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Pepperdine University
Graduate School of Education and Psychology

EXAMINING THE PERCEPTIONS OF GWINNETT AND COBB COUNTY
GEORGIA PRINCIPALS TO DETERMINE THE STRATEGIES NEEDED TO
IMPROVE PERFORMANCE AND GRADUATION RATES OF AFRICAN –
AMERICAN MALES IN METROPOLITAN U.S. SCHOOLS

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy

by

Darren L. Henderson

February, 2012

Linda Purrington, Ed.D. – Dissertation Chairperson

This dissertation, written by

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under the guidance of a Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to wonderful mother Francis Elaine Henderson. When I needed you, you were always there and when I called, you never hesitated to answer. I still don't know how someone with so little did so much.

To my brother Ronald (Terry) and my sisters Yvette and Britta, remember this was not a journey of I, but of we.

To my children, Darren II, Amaree, and Jasmine-Alexis, you are my very essence. Please know that all I do, I do for you. How much do I love you? More than you will ever know!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my committee members: Dr. Robert Barner, Dr. Michael White and a special thank you to Dr. Linda Purrington for providing the guidance, motivation and inspiration that this work is necessary and should be completed. From the very beginning, you believed in me and for that I will be eternally grateful!

Thank you to the participants and professionals who allowed me to chime your thoughts, glean your expertise and your exuded patience, agreed or disagreed I always respected your professional opinions. Ours was a conversation that we needed to have. To all my friends (sanguine and otherwise), our actions will always speak louder than our words.

Finally and certainly not least among them, to my family (too many to name but never too many to forget), your struggle lives on in me because I know that you know, without you there is no me.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school administrators in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, Georgia that have successfully narrowed the achievement gap for high school African-American males as to: (a) why the achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States; (b) what successful strategies they credit for closing the achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and (c) what additional strategies they might consider in order to curb the achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools.

The following research questions were the basis of this study:

1. What strategies have been implemented by principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools to successfully close the achievement gap for low income African-American students?
2. What additional strategies, if any, might principles of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools consider implementing in their continuing efforts to close the African-American achievement gap?
3. What are the perceptions of Gwinnett and Cobb County high school administrators who are successfully closing the achievement gap in their respective schools as to how the achievement gap for high school African-American males in metropolitan districts in the United States might be narrowed?

This was a qualitative research study. The data instrument was an open-ended questionnaire that examined common themes related to narrowing the achievement gap.

The data collection process involved examining responses for commonalities and perspectives related to strategies that might be used to further close the achievement gap.

Conclusion of the research revealed that site-based reforms, mentoring programs, tutoring programs, parental involvement, and constant communication between the school, parents, and the community are strategies needed to increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap between African-American males and their Caucasian peers.

CHAPTER 1: Introduction to and Background of the Problem

“The educational system of a country is worthless unless it [revolutionizes the social order]. Men of scholarship, and prophetic insight, must show us the right way and lead us into light which is shining brighter and brighter.” (Carter G. Woodson, p.107)

Recent studies of the American educational public school system have revealed an alarming trend, a disproportionate number of American students exit the nation’s public schools, some with high school diplomas but many with out. What is even more shocking is that not only are some students hardly capable of reading, writing , and doing simple arithmetic, it is that these academic breakdowns are not equally dispersed among children from all ethnic backgrounds. The studies revealed that the failures of the American educational system reflect in disproportionate numbers on ethnic minorities in general and on African-American students, more specifically African American males in particular. Notably those African American minorities living in impoverished metropolitan areas. The U.S. Census Bureau (2003) has estimated that there are about five million African-American young men who range from the ages of 5 through 19 in the U.S. that comprise about 14% of the total African-American population, 2% of the national population and 15% of the total male population of all boys of that age (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). These young men embody a broad range of the American Diaspora and they live in all areas of the United States. These African American males live in urban areas, rural areas, on farms, within small towns, and in suburbs. Their living environments include living with nuclear families, extended families, with grandparents, with single parents, in foster parent homes and in a variety of other public care settings. This researcher believes that these African American men exhibit great talents and diversity. They represent a wide variety of educational, cultural, social, and economic

differences (Franklin, 1980). Smith (2004) states that people might imagine that there is an unlimited range of creativity, talent and possibility available to African American males but as some prosper still many do not do to poor academic performance, inadequate schools and teachers and preexisting myths concerning the African American male (Smith, 2004). The conditions of low test scores and low graduation rates among young African-American males who attend public schools in this country coupled with the fact that African-American males do not fare as well academically as their Caucasian counterparts is what is known as the African-American achievement gap. Johnson (2002) defines the achievement gap as “the persistent widening of educational achievement between Caucasian students versus African-American and Hispanics students, and more specifically from low income families” (p. 4). Pearson (as cited in Becker & Luthar, 2010) defines the achievement gap as “a persistent, pervasive, and significant disparity in educational achievement and attainment among groups of students as determined by a standardized measure” (p. 1). He adds that “when analyzed according to race and ethnicity achievement, disparities negatively impact educational outcomes for the poor and children of color on a consistent basis” (p. 1). The achievement gap between low-income Americans and their counterparts is not new. The increased focus on standardized testing and high academic performance standards for all students has brought an increased amount of attention to the anguish in student achievement. In light of the fact that recent data suggest that the national poverty rate for African-Americans is triple that of Caucasians, the achievement gap has become a growing concern for school administrators and teachers, lawmakers, parents and community activist (Shannon &

