of being in the street.”

Stitch remarked:

Like, nothing for you to do after school. You just go home and no programs offered, nothing to do, just go hang in the streets or whatever. Give me something to do instead of going straight home and getting in the streets.

Unknown Critic mentioned the need for the community to set curfews to help African American males avoid the street life. “The more time they spend on the streets, the less time they are not studying, focusing, or thinking about their schoolwork.” Scooby Doo perceived the community mentoring African American males may challenge them to stay in school and strive for success.

They can actually push us farther, help us out. Tell us what is and isn't. You see all the males who is out there on the streets or whatever and if you want to be truthful, most of them probably was never told anything about education. Most of them probably dropped out. There is no drive for success.

*Solutions.* During the interviews, the participants made several suggestions to help African American males become academically successful. In addition, participants identified several study strategies they found to be beneficial for achieving academic success. African American male participants indicated studying at home, using various study strategies in school, as well as applying good listening techniques in school promoted academic success for them. Half of the participants used note taking as a successful study strategy. Participants perceived these suggestions for academic success as ideas to be incorporated by peers, parents, school, and community.

Several participants expressed African American males should take responsibility for their education. Light and Nascar perceived hard work, encouragement from peers, being surrounded with people who have similar goals, teamwork, self-determination and believing that success is possible are solutions to their academic success. Light remarked:

You have to believe in yourself. Once you believe in yourself, you can do things you never imagined you can do. And once you start believing in yourself, others will start to believe in you as well, and it goes vice versa. Once others start to believe in you, you might start to believe in yourself. I think that once you have the faith that you can do it, you can do it.

Light's study strategies involved studying with friends. He found it hard to study alone, but when engaged in a study group, he remained focused and motivated. In addition, he used flash cards, drilled friends on questions, and used graphic organizers to help him study and retain information.

I find it hardest to study alone... focus study groups with your friends drilling each other, using flash cards, maybe, or just constantly drilling each other questions. When you can be engaged with other people, I think it is more effective than being alone.

Nascar emphasized the major component for academic success is "hard work." He perceived that if you are determined to be successful, "you will achieve whatever it is you want to do." He expressed friends and peers can motivate each other to stay focused. Nascar stated, "It is best to have a group of people around you who want the same thing and work with others who have the same goals as you." The study strategy that worked best for Nascar was to spend time at home reading the information from that day. He found this method to be helpful in

remembering information. Nascar replied, “A strategy outside of class would be to just go home and reread the information.”

Unknown Critic emphasized the importance of self-discipline to accomplish your goals. “Just mainly focus, stay on track, stay on point. Set goals and before you know it, you will be graduating high school and hopefully going to a technical college or a 4-year college.”

Unknown Critic stated he actually spent little time studying but by listening to the teacher, he was able to absorb and take in everything the teacher taught. Unknown Critic responded: “Well, it is pretty fun, because I don’t usually study. I just pay attention in class, and it usually marinates into my mind and I am able to remember everything. I do not usually study.”

Wiz Khalifa believed the solution to helping African American male students succeed is to offer some type of educational program that will allow them to experience success. “We need another educational program. An educational program that allows them to have success or something probably like a sports thing. You know a lot of people like sports, so that might attract them.” Wiz Khalifa further commented that he participated in football as a way of helping him bond with other people and feel connected to the school. He found participating in football after school provided an opportunity for him to engage in a worthwhile activity.

After I do my work, it is something I can do to stay focused instead of doing something bad. After school is over, I just go to football practice. That is what I play instead of going home. It helps me feel like I have a strong relationship with some people, some cultures at my school.

Wiz Khalifa used hand note taking and index cards as study methods to help him remember information from classes. He found writing definitions and main ideas on note cards helped him review and study for tests. “I had hand notes, little index cards. I write notes down. I write my



stuff down and just go back and look at it. I keep a whole load of information, key points, definitions, terms and main ideas.”

Scooby Doo perceived a firm foundation for accomplishing many tasks in life requires, supporting, believing, and having the confidence that your race is capable of succeeding.

You can just try to pull up our race, just try to prove to the world what we all can be. We are known as probably one of the minorities, but if we actually, stand and actually do our best at everything we do, I honestly believe we can be the best at whatever it is we are accomplishing.

Scooby Doo also used note taking as a method to help him remember information from classes.

Scooby Doo indicated that taking notes were more valuable than memorizing the material. He replied:

Taking lots of notes is really important for me, because photographic memory is good, but if you are not actually learning it, there is no use for it.

Stitch believed the community could help with academic achievement of African American males by offering tutoring sessions, mentoring and having male oriented programs established through the churches. Male oriented programs will provide an opportunity for church leaders to talk to African American males about goals and offer help with questions young males may have.

I think they can start out by having male programs. Some churches have them. They have male Lock-In's sometimes in the community teaching me how to achieve certain goals, how to treat this and treat that. Have elders to tutor you into becoming a great man.

Stitch indicated being able to break down difficult material into smaller units helped him study.

Unraveling was a technique he used to identify main points in his reading. Stitch replied:

Studying can be done right away, but the way I do it is most of the time the teachers will give out information that we need to study. I will break it down into little pieces so that I can fully understand it. Then I go over it, read it thoroughly, and then I get someone else to quiz me the day of the test.

Overall, all participants felt prepared for life after school. Self motivation, hard work and belief in self resonated with participants. They felt they had been given great opportunities for success at Ivory High School and teachers had prepared them well for life ahead. One participant stated, "I think all that help contributed to my academic success. My teachers pushing me and making me go harder and my family being on my back. Thank you very much."

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to report the findings that emerged from the data collected from three junior and three senior African American male students. Through interviews, the researcher obtained the perceptions of the selected African American male students at Ivory High School.

The researcher's findings in the study noted common themes and patterns related to academic success among African American male students. Among African American male participants, academic success meant obtaining knowledge to be successful, self-motivation, and future achievement. The factors influencing African American males' academic success included parental involvement, peer support, caring teachers, recognition of achievement, understanding cultural background, safe, well-mannered environment, and positive environment. Challenges to African American male academic success included negative stereotypes, lack of community initiatives, and lack of self-motivation. Finally, solutions to African American males' academic success included positive role models, mentoring, and self-initiatives.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summary, Conclusion, and Implications**

In this chapter, the researcher reported the summary of the study, discussion of the findings, and conclusions and implications according to the findings. Recommendations based on the analysis of the data are also provided.

#### **Summary**

This study explored factors African American male students perceived contributed to academic success as well as investigated the challenges to academic success and solutions students believed to be necessary for improving academic success. The overarching research question guiding this study was: What factors do African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success?

The supporting questions that assisted in the study were:

1. What does academic success mean to African American male students?
2. What roles do peers, parents and educators play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
3. What role does school environment play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
4. What are some challenges and solutions for accomplishing academic success?

The qualitative study was completed by conducting semi-structured interviews with three junior and three senior African American male students in a rural high school in Georgia. The researcher solicited the help of counselor and principal in identifying African American male junior and male senior students as consideration for this study. From the returned consent and assent forms, three junior and three senior students were chosen as participants for the study.

Each interview consisted of 16 questions and follow-up questions when necessary to gain clarity and understanding of interviewees' responses. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed. The researcher coded the factors participants considered contributed to academic success for common themes and patterns. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of students and the high school.

## **Discussion of Research Findings**

### **Supporting Question 1**

What does academic success mean to African American male students? The results of this study indicated similarities in the attitudes and perceptions of participants concerning the meaning of academic success. They associated academic success with working to achieve a position in life, and striving to do one's best. Participants' responses centered around three major themes: obtaining knowledge to be successful, future achievement, and self-motivation.

Academic success was defined as an avenue for gaining knowledge that will lead to opportunities for advancement in life. A valuable education was a means of achieving future success. This finding supports previous research studies that indicated African American males considered a quality education the pathway to economic and social success (Anderson, 1988; Fitzgerald, 2006).

Although participants expressed different individual future goals, each viewed completing high school as a first step to being able to complete college, and advance economically in life. All participants in this study had concrete and precise plans for accomplishing their goals, which included working hard in school and staying focused on their studies. The findings in this study support previous research studies that African American male students desire to achieve an education and their desire to have a career are related to academic

achievement (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Goldsmith, 2004; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Smerdon, 2002; Sullivan, Riccio, & Reynolds, 2008). The findings revealed that African American male participants perceived if they stay in school, good things would happen to them economically.

Researchers (Anderson, 1988; Fitzgerald, 2006; Howard, 2003; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Rentner & Kober, 2001; Rowley, 2000; Ryan, 1999) provided documentation that African American males viewed advanced levels of education as an opportunity for social mobility and career advances. Academic success was also viewed as an important ingredient for future achievement. Academic success was the pathway for participants to pursue their hopes and dreams of a better lifestyle, high income and a great job. Findings in this study support previous researchers who agree that most African American students are driven to perform well academically because of their hopes and dreams to be successful (Conchas & Clark, 2002; Noguera, 2001, 2003).

Academic success was an inner drive or motivation to get to whatever place in life one feels successful. All participants perceived the value of getting an education and realized that it involved self-motivation, and setting goals. Education is important to African American males because it is an avenue to advance out of current environment. Some perceived an education would allow them the opportunity to abandon their negative environment, while others perceived an education would make it possible to enjoy the “finer things in life.” Yet, others perceived academic success would allow them to accomplish the education their parent(s) or grandparents did not attain. These findings align with previous research stating that successful African American males recognized that self-discipline and self-motivation contributed to their high achievement (Barnett, 2004; Trotter, 1981; Williams, 2002). These findings are also consistent with a historical passage indicating that early African Americans realized in order to reach a

successful place in life, African American males had to educate themselves (Anderson, 1988; Patton, 1980).

### **Supporting Question 2**

What roles do peers, parents and educators play in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success? Previous research confirmed that successful African American males credited their high achievement to excellent teachers, supportive parents and their determination to succeed (Barnett, 2004; Trotter, 1981; Williams, 2002). Five of the six participants in the current study perceived the role of peers, parents and educators to motivate and encourage them to succeed. It is important to understand how variables affect academic success for African American students who are struggling academically. Therefore, it is beneficial to explore factors contributing to African American males' perceptions toward their academic performance.

*Role of peers.* Peer influence and peer support were the major themes emerging from the resulting data. The African American male participants in this study recognized peer influence and peer support as important elements in their academic success. In this study, all African American male participants reported having a positive identity with their peers.

Peers were influential and could be either a positive force or a negative force in participants' decision-making. Peers, at times, had a strong impact on participants' decision-making. In some instances, participants listened to the advice of peers before listening to the advice of parents. The advice given by peers had a greater impact than advice from family members because peers could relate to each other. Findings aligned with previous research studies emphasizing development of same-race peer relationships and same-race support, to some extent, affects African American males' academic success. These studies showed that peer

connection played an important role in African American males' collegiate success. In addition, same-race peer relationships and same-race support enhanced the quality of college experiences for African American males (Harper, 2006; McClure, 2006).

All participants perceived themselves in a positive peer environment promoting academic success. They associated with peers who supported them, who encouraged them, who had similar goals, and who kept them on a positive path. Their association with peers who valued education and were committed to education motivated them to stay committed to the ideals of pursuing an education. These findings agreed with Sullivan's (2002) research stating peers made the difference in the academic success of African American male students. Although peers could cause one to make right or wrong decisions in life, participants in this study perceived their peers motivated them to stay focused and out of trouble. In addition, peers had trust and confidence in each other. The findings reflected Warde's (2008) study focusing on factors contributing to African American males successfully completing a baccalaureate degree. Those findings concluded that peer mentorship had an impact in the successful completion of African American males receiving their baccalaureate degrees.

*Role of parents.* Several themes emerged from the resulting data concerning parents' role in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success. The emerging themes were parental encouragement, parental involvement/support, and parental expectation. Participants recognized the connection between parental support and being academically successful.

Previous research studies found that African American male students excelled in school when parents encouraged them and when parents showed interest in their school work (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Goldsmith, 2004; Jordan & Cooper, 2002; Tomlinson, Gould, Schroth, & Jarvis,

2006; Trotter, 1981; Wilson-Jones, 2003). Fifty percent of participants in the current study were products of a single-parent upbringing, in a household consisting of a mother and/or grandparent. Although participants grew up in a non-traditional household, all participants reported the value of getting an education was stressed in their household. In some participants' household, neither mother nor grandparent was a high school graduate or attended college, but participants in this study noted their parent or grandparent encouraged their academic achievement by telling them to do their best, remain focused and work toward their goals for a better life. This encouragement from parent(s) gave the African American male participants the drive to succeed.