Bylsma, 2002). Regarding the conditions of educational inequality, Darling-Hammond (2007) states:

Throughout two centuries of slavery, a century of court sanctioned discrimination based on race, and a half century of differential access to education by race, class, language background, and geographical location, we have become accustomed in the United States to educational inequality. While we bemoan the dramatically unequal educational outcomes announced each year in reports focused on the achievement gap, as a nation we often behave as though we were unaware of—or insensitive to—the equally substantial inequalities in access to educational opportunity that occur from preschool through elementary and secondary education, into college and beyond. (p. 1)

The consequences of the failure to adequately educate African-American males will result in increased imprisonment and unemployment rates and will further diminished the chance to pursue and finish post secondary education as well as lead to an increase in broken or unstable families (Smith, 2004). This phenomenon is evidenced by data comprised in the National Center for Education Statistics (2006) report entitled *Educational Achievement and Black And White Inequity*, there is little uncertainty that a problem in educational inequality exists and something should to be undertaken to curb this trend. Consider the following statistics for African-Americans males and school special education, discipline and incarceration:

1. Although African American students are just 17% of all U.S. public school students they account for 30% of all expulsions and for 32% of all suspensions. 35% of all African American students in the 1999 school year in grades 7-12 were expelled or suspended from school. In contrast to these findings, the rate for Hispanic students was 20% and 15% for Caucasians;

2. African American students are classified as mentally retarded nearly 300% more than Caucasian students and only 8.4% of African American males are identified and enrolled in gifted and talented classes;
3. The average 30 year old African American male is two times more likely to end up in prison rather than become college graduates. Studies show that 22% of African American males will have prison records and only 12% will graduate college;
4. Studies also indicate that if an African American males was born in 1991 there is a 29% possibility that he will do prison time at some period of his life, in contrast the statistics for Caucasian males are 4% and Hispanic males is 16%;
5. In comparison to Caucasian males, African American males have a 700% greater probability of receiving a local, state, or federal prison sentence;
6. African American males typically receive sentences five times greater than Caucasian males for the same crime; and
7. African American males are put in prison at a rate of 3.4%, Hispanics at a rate of 1.2%, and Caucasian at a rate of .465% (National Center for Education Statistics, as cited in Wynn, 2007, p. 27).

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University released statistics related to African-American male achievement and social economics. Among those statistics were the following findings:

1. The college completion rate for African-American males decreased by 10.2% between 1976 and 1990;

2. In 1990, 60% of all African-American students in college were women;
3. By 1990, 9% of African-American men 20-24 years of age were married and living with their spouses, compared to 30% in 1974;
4. In 1990, the main cause of death among African-American males in the 15-to-30-year-old age range was homicide and;
5. The proportion of African-American men between the age of 20 and 24 with no reported income increased from 8% in 1973 to 20% in 1990 (Simmons, 2004).

Even more startling statistics are available regarding the achievement gap and high school performance. Haycock (2002) reports that by the completion of high school, a meager 2% of Hispanics and 1% of African-American 17-year-olds could comprehend and interpret information from technical literature that might be found in the science or business sections of the newspaper, in comparison to almost 8 % of Caucasians, and less than one quarter of Hispanics and one fifth of African-Americans could comprehend difficult but more generalized text that greater than half of all Caucasian students could comprehend (Haycock, 2002). Quite similar finding were also found in math, where it was approximated that 3 % of Hispanics and 1% of African-Americans could solve math problems that involved performing many steps, compared to about 10 % of Caucasian students, and a mere 3 % of African-American students (Haycock, 2002). Haycock further reports that 40 % of Hispanic teens who's age is about 17-year-olds have mastered basic math skills and pre algebra concepts, compared to 70 % of Caucasian students and by end of high school, African-American and Hispanic students have

mathematics and comprehension skill that are on par with Caucasian students in eighth grade (Haycock, 2002).

In other significant areas of high school performance, the National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in Wynn, 2007) reports that almost 18 of every 100 African-American students, 13 of every 100 Hispanic students, and 9 of every 100 Caucasian students in grades K-12 repeated at least one grade (Wynn, 2007). 13 % of African-Americans ages 16 through 24 had not received their high school degrees, comparatively the rate for Caucasians students was 7% (Wynn, 2007). Less than 1 of every 3 African-American high school students had taken advanced placement courses in mathematics such as advanced calculus compared to 1 of every 2 Caucasians students and just 5 of every 100 African-American high school students had taken a fourth year of a foreign language with 2 % taking an Advanced Placement course in a foreign language such as Spanish, French or Latin (Wynn, 2007). In reference to other courses, 12 % of African-American high school students had taken science classes at the level of chemistry and physics, 27 % of African-American high school students had taken advanced English courses and African-American students had taken Advanced Placement exams at a meager rate totaling a 5.3 %, The rate for Hispanic students was 11.5 % and 18.5% for Caucasians (Wynn, 2007). The average Student Achievement Test (SAT) scores for African-American students were 433 verbal and 426 math; for Caucasians it was over 22% higher at 529 verbal and 531 math, the average ACT score for African-American students is 16.9; for Caucasians it was just about 30% higher at 21.8 (National Center for Educational Statistics, as cited in Wynn, 2007).

Noteworthy disparities are also prevalent in the speed at which diverse ethnic groups finish their high school and university educational experiences. According to statistics compiled by the National Center for Educational Statistics (2007), 90% of Caucasian students in the 18-to-24-year-old age range and about 94% of Asians have either earned a high school diploma or earned a General Education Diploma (GED) and as it relates African-Americans, the rate plummets to 81% and among Hispanic youth the rate is 63% (National Center for Educational Statistics, as cited in Wynn, 2007). Further it is approximated that 71% of African-American graduates and 71% of Hispanic graduates immediately attend college, compared to 76% of Caucasian graduates and 86% of Asian graduates and African-American youth are just about 50% as likely as Caucasian students to gain an undergraduate college degree by the of age 29; Hispanics are only about 33 % as likely as Caucasians to complete requirements for an undergraduate degree (National Center for Educational Statistics, as cited in Wynn, 2007).

The greatest achievement gap dilemmas are usually centered in a small number of big cities. According to statistics provided by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (as cited Haycock, 2001) New York City fails to graduate 75 % of its African-American male students, and Chicago graduates less than 33 % of its African-American male students with their counterparts, the two districts of New York and Chicago enroll almost 1of every 10 of the United States' African-American male students (National Center of Education, 2007). The Schott Foundation (2002) reported that African American males enrolled in school districts in which African-American students are highly concentrated have poorer performances on the National Assessment of

Educational Progress are suspended and expelled more, and are assigned to Special Education more often than Caucasian males and that the procedures used in this process are often abusive and successful in stopping those students from graduating high school at their projected time (Schott Foundation, 2002). In the 2001-2002 academic year, just over half of all African-American males failed to get diplomas with their cohort and New York, South Dakota, and Wisconsin graduated less than a 33% of their African-American male students on schedule (National Center of Education Statistics, 2006). The Schott Foundation (2002) found that ten other states graduated fewer African-American male students than the national average, those were the states of Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Nebraska, New Mexico, Ohio, South and Carolina.

According to the currently resubmitted statistics from the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), between October 2004 and October 2005 Caucasian and Asian/Pacific Islander students were more likely to graduate from high school than Black and Hispanic students. The event dropout rate, which refers to the percentage of high school children that attended public and private schools and who drop out of school within one school year, for African Americans and Hispanics were 7.3% and 5.0%, respectively, compared with rates of 2.8% for Whites and 1.6% for Asians/Pacific Islanders. Hrabowski, Grief, and Maton (1998) note in *Beating the Odds: Raising Academically Successful African-American Males*:

By junior high school, many [African-American males] are working below grade level or barely passing; consequently they see school as a place where they fail. Their environment becomes even more frustrating because of problems between these students, their peers, and teachers and administrators – problems often related to behavior. We see that Black students are more often tracked into lower ability groups involving general education and vocational education and, in contrast, very few Black students are placed in gifted classes. In fact, White children are twice as likely to be placed in these classes as Black children. We

also know that males, in general, are more likely than females to be overrepresented in the educable mentally retarded and learning -disabled children and underrepresented in gifted and talented programs. Ford and Harris report that Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans are underrepresented in many as 70% of the gifted programs in the nation, and overrepresented in almost half of the special education programs. These statistical results will not only have a devastating effect on the African-American community in particular but on the American community as a whole. (p. 5)

Wynn (2007) states that while statistics concerning the fate of the African American male might be shocking, African American families are forced to confront these maladies on a regular basis (Wynn, 2007). Wynn further says that gang involvement, the misperceptions from society, police brutality and racial profiling, the lack of education, etc., has deep consequences on the present and future generations of African American males (Wynn, 2007). Wynn also states that

The issue for the Black community, indeed for America, is much more than merely closing an achievement gap, it is ensuring that future generations of Black men have jobs, function as fathers, and contribute to the health and economic well being of the local and national community. (p. 6)