Researchers Maton, Hrabowski, and Greif (1998) affirmed African American males showed high educational outcomes when parents visited the school, were involved in school activities, and had high expectations for postsecondary education. Parents who encouraged and pushed African American males to do well in school, as well as parents who stayed involved in school activities by volunteering and visiting the school on a regular basis contributed to African American males' academic success. Through such participation, parents demonstrated the importance they attached to academic success. In addition, the presence of a parent at school on a regular basis encouraged behavior from participants that would be pleasing to parent(s). The incentive to some participants was to behave in a pleasing way when parents showed up at school so that parent(s) would be proud of them. These findings support Wilson-Jones' (2003) research that African American male students had better grades, fewer behavior referrals, and better test scores when parents came to the school to have lunch with them or checked on them, than those students whose parents did not visit the school. All participants reported having a parent involved with their education motivated them to succeed and parental involvement affected their academic behavior. They were motivated to do well when an adult showed interest



in their school work. According to the literature, parental involvement positively influenced African American male students' academic success.

Fifty percent of participants in this study did not have the traditional nucleus of a family, a father and a mother. However, this did not deter their academic aspirations. Parent or grandparent was praised for supporting their education, for making sure the necessary school supplies were available, and for making sure their homework had been completed. When parents reinforced the value of getting an education, this expectation manifested in the behavior of the participants, and it made a difference in their performance at school. Participants in this study indicated they performed better when parents actively participated in their education and/or had high expectations for their success. Parents expected participants to be successful in their classes and earn passing grades. Participants expressed they did not feel pressured to succeed; instead, they welcomed the high expectations parents had for their academic success. They realized their expectation for academic success was the same or greater than their parents' expectations. Parental expectation motivated African American males to succeed. Parental expectation reinforced the importance of parental involvement in African American males' academic success. African American males in this study credited parents for encouraging, motivating, supporting, and staying involved in their education. Participants perceived to perform better in school because parents were involved in their education.

Regardless of family structure or family educational background, the African American male participants in this study stated parental involvement made a difference in their academic development. These findings agreed with Brown and Fiester's (2003) research that parental background did not affect student grades, but students earned higher grades and higher test scores when parents were involved in their education. When parents instilled in African

American males the purpose and value of an education coupled with students' expectations, the benefits to the school are possibly improved attitudes about school and possibly improved educational outcomes for African American male students.

Overall, parental encouragement, parental involvement/support, and parental expectations were reported to be related to participants' internal incentive mechanism to achieve academically. When schools continue to find ways of bringing African American parents into the educational arena, positive learning results may evolve from African American male students; therefore, parental involvement may become one of the most influential components on school and educational policies having a direct bearing on African American males' academic success.

### **Role of Educators**

Research pertaining to the role of educators in helping African American male students succeed indicates that emphasis needs to be placed on encouraging positive school experiences, motivating students to reach their potential, creating a bond with students, and understanding their unique cultural background (Barnett, 2004; Cooper & Datnow, 2000; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Trotter, 1981; Wiggan, 2007; Williams, 2002). In addition, African American males need school counselors to guide them in mastering their academic challenges (The University System of Georgia, 2002).

*Role of principal.* Several themes emerged from the resulting data concerning role of principal in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success. The emerging themes were improved curriculum, recognition of achievement, more African American male teachers, and dispelling negative stereotypes. Participants perceived the principal as one in authority with power to make the necessary changes and improvements for student achievement.

Participants in this study recognized the principal as a leader capable of making curriculum changes to address their needs. The principal had the authority to enhance the curriculum so African American males could develop useful everyday skills, develop maturity, and develop respect for others. These findings were reflected in a research study by Schwartz (2001) recognizing the importance of developing a curriculum incorporating diverse backgrounds as a way of building students' social skills. In addition, participants perceived the need for a curriculum that will assure African American males are prepared for life after high school, as well as assure them of being able to make informed career choices. These findings concurred with those of Sizer (1999) who noted the curriculum should work to foster achievement for all students. According to Sizer, as a leader, the principal's objective is to develop a curriculum that will promote character traits and values empowering African American males and all students with the ability to achieve.

The responses from the participants agreed with researchers (Braun, Wang, Jenkins, & Weinbaum, 2006; Klauke, 1989) that educators must acknowledge the educational needs of diverse student backgrounds and develop strategies to remedy low academic success among African American students and assist them in making correct career choices. Furthermore, findings were consistent with The University System of Georgia's (2002) study which declared the administration must take the initiative to inform and counsel African American male students about career choices and communicate with them to learn about their needs. Overall, participants in this study wanted the assurance that when they completed high school, they would be equipped with skills to succeed in life. This is important because too many African American males leave school without adequate preparation for job, career or motivation to make it in the world, thereby, becoming dropouts and becoming disconnected in society. The lack of job skills

puts dropouts in a position of being more likely to engage in petty crime and gang activities (Freeland & Tucci, 2003; Western et al., 2006), thus becoming disconnected from mainstream society. The principal, as perceived by participants, should promote a curriculum designed to foster success in African American male students.

African American male students need educators, and administrators to encourage and promote academic progress and success (Freeman, 1999; Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). In this study, several participants stated they perceived the principal to praise and recognize them for their achievements. Findings concurred with a study conducted by Goddard, Sweetland, and Hoy (2000) that emphasized poor and minority students do well in a school environment recognizing academics. Recognition from school leaders for academics, as well as sports, would encourage and challenge African American males to work harder to achieve in academics because participation in sports and extracurricular activities depended on having acceptable grades. The findings in this also study agreed with researchers who emphasized leaders have the responsibility to challenge African American students and increase their expectations (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Goldsmith, 2004; Jordan & Cooper, 2002; Tomlinson, Gould, Schroth, & Jarvis, 2006; Trotter, 1981).

There is considerable evidence that issues of race and cultural background play a key role in the education of African American students (Cooper & Datnow, 2000; Delpit, 1995; Irvine, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Tatum, 1992). African American male participants in this study indicated the need for interaction with African American male teachers. They perceived the need to be taught by someone who looked like them with the same cultural perspective for addressing developmental challenges facing African American males. These role models could help African American males develop a sense of cultural and historical pride in the accomplishments of

African American males. Furthermore, they perceived they could model the attitudes and behaviors of successful African American males. Findings are consistent with literature concluding that African American male students' cultural identity is related to academic achievement and attitude toward school (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Goldsmith, 2004; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Smerdon, 2002; Sullivan, Riccio, & Reynolds, 2008). Therefore, the principal, according to the participants, has the responsibility of actively supporting, and recruiting African American males who can serve as leaders and role models for young African American males.