Darling-Hammond (2007) agrees, stating,

The nation can ill afford to maintain the structural inequalities in access to knowledge and resources that produce persistent and profound barriers to educational opportunity for large numbers of its citizens. Our future will be increasingly determined by our capacity and our will to educate all children well—a challenge we have very little time to meet if the United States is not to enact the modern equivalent of the fall of Rome. (p. 1)

Problem Statement

American has a tremendous number of United States citizens, particularly students from economically disadvantaged communities that do not obtain even the least amount of education required to become knowledgeable citizens and a productive part of the civilian labor force. This problem will continue to grow as the current technological economy requires an increase of education level from all citizens. Recent reports state

that currently seven out every ten U.S. jobs demand that workers are equipped with specialized skills further than the minimum high school training and that this trend has risen since the beginning of the 20th century when that trend was only 5% (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Envision a United States where all students from all areas of the country receive a high school diploma and are ready to master the rigors of post secondary education also envision the social and economic benefits that might be gained if American could boast that any child in any area of the country will be given the necessary skills in high school that will educate them so that when they graduate they will be prepared to compete and become successful in any labor market (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

African-American males from families living in metropolitan areas are sometimes more than double the chance to under-perform and exit high school without their high school diplomas as their Caucasian equals and this educational achievement gap appears to be widening. Although efforts have been undertaken to curb the achievement gap, educators and policymakers need to know more about the causes of the achievement gap and identify successful strategies that might be used to close the gap. The positive news comes from success stories of metropolitan high schools that have demonstrated success in closing the achievement for African-American males. Principals of these schools would be an excellent resource in order to learn more about underlying causes of the achievement gap, strategies that have proven to be successful and that could be replicated, and recommendations for new strategies for possible implementation. Gwinnett County Public Schools and Cobb County School District are two public school districts in Georgia offer concrete examples of metropolitan high

schools that have curbed the achievement gap within the last 2 years. It is unknown, however, how these schools have achieved their success and what recommendations principals at these schools might offer as to how to continually narrow the achievement gap between African-American and Caucasian students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school administrators in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, Georgia, that have successfully narrowed the achievement gap for high school African-American males as to: (a) why the achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States; (b) what successful strategies they credit for closing the achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and (c) what additional strategies they might consider in order curb the achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions were the basis of this study:

1. What strategies have been implemented by principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools to successfully close the achievement gap for low income African-American students?
2. What additional strategies, if any, might principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools consider implementing in their continuing efforts to close the African-American achievement gap?
3. What are the perceptions of Gwinnett and Cobb County high school administrators who are successfully closing the achievement gap in their

respective schools regarding how to narrow the achievement gap for high school African-American males in metropolitan districts in the United States?

De-limitations

The sample size for this study is de-limited to two Georgia county school districts in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties and 10 high schools within the two districts.

Limitations

This study is operating under the following limitations:

1. Depending on the years of experience at the site being surveyed, the site level administrator may have limited knowledge of the strategies implemented over an extended period of time.
2. The validity of the survey results may be compromised by the respondents, deliberately or unconsciously. Personal bias, personal interest in questionnaire findings, and personal interest in school perceptions may impact self-reported data.

Study Assumptions

In designing and conducting this study, it was assumed that school principals are the most knowledgeable professionals with regards to strategies being implemented in their respective schools. It was also assumed that the principals participating in this study would provide truthful and reliable information in response to interview questions.

Definition of Terms

Achievement Gap - The achievement gap is usually defined in terms of the difference in academic performance among identified groups on standardized tests (Simmons, 2004).

African-American - African-Americans are a racial group of Americans who are typically identified by their darker complexions and who can trace their genetic origins to the continent of Africa, also known as Blacks and Negroes (“African-American,” 1996).

Busing - The transportation of children by bus to a school distant from their homes in an effort to achieve ethnic balance in the school population. The process initially took place during the desegregation era of the 1960s and 70s (“Busing,” 1996).

Caucasian - Belonging to the light-skinned peoples of Europe, northern Africa, and western and southern Asia, formerly considered a distinct ethnic group. Caucasians are a racial group of Americans who typically are identified by their lighter complexions and who can trace their genetic origins to the continent of Eurasia, also known as Whites (“Caucasian,” 1996).

Desegregation - The process of putting an end to a customary or enforced separation of ethnic or racial groups in a place or institution, e.g. in a workplace or school (“Desegregation,” 1996).

Hispanic - Hispanics are a racial group of Americans who are typically identified by their brown complexions and who can trace their genetic origins to the continent of the Americas, also known as Latinos. Relating to people descended from Spanish or Latin American people or their culture (“Hispanic,” 1996).

Metropolis - The chief or capital city of a country, state, or region, the city or state of origin of a colony (as of ancient Greece), or a city regarded as a center of a specified activity; a large important city also known as *metropolitan* (“Metropolis,” 1996).

Resegregate - A term used in education to describe as the process of segregating students based upon an inequity of capital resources, also referred to as *resegregation* (“Education: Resegregation,” 1961).