Participants perceived the leader as one capable of dispelling negative stereotypes. Some participants in this study viewed negative stereotypes of the African American male as deterrents to their academic development. Negative stereotypes associated African American males with being in prison, being in gangs, or being in the grave. Findings in this study are reflected in previous research studies documenting that African American males are often associated with stereotypes such as incompetence, laziness, and aggression. Stereotypes such as these affect African American males' academic performance (Bell, 2004; Bogle, 1994; Cheng & Starks, 2002; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Mincey, 1994; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; Ogbu, 2004; The Staff of the Washington Post, 2007). These stereotypes, as perceived by the participants, have a negative effect on African American males' academic success. Negative stereotypes limited African American male students' ability to be successful in the classroom because some African American males' mindset can be easily influenced. Negative stereotypes have African American males believing they 'can't do' instead of believing they "can do". These stereotypes placed on African American males by society make them feel insecure about what they can and cannot do. After trying to succeed in the classroom and failing at academic success, some African American males may become easily discouraged and turn to sports because they

realize success can be experienced on the playing field. Some participants believe that society expects African American males to be successful in sports and not successful in academics. As a result, African American males end up giving 100% being successful on the playing field. These findings support Ogbu (1991) who noted that some African American males direct their focus away from academics and toward nonacademic endeavors such as personal dress and grooming, athletics and dating, which give them a feeling of success. These findings contradicted those of Ferrer and Garlington (2007) who reported that African American participants perceived they were hated and nobody cared about their educational success, including people from the home, school, and community. However, findings also aligned with the research of Ferrer and Garlington who reported African American students perceived that they were viewed only as being successful in sports. Students felt that parents would support a sporting event of the school before supporting an academic event. African American male students saw the school as rewarding, celebrating, and recognizing sport participation and not recognizing efforts in school achievement.

Stereotypes pose a threat to African American males because negative stereotypes tend to provoke self-doubt in learners about whether they can be successful in academics. After constantly hearing negative stereotypes, African American males begin to believe what is reported about them. Therefore, the principal has the responsibility of dispelling negative stereotypes within the school and fostering a positive environment. Findings concurred with researchers Irving and Hudley (2008) who suggested that leaders design programs to meet the needs of African American male students who have been subjected to negative cultural identity. Focusing on redesigning the curriculum, leaders will enhance the educational development of African American male students. Findings from this research supported the theory that when

educators avoid negative attitudes and stereotypes, and increase their expectations, African American male students improved in their academics (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Goldsmith, 2004; Jordan & Cooper, 2002; Tomlinson, Gould, Schroth, & Jarvis, 2006; Trotter, 1981).

*Role of teachers.* Participants who felt cared about, supported, and understood felt connected to the educational process. Several themes emerged from the resulting data concerning role of teachers in African American male students' ability to achieve academic success. The emerging themes were caring and supportive teachers, teachers meeting individual needs, and teachers understanding cultural environment.

Sergiovanni (1995) stated schools must invoke a school climate that promotes caring and learning. Findings in this study concluded that participants perceived teachers should have a caring, supportive attitude. Teachers should thoroughly explain material and give extra help after school to African American male students. Teachers must be willing to stay after school, and help students realize their academic potential, as well as show care and concern by supporting African American male students in their after school activities. This finding concurred with previous research stating caring and concerned teachers influenced African American male students' outcomes (Wiggan, 2007). Participants believed teachers who showed up for extracurricular activities had less discipline problems from African American males in the classroom than those teachers who did not attend extracurricular activities of their students. Involvement in extracurricular activities or some constructive activity after school helped with academic success because it kept these African American males focused on their goals and school. It also kept them from becoming involved in destructive street activities. Findings from this study also concurred with those of previous researchers who noted African American students who attend schools that are supportive and caring will have higher academic

achievement (Ragland, Clubine, Constable, & Smith, 2002; Sergiovanni, 1995; Stewart, 2008; Wiggan, 2007; Wilson-Jones & Caston, 2004).

Ferguson's (2002) research noted teachers must meet the individual needs of African American students by using appropriate instructional tasks to accomplish academic objectives. Participants in this study perceived African American male students need encouragement and individual assistance from teachers, instead of being labeled "slow" to grasp the classroom material. Some participants believed educators are sometimes quick to label African American male students because they do not understand classroom material. This finding supported researchers (Stewart, 2008; Toldson, 2008) who revealed high-achieving African American males excelled in academics when they had a friendly relationship with their teachers, and when their school encouraged them, supported them and was considerate of their needs.

Teachers should focus personal attention on African American male students who are struggling with class work. The intervention of the Freshman Academy Program in a South Carolina school with a 48% African American population utilized the concept of a small learning environment to improve their student population test scores. The Freshman Academy Program separated freshman students from upper class students in core classes. The program focused on building peer-relationship skills, and team cooperation skills while teaching students basic life-surviving skills such as balancing a checkbook. After the first year, administrators reported the school exceeded district test scores in math, reading, and language arts. Only three students were retained out of a freshman class of 101 students. The school recognized that simply identifying the achievement problems would not alone improve academic success; instead, the school had to employ an alternative learning method to reach the individual needs of students (Sellers, 2009). Studies have shown that smaller learning communities (SLC) provide personal learning



environments that provide a sense of belonging for students and foster greater student engagement in learning (Cotton, 2001; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Janusik & Wolvin, 2007; Metzger, 2006; Shear et al., 2008; Tasker, 2007). Participants in this study understood when African American males are slow to understand classroom material, teachers need to have patience with them, encourage them, and instill confidence in them.

Teachers must begin to understand the environment of the African American male student in order to “get to know” the individual. The findings in this study revealed the need for teachers to be aware of African American male students' diverse backgrounds and environments. Findings agree with Klauke (1989) who stated school officials must meet educational needs of diverse groups. Participants perceived that teachers lacked sensitivity or understanding of the African American male academic development because educators do not understand the environment they come from. This lack of understanding often lead teachers to assume disruptive students should be isolated from the class. Participants perceived teachers need to incorporate alternative learning methods in the curriculum relevant to African American males' realities, and keep disruptive students involved in the learning process. Findings are consistent with previous research indicating good classroom management promotes positive classroom experiences. Positive classroom experiences include using alternative methods for expulsion and suspension of African American male students who disrupt class (Advancement Project/Civil Rights Project, 2000; Morgan, 1991).

Overall, the results of this study indicated that participants perceived the role of educators as caring about African American male students' cultural background as well as caring about their academic development. This research agreed with Heck (2000) who stated that strong leadership, positive faculty attitudes, and high expectations from faculty led to higher than

expected achievement gains. Findings from this study disagree with a study conducted by Basden (2006) in which high achieving and low achieving African American males indicated their grades were less reflective of how nice their teachers were.

### **Supporting Question 3**

When the school environment recognizes the different cultures and combines the uniqueness of these cultures into the curriculum, students are likely to be successful in school and in adulthood. The type of environment African American male students are exposed to has an effect on behavior and educational outcome. Major themes emerging from the resulting data of this were safe environment and positive environment.

Scheuermann (2000) maintained that educators believe successful students are those who expect to succeed, are goal oriented, intrinsically motivated and are able to balance effectively the social and academic aspects of the school environment. Furthermore, findings indicated that participants believed that African American males are likely to react to the type of environment to which they are exposed. Findings in this study revealed participants desired an environment that is safe, free of gangs, drugs, and violence. They perceived this type of environment affected their behavior and ability to focus on learning. Findings are also consistent with research stating African American males performed best when they perceived the school environment to be safe (Toldson, 2008).

The results of this study indicated that participants perceived the school environment should support and recognize students for their academic achievement. Participants at Ivory High School perceived the environment as a positive entity motivating students to do well and discouraging students from becoming dropouts. The environment was described as a “happy” environment with a well-stocked library and recognizing students for their achievements in

academics and sports. When the school displayed their pictures and names in the hallway, this provoked a feeling of proud and motivated African American males to do well in their classes. This was an incentive for them to maintain passing grades in order to participate in those extra-curricular activities, such as clubs and sports. The principal in this school environment praised students when they did well and encouraged them to stay focused on their goals. Students admired her for her interaction with them and sharing her personal experiences of success with them. The findings agreed with Heck (2002) who stated an environment promoting high expectations of students and teachers, and positive student and faculty attitudes led to higher than expected student achievement gains. Findings also aligned with research stating the school environment is important to African American male students' academic development (Cheng & Starks, 2002; Goldsmith, 2004; Irving & Hudley, 2008; Smerdon, 2002; Sullivan et al., 2008).

#### **Supporting Question 4**

What are some challenges and solutions for accomplishing academic success?

*Challenges.* Participants discussed many challenges African American males in today's society face in achieving academic success. For many African American males, their belief in the educational system is challenged, they become disconnected from school and society, and they give up on their education, hopes, and dreams. This finding agrees with (Carter, 2003) who suggested African American males are disconnected with school as early as kindergarten and continue to be disconnected as they progress through school. The finding further reflects Kirkland's (2006) research, recognizing that African American males require particular attention to their success and academic development because of exceptional barriers and gaps in their educational development. Participants expressed the need for educators to understand their cultural environment in order to understand who they are and be able to support them

academically. A research study exploring African American males' attitudes toward college cited African American males consider lack of academic preparation, poor grades, low Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores, lack of adequate high school guidance from school counselors, teachers, high-school faculty and administration, peer pressure, parental and societal expectations as barriers to their success (The University System of Georgia, 2002). Participants in this study identified similar challenges, as well as some additional challenges affecting academic success of African American males. Challenges included lack of belief in self, non-caring teachers, lack of confidence from educators, and lack of self-initiative. Participants realized society has negative opinions of African American males. They perceived these negative opinions could affect belief in their ability to succeed. In addition, negative opinions can result from listening to their favorite rap artists. These negatives opinions may confuse African American males and affect how they perceive themselves. This perception leads to a negative mindset affecting their ability to succeed. Another challenge was the lack of after school community activities and programs to keep African American males off the streets. Participants recognized the lack of community activities and programs provided opportunities for African American males to become involved in gangs, drugs and violence.

The absence of African American male teachers from their educational development hampered academic success and cultural development. African American male teachers could serve as mentors and role models in school and provide the cultural perspective of another African American male to model positive attitudes and behaviors.

*Solutions.* Participants in this research cited many solutions important to their academic success: self-belief, hard work, self-motivation, goal setting, peer and parental support, mentors and role models, caring educators, safe and positive environment. All participants had belief in

their ability to succeed and were motivated to complete high school and accomplish their goal of attending college. They believed this was the answer to their future success. Findings agree with Basden's (2006) research stating that participants believed grades were reflective of their attitudes and behavior. The principal at Ivory High School was considered an excellent leader. She was praised for her dedication, support and confidence that all students had the ability to succeed. They were proud to have a principal who took time to encourage them to stay focused on their goals, as well as provide a safe and positive environment. The principal recognized them for their achievements. Findings support Ferrer and Garlington's (2007) research identifying solutions leading to academic success for African American students. Participants in their study emphasized the solution to achieving academic success is for schools to take more of a proactive role in motivating African American males to achieve academically. In addition, the school should recognize their academic achievement and school's facility should be safe and clean. The findings did not reflect Ferrer and Garlington's (2007) research for more highly-qualified teachers to effect academic success in African American male students and schools maintaining a strong collaboration with community and parents. The finding in this study agree with the research of Wright (2007) who examined the relationship between racial-ethnic identity and high academic achievement of five young African-American men in grades 11 and 12. The study revealed that effective youth development and identity theory have a positive effect on the way adolescents use strategies of assertiveness to achieve school success. Overall, participants in this study credited being academically successful to their persistence, parental support, parental encouragement, caring educators, and supportive peers.

## Conclusion

Students' perceptions revealed their understanding of academic success. They associated academic success to obtaining an education. The participants had a vivid impression of how their life would be after accomplishing their goals. Overall, the results led the researcher to conclude that successful African American males were motivated to succeed because of their self-determination for a better lifestyle. They remained focused on their goals and they were aware of their destination following high school. Based on the findings, the researcher found five major factors African American males perceived contributed to their academic success. These factors included parental support and encouragement, caring and supportive educators, supportive peers, understanding of cultural background, and community initiatives.

Parental support was found to play a vital role in the academic achievement of African American male students. The participants acknowledged the support and encouragement received from parents were influential in their achieving success. Parents who stayed involved in their child's education by visiting the school, volunteering, and making sure needed supplies were accessible, motivated the males to stay focused on school tasks. African American males recognized the values parents placed on an education and duplicated the same values. Parents constantly reminded the African American males of their responsibility to get an education if they wanted to be successful in life. Although, many participants expressed self-determination, they welcomed the interest their parents took in their education and the expectations they had for them. African American males believed parental involvement influenced their academic success.