Segregate - The practice of keeping ethnic, racial, religious, or gender groups separate, especially by enforcing the use of separate schools, transportation, housing, and other facilities, and usually discriminating against a minority group, also referred to as *segregation* (“Segregate,” 1996).

Socioeconomic Status - is commonly conceptualized as the social standing or class of an individual or group. It is often measured as a combination of education, income and occupation. Examinations of socioeconomic status often reveal inequities in access to resources, plus issues related to privilege, power and control (American Psychological Association, n.d.).

Organization of the Study

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 included an introduction, the purpose of the study, the significance of the study, research questions, the definition of terms, and limitations and assumptions. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on the academic achievement gap, the history of educational inequality of African-Americans, efforts to close the achievement gap, relevant literature focused on the state of Georgia with emphasis on best practices of the Gwinnett and Cobb County school systems noting demographics and state wide initiatives, leadership, McREL research, and recommendations. Chapter 3 provides a description of the methodology utilized to conduct the study, including the collection and analysis of data. Chapter 4 summarizes the data collected through qualitative research methods. Chapter 5 includes a summary of

the study and its findings, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and future studies.

CHAPTER 2: Review of the Literature

The Achievement Gap and the History of African-American Educational Inequality

The United States spends more of its annual yearly budget on education than any other program with the exception of the armed services and almost 15% of all tax dollars are used to maintain public schools (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008). The citizens of the United States count on its public educational system to reduce the economic and social inequalities of its citizens and to guarantee that all young people contribute to the overall health and national economy thereby further ensuring that America remains a productive democracy (Rothstein et al., 2008). Bond (1934) states:

Educators have not hesitated in the past to regard the school as the most important factor in elevating the life of a people, so firmly has this belief been held, not only by teachers, but by the American populace as well, that extravagant claims have been made as to the effectiveness of the school as a social leaven of prime importance. It has been thought by many to transcend the family, the church, and the entire social organization generally as the most powerful of all influences in molding personality and conveying ideas. (p. 13)

Given the tremendous amount of resources dedicated to public education, it should be alarming that great quantities of American students depart school, some with and some without high school diplomas, with minimal ability to comprehend, write, and perform simple arithmetic.. Additionally and as previously mentioned, the collapses of the nation's schools are not distributed equally among citizens of all ethnic backgrounds (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

As noted in chapter one, the failures of the American public school system fall disproportionately on Hispanic and African American students in general and particularly on African-American males. Between the years of 1980 through 2000, African-American men were 3 times as likely to be put in to the U.S. prison systems as were enrolling in

U.S. colleges (Darling-Hammond, 2007). It was estimated that there were 791,600 African-American men in prison or jail in the year 2000, yet only 603,000 comprised schools of higher learning (Justice Policy Institute, as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2007). In a culture that boast about of equal opportunity and racial fairness, the U.S. still has an ethnically demarcated section of young African-American and Hispanic students don't measure up to current educational standards and whose inadequate education will most certainly limit their future opportunities (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). When comparing African American and Hispanic youth who are between the ages of 25 through 29 to their Caucasian counterparts, only about 17% of African-American and 11% of Hispanics had received a college degree in 2005, Caucasians averaged 34% (U.S. Census Bureau, as cited in Darling-Hammond, 2007). When we as a nation allow students to graduate or exit high school with out the necessary skills needed to succeed then the entire nation will suffer the consequences (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

The implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 prompted a set of efforts to eradicate the achievement gap. was President George W. Bush signed NCLB into law on January 8, 2002. Since the implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), enacted in 1965, NCLB symbolizes the governments most far reaching transformation in educational reform in K-12 education by measuring student achievement as focal point of the educational reform (New Jersey Department of Education, 2006). NCLB deals specifically with four essential education reform principles espoused by President George W. Bush: (a) strengthen focus on accountability for results, (b) more local control and flexibility (c) more choices for parents, and (d) highlighting teaching strategies that have been proven successful (New Jersey

Department of Education, 2006). By the passage of the NCLB legislation the U.S. government has committed to closing the achievement gap and making improvements in education a main concern. The ideal of public schools teaching the nation's children and keeping educators responsible for how well those students perform is the sole purpose of the NCLB initiative but ultimately it is the obligation of professional educators to eradicate the achievement gap and get students through schools, guaranteeing that the nation's public schools has a equal options and resources for all students..

This literature review will seek to examine: (a) the history of African-American inequality in the educational social order; (b) the current state of the achievement gap in relation to African-Americans, including its social impact; and (c) the current literature's suggestions regarding what steps might be taken toward closing the African-American achievement gap.