Positive teacher-student relationships bring students into the learning process and strengthen their desire to learn. Participants viewed educators as recognizing their achievements, caring about meeting their educational needs, believing in them and encouraging them to do their

best. African American males had a positive relationship with their teachers. They were encouraged by their teachers to succeed. In addition, their school principal praised African American males and reminded them they were capable of achieving their goals. Teachers were willing to help them because they put forth effort to complete their classroom tasks.

Positive relationship with peers was related to the pursuit of academic goals. Although participants recognized the possibility of negative peer support, all participants reported being in a positive peer environment. Students reported their peers had a positive attitude toward school, and peers academic goals were similar to their educational goals. Peer influence plays meaningful role in African American males' disposition toward school. Peer influence supported positive behavior, such as studying and pursuing college goals. In addition, trust and confidence were important factors among peers. In this study, African American males' peers were supportive in their academic pursuit.

An understanding of African American males' cultural environment and addressing their diversity in the curriculum allowed students to connect to the learning process. It was important for African American males to have their culture understood by educators as a means of understanding their diversity. Educators must understand African American males' environment in order to understand their identity. Educators' attitudes and behaviors toward African American males' cultural upbringing and environment will enable educators to meet the needs of African American males.

The researcher concluded that there is a need to provide support to African American males through mentoring and community activities. Support from African American male role models in the school and in the community would give African American males someone to identify with and assist in their personal development. These findings led the researcher to

conclude that involvement in community activities will keep African American males focused and motivated to stay away from gangs and drug activities.

This research emphasized African American male students need to feel cared about, understood, supported, and encouraged by principals, teachers, parents, and peers to be academically successful. Parental involvement, cultural understanding, and community involvement in their educational experiences were also cited as necessary for academic success. The findings led the researcher to conclude that it is imperative for those involved with the education of African American males to lend positive support. There are clearly many components affecting student performance, and it takes caring teachers, excellent school leaders, involved parents, and the community to help African American males perform well. The researcher concludes the school is the best chance for changing negative educational trends for African American males and will require parents, school, and community collaborating.

### **Implications**

The academic challenges confronting African American male students in the school setting suggest an urgent need for an intervention plan involving educators, parents and the community. Participants perceived these stakeholders have a direct effect on African American males' academic success.

Several implications on how key stakeholders can improve the academic success of African American male students emerged from this study. First, educators should be more vocal in encouraging and motivating African American males to succeed. Participants clearly indicated they respond well academically when their teachers show interest by encouraging them to succeed. African American male students need educators and administrators who will encourage and promote their academic progress and success. As studies cited earlier, this research indicated



that nurturing teachers and strong administrative leadership influenced students' achievement. In the final analysis, teachers showing a sincere interest and concern for African American males will enhance their learning.

Second, key stakeholders must have a greater understanding that the road to academic success is often turbulent for African American males. As such, strong administrative leadership should hold professional staff development training on cultural diversity, and the effects of negative stereotyping faced by African American males. This will strengthen educators' ability to teach and understand diverse learners.

Third, the perceptions of parental participation and community involvement were reported to affect students' academic success. Participants favored involving parents and the community in their school activities. Findings suggested parental involvement in school activities and collaboration between school, parents, and community had a positive effect on academic attainment for African American males. To further African American males' academic attainment, the implication is that schools need to develop a strategic plan for collaborating with parents, and community.

Fourth, mentorship is an important factor in helping African American males plot a course for academic success. School leaders should make sure staff members are responsive to the challenges and needs of African American male students who as described in this study face a number of challenges. Participants indicated they would benefit academically by having more African American male teachers as role models. Participants perceived these African American male teachers would motivate them to excel academically. The implication is that administrators formulate a plan to hire a number of African American male teachers that will serve as role models and positively influence African American male students.

Some observations from demographic profiles provided by participants are particularly noteworthy: First, although student demographic data was not included in findings, it served to provide additional information about participants. It was noted from demographic profiles that each academically successful student participated in a variety of sports, clubs, and activities both at school and outside of school. This observation suggests that these students were able to balance successfully academics and extracurricular activities. Some participants expressed how involvement in extracurricular activities helped them remain focused and provided a distraction outlet from street activities. It appears from this research that participation in sports or club activities play an important role in student academic success. This implies that administrators and educators should devise a plan to encourage African American males to become involved in some type of extracurricular activity either at school or outside of school. The implication is that extracurricular activities give students a focus and a chance to be involved in another positive aspect of school or the community. Administrators should devise a plan to involve all teachers in African American male students' extracurricular activities.

From demographic profiles, each participant's goal was to complete high school and further his education by attending college. Some participant indicated their parents encouraged them to stay in school and get an education. This suggests to the researcher that goal setting is an important ingredient for striving towards academic excellence. The implication is for educators and parents to work together to encourage African American males to set goals early in life giving them an opportunity to work toward being successful.

The NCLB Act ensures that school leaders will be accountable for the academic success of their students. School leaders should facilitate a strategic plan that will improve student achievement for those students who pose a challenge to the educational system. The findings

from this study provide several suggestions for key stakeholders to incorporate strategies and positive attitudes to foster African American males' academic success. In addition, the findings challenged the way teachers, administrators, parents and community interact with African American male students. Therefore, the implication is for the administrator to formulate a policy and strategic plan with community leaders, parents and school leaders to get input on what each entity can do to serve African American male students.

Therefore, this research provided insight into the need for administrators, teachers, parents and the community to become more knowledgeable and sensitive to the needs of African American male students. In essence, there was a need to conduct this study with the target population by directly collecting data on academic success from the perspectives of African American male students.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The researcher suggests the following recommendations for potential educators and relevant district and state level administrators in K-12 and postsecondary education. The suggested research studies will possibly provide needed information to assist today's educators and leaders in determining how to capture the unused academic potentials of many African American male students.

Future research may examine African American males who were unsuccessful in their academics while in high school to determine the gap between perceptions of academically successful African American male students and unsuccessful African American male students. Socio-economic background, family educational background, family values on education and students involvement in extracurricular activities in school and community could be taken into

consideration. This research could provide needed information on why the dropout rate is high among African American male students.

Another recommendation for future researchers is to examine how African American males' attitudes toward education affect their academic success. A study of this nature could provide information on the power of mental attitude and self-motivation among African American male students.