History of African-American Educational Inequality

Colonial era to the Civil War. One of the most controversial and compelling topics in the American social strata is the question of racial equality. Since America was founded, the question of educating African American has always had positive and negative reviews. Carter G. Woodson (2006) made significant note of such in 1933 with the publication of *The Miseducation of the Negro*. He knew then that when it came to the question of educating African-Americans, a problem existed (Brooks & Cooper, 1987). The history of the African-American in the educational social order is comprehensive and complex, playing an essential function in the comprehension of some of the consequences affecting African-American triumphs and setbacks. For this reason, when

examining the current educational achievement gap, some of the history of African-Americans and their roles in education must be analyzed.

African-American ancestry is traceable to the continent of Africa. With the founding of the Americas by Christopher Columbus in 1492, Europeans had hoped to take advantage of the rich natural resources they found in the Americas. The lack of a significant native labor force, however, led them to import slaves (Gant-Britton, 2006). Soon Europeans were bringing thousands of African slaves each year to work on plantations in the Caribbean and in South and North America. Like other European colonizers, the British imported African slaves to their Colonies in the Caribbean and North America as well (Franklin, 1980). Most African-Americans living in the United States today can trace their ancestry back to British importation during the Triangular Trade of this era (Horton & Horton, 1997).

The majority of slaves brought into this hemisphere came from the West African regions: the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, the Congo, and Angola (Kvaraceus, Gibson, & Curtin, 1967). Well-organized patterns of work made Africans prime targets for enslavement by expanding European nations, yet there is no doubt that the Atlantic slave trade had a devastating effect on Africa. The greatest impact was the human cost; historians estimate that 10 to 12 million Africans were sent to the Americas as part of the slave trade (Gant-Britton, 2006). Other historical estimates are even higher.

As huge portions of the population in some places were enslaved, valuable members of the community were taken away (Gant-Britton, 2006). African kingdoms suffered tremendously. Entire communities were devastated by the loss of their people to slavery. Franklin (1980) noted, "The immediate family, the clan, and the tribe under

girded every aspect of African life. Nothing is more impressive in viewing the social institutions of Africa than the cohesive influence of the family” (p. 26). The institution of European slavery itself was the prevailing force in destroying the African family (Horton & Horton, 1997).

African laborers arrived in England’s North American Colonies in early as 1619, when a group of about 20 slaves were sold in Jamestown, Virginia (Jones-Wilson, 1996). The first Africans in North America were not lifelong slaves, however; likely because they were Christian they earned their freedom after number of years of service (Gant-Britton, 2006).

Over time, colonists grew less satisfied with temporary laborers or indentured servants, as they were known (Franklin, 1980). The British colonialists wanted a system that enabled a permanent labor force. As the number of African slaves in the North American Colonies rose, colonial governments passed laws regulating slavery (Horton & Horton, 1997). At this particular time the various colonies in the United States had their unique ways in choosing how slaves were treated. While Southern slavery was more agrarian in nature, Northern slavery was more industrialized; however, the situation in the North was as much conditioned by racial prejudice as it was in the South (Jones-Wilson, 1996). The agricultural aristocracy of the Southern Colonies created a condition where slaves worked from “sun up till the sundown” (p. 283) and as such the Southern colony slaves usually worked in more cruel and inhumane working conditions, while Northern and Middle colony slaves were usually given more freedom and were treated with more humanity (Gant-Britton, 2006). These regional differences not only created differences in how slaves would be treated, but also led to the development of manumission societies

such as Quakers and Methodist abolitionist preachers in the Middle and Northern Colonies (Jones-Wilson, 1996).

In order to prevent slaves from entertaining ideas of freedom, states passed restrictive laws to discourage any attempts by Whites to teach Blacks to read and write (Jones-Wilson, 1996). In the British Caribbean colonies these laws were known as the Slave Codes, in the British North American colonies they were known as the Virginian or Black Codes (Franklin, 1980). Southern Whites knew the dangers involved if slaves became literate, and as such many Whites discouraged the practice of educating slaves (Woodson, 2006). Among a myriad of other activities such as not being allowed to leave the plantation without permission, insolence and idleness, slaves weren't allowed to be taught reading and writing (Gant-Britton, 2006). Slaves were not even allowed to have access to the Bible (Jones-Wilson, 1996). The noted abolitionist Frederick Douglass reasoned that slaveholders feared literate slaves because education for slaves would sow the seeds of discontent and lead to efforts to gain their freedom (Ashmore, 1954). Katz (1969) details specific examples of the Slave Codes of Georgia and South Carolina and their perverse effects on limiting the education of African-American people:

By the census of 1860 the population of Georgia was 1,057,286; and of this number 465,098 were Black all of whom but 3500 were slaves. Fearing the huge population growth of Blacks, The Province of Georgia, in 1770 adopted a version of a law from South Carolina past in 1740 providing only a light penalty for teaching slaves to write, a fine of 20 pounds instead of 100 pounds established by the South Carolina Slave Codes. The same law provided that any magistrate or constable must "disperse in the assembly or a meeting of slaves which may disturb the peace and endanger the safety of his majesty's subjects;" and any slave found at such meeting might, by order of the magistrate, be immediately corrected, without trial, by whipping on the bare back 25 stripes with a whip, switch, cow skin. (p. 339)

The reason for the passage of this provision of the law was, as stated, because the frequent meeting of slaves, under the pretense of feasting, may be attended with dangerous consequences. The *feasting* referred to was the love feast of the Methodist church, a social practice of integrating church parishioners for courtship and possible marriage (Katz, 1969).

Katz (1969), details the following 1829 legal enactment in a further effort to limit the educational freedoms of African-Americans:

If any slave, Negro, or free person of color or any White person, shall teach any other slaves, Negro, or free person of color to read or write either written or printed characters, the said free person of color or slave shall be punished by fine and whipping, or fine or whipping, at the discretion of the court. In December, 1833, the Georgia penal code was consolidated and in it a provision from the act of 1829 was embodied, providing a penalty not exceeding \$100.00 for the employment of any slave or free person hired in setting up type or other labor about a printing office requiring knowledge of reading and writing. In 1833 the city of Savannah adopted an ordinance that if any person shall teach or cause to be taught any slave or free person of color to read or write within the city, or who shall keep a school for that purpose, he or she shall be fined in the sum not exceeding \$100.00 for each and every such offense; and if the offender be a slave or free person of color he or she may also be whipped, not exceeding 39 lashes. These penal codes continued in force until swept away by the events of the Civil war. (p. 339)

Such practices had devastating impacts on the educational progress of Black people in colonial era America. America's Caucasian power structure had a distinct desire to keep slaves uneducated so that slave would not possess the know how to seek an improved way of life and eventually seek their freedom (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

The situation of African-Americans in the North was as much conditioned by racial prejudice as it was in the South. Where Northern schools existed, the notion of racially mixed schools was repugnant to most Whites. Communities that provided

education for African-Americans established separate facilities for them. In New York, for example, the board of education spent an average of \$1,600 for Whites (including capital expenditures) for every one dollar spent on Blacks (Franklin, 1980). Even when communities established tax-supported schools, the African-American communities often had to resort to establishing private schools (Bond, 1934). African-Americans were constantly faced with discrimination and segregation in the area of education. Only in Boston were they successful in integrating schools, but not until 1855, after 9 years of struggle (Gant-Britton, 2006). Also, at the time there were some who campaigned for the education of African American people. Early advocates of those who favored educating African Americans were in three categories. The first category comprised slave owners who hoped to enhance the economic efficiency their supply of labor. The second category included compassionate citizens who desired to help oppressed peoples. Finally, the third category comprised missionaries who thought the message of God's love was meant for all persons regardless of color. These ideas were contrary to popular opinion and existed in very small measures (Freedman, 1999).

Beginning in approximately the year 1500, the people today commonly referred to as African Americans were first brought to the Americas as chattel slaves and although the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 liberated them, the economic and social advancement of these citizens has been impeded by the fact that the Caucasian population of America deemed them as inferior and not worthy of equivalent social standing (Franklin, 1980). Woodson (2006) stated, "The thought of inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies. When you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions" (p. 33).

This inferiority stigma created the foundation of a collection of exploitations stagnating the educational progress of African-Americans in the United States (Kvaraceus et al., 1967).

Civil War to reconstruction. During the antebellum and Civil War periods, a small percentage of slaves were trained to become skilled and semiskilled technical workers; but, prior to the 1850s, there were very few schools in the North and none in the South that provided a formal adult education and the education of child slaves was basically nonexistent (Jones-Wilson, 1996). Frederick Douglass, a slave born in Southern colony of Maryland was one of the first slaves to learn how to read and write (Franklin, 1980). Changes for the education of slaves started in the mid 1800s and depended on the location of the state also when slaves began to become educated and this time the time period that slaves also began to understand the impact that education could have on their lives (Freedman, 1980).

By the mid 1800s, many African-American slaves, with the support of some Northern abolitionists, as previously noted, were advocating for freedom and finding out what they might do to achieve this goal. One specific example of the effort to challenge the legal constitutionality of the system of slavery was the case of Dred Scott. In the 1854 case of Dred Scott v. Sanford, Scott, a slave at that time, had resided in the free state of Illinois and the free territory of Wisconsin prior to returning to the slave state of Missouri (Newman, 2007). Scott appealed to the Supreme Court in the anticipation that he would be given independence. In March of 1857, Roger B. Taney, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, stated that African Americans, regardless of social standing and emancipated status, were not and would never be recognized as United

States citizens (Boorstin, 1965). The U.S. Supreme court also decided that the Missouri Compromise of 1820 was unconstitutional thereby permitting slavery in all of the United States territories (Newman, 2007). Justice Taney, an avid supporter of slavery, was very interested on protecting Southern segregationist from Northern who might have sought civil rights for African Americans (Franklin, 1980). Taney wrote the Supreme Court's majority opinion insisting that because Dread Scott was a Black man that Scott was not a citizen and therefore had no legal right to bring suit against the United States (Newman, 2007). The writers of the Constitutional, he wrote, thought that Blacks

had no rights which the White man was bound to respect; and that the Negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit. He was bought and sold and treated as an ordinary article of merchandise and traffic, whenever profit could be made by it. (McBride, 2006, p. 1)