Further research may study the effect of African American male parents' involvement in school and parents' relationship with schools. In addition, the study can explore what it means to African American male students to have their parents involved in schooling practices.

The researcher recommends a research study to examine factors African American males consider affecting their academic success with factors White males consider affecting their academic success. This information could show the relationship between academic attitudes and academic success of two racial groups.

Another recommendation for a research study is to examine the effects of community initiatives, and community mentors on the academic development of African American males. This information could lend support for community leaders to initiate programs and activities to support African American males.

A research study conducted to examine how culturally sensitive educators are to the needs of African American males could provide valuable information on how well educators meet the needs of African American males. A study of this type could also provide insight into how well educators understand the environment of African American males. This information will allow educators to structure activities, build curricular materials, and gather resources that will help African American males be academically successful.

### **Dissemination**

The researcher plans to submit articles based on this dissertation to the following journals for publication consideration: *The High School Journal*, *Middle School Journal*, *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, *Principal*, and *Journal of Negro Education*. The researcher also welcomes the opportunity to disseminate the information to any interested person or organization.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

There is pressure on state, district, and local administrators to improve their school systems. Based on criteria established under NCLB Act, school systems must meet AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) each school year. Schools that continue to fail in meeting yearly criteria is a harsh way of letting key stakeholders know that the knowledge base they already possess is inadequate in our society for achieving academic success. Therefore, it is imperative that school systems empower their leaders with strategies that will generate academic success among its students.

As previously mentioned, the academic problems facing African American males are often associated with a lack of understanding of their cultural identity, inadequate academic preparation, their disconnection from mainstream society, negative stereotypes, lack of encouragement from school, parents, community, lack of parental involvement, and lack of positive male role models in the home, the school and the community. These social and academic challenges confronting African American males in the school setting must be addressed. This is a strong indication that educators need to be aware of these challenges in order to formulate a prescription of how best to support academic development among African American males.

It is noted from the results of this study that all participants had aspirations of attending college. Each participant set a goal and each had a plan for the future that did not include failure. To the researcher, the immediate solution for improving academic success seems relatively simple, that is, begin to encourage goal-setting and convey a caring attitude toward African American male students.

Although the review of literature highlighted many factors thought to lead to academic success among African American male students, none of the literature provided perceptions of academic achievement through the eyes of African American male students. This researcher found the participants in this study very knowledgeable, and able to articulate clearly what caused them to be successful. The African American males involved in this study possessed qualities of intellect, self-confidence, pride and goal-driven directions. Educators and administrators at this study site can be proud of this group of students who were not intimidated by questions posed to them and for their directness in their responses. The ideals proposed by African American males in this study can serve as the medium in helping administrators in their quest of achieving academic success for all students.

The research literature relevant to the perceptions of African American male academic achievement is lacking. Therefore, any future research will possibly provide educators and school leaders with suggested information regarding how best to support the academic development of African American male students. Furthermore, findings from this study can fuel future research questions that may lead to reverse the cycle of low-achieving African American male students and begin the trend of fostering a generation of high achievers among this population of students.

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## Appendix A

### Demographic Profile (Please Print)

<b>First Name</b>	<b>MI</b>	<b>Last Name</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>Grade Classification</b> Junior ( )    Senior ( )	
<b>E-Mail Address (If available)</b>		
<b>How do you describe yourself?</b>  <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Alaska Native <input type="checkbox"/> Black or African American <input type="checkbox"/> Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino <input type="checkbox"/> Asian or Asian American <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Hispanic White <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
<b>Please identify your intent (Check all that apply)</b>		
Complete my high school education ( )  Go to College ( )  Attend Technical School ( )	Enter Military ( )  Other, Specify _____	
<b>List all clubs, organizations, and sports you participate in at school</b>	<b>List all clubs, organizations, and sports you participate in outside of school</b>	

**Thank you for your responses**

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent

#### **COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

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#### **DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

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My name is Gertrude Rolland, and I am a graduate student at Georgia Southern University working on my doctorate in Educational Administration. I am interested in exploring the perceptions of Georgia's African American male junior and senior students concerning factors contributing to their academic achievement. I am asking permission for your child to participate in this research study.

1. Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this research is to explore the factors African American male students in Georgia perceive as contributors to their academic success as well as investigate the challenges and solutions students believe to be necessary for improving academic success. This research will lend insight into how teachers and administrators can aid African American male students in developing skills, strategies, and attitudes essential to building academic success.

2. Procedures to be followed:

Participation in this research will include a qualitative interview. Interviews will be recorded using an audiotape recorder for the purpose of transcribing the information accurately. The audio taped information will be kept by the researcher in a locked and secure vault. The tapes will be transcribed. Data will be maintained no less than 7 years from completion of research. The researcher will be responsible for scheduling all interviews that will take place in a neutral location within the school agreed upon by principal and counselor. All student participants have the right to refuse to answer any questions during the interview and may terminate the interview at anytime, or have any information deleted from analysis.

3. Discomforts and Risks:

African American male students re-living their experiences can be sensitive for some. The sensitive interview questions may elicit slight embarrassment or may cause hidden emotions related to certain events to surface. Participants have the right to refuse to answer questions they are uncomfortable answering. If there are any questions or concerns about your child's rights as the research participant in this study, those are directed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Coordinator at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843 or e-mail [ovrsight@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:ovrsight@georgiasouthern.edu).

## 4. Benefits:

**The participants will benefit by taking part in a study that will possibly increase the knowledge base of what African American males perceive as factors contributing to their academic success; and understand the role peers, parents, educators, and school environment play in their ability to achieve academic success.**

**Society will benefit by gaining first-hand knowledge, data and understanding from African American male students on how best to support them in attaining academic success and hope of finding answers to challenges and possible solutions for improving their academic success. Findings may have an impact on colleges, leadership preparation programs and school reform regarding how administrators and school personnel work with African American male students. This research may provide the opportunity to reverse the cycle of low-achieving African American males and begin the trend of fostering a generation of high-achieving African American males.**

## 5. Duration/Time required from the participant:

The audio taped interviews will be approximately 45 to 60 minutes in length.

## 6. Statement of Confidentiality:

Participation and participants' names will be kept confidential. Copies of the study results will be available upon participant's request.

## 7. Right to Ask Questions:

Participants have the right to ask questions and have those questions answered. If you have questions about this study, please contact the researcher named above or the researcher's faculty advisor, whose contact information is located at the end of the informed consent. For questions concerning your rights as a research participant, contact Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs at 912-478-0843.

## 8. Compensation:

Participants will not receive any monetary or other incentives for participating in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary.

## 9. Voluntary Participation:

Participation in all aspects of this study is voluntary. Participants may withdraw from the audio taped interviews at any time without risk or penalty by notifying the principal investigator, Gertrude Rolland. The participant has the option of not answering questions he does not want to answer. If you choose to allow your child to participate, all

information collected from your child in combination with data collected from other participants will be held in the strictest confidence. The information obtained in this study may be published or presented at conferences but your child's identity will remain confidential.

10. Penalty:

There is no penalty for deciding not to participate in the study or answer any questions during the interview; participants may decide at any time they don't want to participate further and may withdraw without penalty or retribution.

11. Deception will not be involved in this study. Participants will be informed of the purpose and intent from the onset of the study. Prior to conducting the interview, participants will be informed of their rights.

Per your request you will be provided a copy of the findings from this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records. Additionally, a copy of the results of this research may be obtained by contacting the investigator at the address below:

This project has been reviewed and approved by the GSU Institutional Review Board under tracking number **H11441**.

Title of Project: AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Principal Investigator: Gertrude Rolland  
3646 Jamaica Drive  
Augusta, GA 30909      [grolland@comcast.net](mailto:grolland@comcast.net)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Cordelia Zinskie  
Dept. of Curriculum, Foundations, and Reading  
Georgia Southern University  
P. O. Box 8144  
Statesboro, GA 30460  
Phone: (912) 478-0672      [czinskie@georgiasouthern.edu](mailto:czinskie@georgiasouthern.edu)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, verify that the above informed consent procedure has been followed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix C****Minor's Assent****COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES  
DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, TECHNOLOGY, & HUMAN  
DEVELOPMENT**

Hello,

I am Gertrude Rolland, a graduate student at Georgia Southern University and I am conducting a study on *AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR ACADEMIC SUCCESS*

You are being asked to participate in research to gather information on African American male students' views on student academic success. I would like to interview you to get your ideas about factors contributing to student academic achievement. My research will address the academic achievement from the eyes of African American male students in hope of finding answers to challenges and possible solutions for improving African American males' academic success. This research is important to me because it provides an opportunity to gather first-hand knowledge, data and understanding from African American male students on how best to support them in attaining success in school.

You do not have to participate in this research project. You can stop whenever you want. If you do not participate, it is ok, and you can go back to your classroom, and nothing bad will happen. You can refuse to do the project even if your parents say you can. The interview will last from 45 to 60 minutes. Interviews will be recorded using an audiotape recorder for the purpose of transcribing the information accurately.

None of the teachers or other people at your school will see the questions that I ask you. All of the answers that you give me will be kept in a locked cabinet in a room at Georgia Southern University, and only I, my advisor or my committee members will see your answers. We are not going to put your name on the answers that you give us, so no one will be able to know which answers were yours.

If you or your parent/guardian has any questions about this form or the research project, please call me at 706-737-2318 or my advisor, Dr. Zinskie, at 912-478-0672. Thank you!

If you understand the information above and want to do the project, please complete the enclosed Demographic Profile Form. Sign your name on the line below and return this letter and the Demographic Profile Form to your school counselor:

**Yes, I will participate in this project:** \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Investigator's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D

### Semi-Structured Interview Guide

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How would you define academic success?
3. How will academic success affect your future?
4. Describe your academic performance in school.
5. What goals have you set for yourself?
6. Discuss study strategies that may contribute to your academic success.
7. Explain what role your parents play in your education.
8. Explain what the principal can do to help African American male students realize their academic ability.
9. Explain what teachers can do to help African American male students realize their academic ability.
10. What effect does the school environment have on African American male students' ability to achieve academic success?
11. What can the community do to help African American male students achieve academic success?
12. What can friends do to help African American male students achieve academics success?
13. Discuss other factors that may contribute to academic success for African American male students?
14. What may hinder African American male students from achieving academic success?
15. What solutions do you have for African American male students to become successful in their academics?
16. Explain how prepared you are for life after school.

## Appendix E

### Literature Matrix

Research Questions & Interview Question Item Grid

RQ & Specific Questions	Student Interview Questions	Item Topic	Research Literature
1	1,2	Defining Academic Achievement	National Alliance of Business, Inc., 1998; Rentner & Kober, 2001; Ryan, 1999; Scheuermann, 2000; Anderson, 1988; Fitzgerald, 2006; Howard, 2003; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Rowley, 2000
2	3, 7, 9, 11	Importance of Academic Success	Anderson, 1988; Bell D., 2004; Brown B. L., 1999; Gottlob, 2009; Ladson-Billings, G., 2006
3	5, 12	Role Parents, Peers, Educators play in African American Males Academic Success	Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Barnett, 2004; Fleischman & Heppen, 2009; Georgia University System, 2002; Goldsmith, 2004; Harper, 2006; Lester, 2004; Rumberger, 1983; Simon, 2001; Toldson, 2008; Warde, 2008; Wiggan, 2007
4	3,5,6, 7, 8	Role school environment play in African American Males' Academic Success	Campbell-Whatley & Algozzine, 1997; Dimmitt, 2003; Harper, 2006; Harris, 2007; Heck, 2000; Lester, 2004; Wiggan, 2007
5	4, 10	Challenges And Solutions for Academic Achievement	Barnett, 2004; Basden, 2006; Ferrer & Garlington, 2007; Toldson, 2008; Wilson-Jones, 2003; Wright B. L., 2007;

## Appendix F

## Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Georgia Southern University Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs <b>Institutional Review Board (IRB)</b>		
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021 P.O. Box 8005 Statesboro, GA 30460
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	

**To:** Gertrude Rolland  
Cordelia Zinskie  
Department of Leadership, Technology, and Human Development

**CC:** Charles E. Patterson  
Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

**From:** Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs  
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees  
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

**Initial Approval Date:** May 25, 2011

**Expiration Date:** May 25, 2012

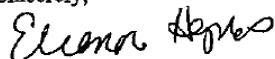
**Subject:** Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H11441** and titled "**African American Males Students' perceptions of Factors Which Contribute to Their Academic Success.**" it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable. You are authorized to enroll up to a maximum of 6 subjects.

*Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.*

If at the end of this approval period there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period. Total project approval on this application may not exceed 36 months. If additional time is required, a new application may be submitted for continuing work. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Haynes  
Compliance Officer