As it relates language in the Declaration of Independence that includes the expressing, "all men are created equal," Justice Taney articulated that "it is too clear for dispute, that the enslaved African race were not intended to be included, and formed no part of the people who framed and adopted this declaration" (McBride, 2006, p. 1). This decision intensely infuriated abolitionists and although disappointed, Frederick Douglass found a positive side to the decision and announced, "My hopes were never brighter than now" (p. 1). Fredrick Douglass thought that the court's decision would bring the issue of slavery to the forefront of national awareness and would also bring slavery to its ultimate demise (McBride, 2006). This decision was a set back to the progress of African-American emancipation, but it gave abolitionists the ambition they needed to continue their pursuit.

President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863; the Emancipation Proclamation stated that all persons kept as slaves within southern states

that had succeeded from the Union were free (Boorstin, 1965). This landmark decision led to the beginning of educational opportunities for African Americans in the United States. Early in 1863 the Union Army set up schools to teach soldiers how to read and write (Franklin, 1980). The Union Army's role in the education of African-Americans was significant because of the estimated 180,000 African-American soldiers who served in the military during the war and its occupation of the South, who received further educational and employment benefits as a result of the Army schools (Jones-Wilson, 1996).

In 1865 the Congress of the United States ended the practice of slavery with the passage of the 13th amendment. In June 1866, the Congress of the United States passed the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the 14th amendment was ratified in 1868 (Boorstin, 1965). The 14th amendment provided Blacks with citizenship and guaranteed that federal and state laws applied equally to Blacks and Whites (Franklin, 1980). During the early period of Reconstruction hundreds of schools were set up to provide adult education for a limited number of freed African-American men and women (Katz, 1969). The schools were established by the Federal government's Bureau of Refugees, The Freedman and Abandoned Lands Bureau (The Freedmen Bureau), The American Missionary Society, The African Methodist Episcopal Church, and other anti- slave groups. (Jones-Wilson, 1996)

Among the most notable medical schools established to educate African-Americans at this time were Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee and Howard University in Washington, D.C. Meharry Medical College and Howard University would produce a huge majority of the United States' African American doctors up to the Civil Rights Movement (Carson, 2003).

The American Missionary Association and Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian denominations were all active in establishing schools for African-Americans during this time period (Franklin, 1980). Although they were called colleges, their programs essentially offered elementary and secondary education designed to

provide basic academic and vocational skills for adult students (Gant-Britton, 2006). The need for education was so strongly emphasized that by 1867 schools had been established in far-flung counties of each of the former confederate states (Franklin, 1980). By 1869 9,503 teachers taught in the Freedman's schools of the South (Franklin, 1980). Although some of the White teachers were southerners, the vast majority of the White teachers came from the North. The number of Black teachers was growing, however, and they gradually took over supervision of some schools (Franklin, 1980).

The 1870s saw a rise in the return of Southern democrats to the United States legislature and as a result the progress that was made by Northern abolitionists on behalf of education for African-Americans began to dwindle. Regarding the return of southern democracy and the demise of African-American education, Franklin (1980) noted:

By 1871 educational work of the Freeman's bureau stopped. There were 247,333 Black peoples in 4329 schools in the South. Reports from all quarters showed a marked increase in attendance, and advance in scholarship, and a record of punctuality and regularity which compared favorably with the schools in the North. The bureau has spent more than \$5 million in schooling Negroes. The shortcomings in the education of Blacks arose not from unusual zeal on the part teachers but from ignorance of the needs of Negroes and from the necessary preoccupation of students with the problem of survival in a hostile world. (p. 237)

Adult education, the most urgently needed type of education during this era, continued to be a major component of many schooling activities during Reconstruction until about the 1930s (Jones-Wilson, 1996). Although much progress was still needed to close the achievement gap during this era, these movements were another step in the right direction in leveling the playing field for African-Americans.

By the end of reconstruction, circa the late 1800s, In 1896 the United States Supreme Court established the doctrine of *separate but equal* based upon the case of Plessey versus Ferguson (Franklin, 1980). The Supreme Court ruled in Plessey versus

Ferguson that public facilities can be segregated by race as long as those facilities were equally maintained (Jones–Wilson, 1996). Southern states applied this concept of to every aspect of society, including public restrooms, drinking fountains, and especially schools (McBride, 2006). In 1899 the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *Cummings v. School Board Richmond County, Georgia* that the city could establish and provide a public high school for Caucasian students and was not bound to maintain a high school for African-American students (Carson, 2003). Henceforth, the southern region of the United States paved the way for Jim Crow laws. The specific purpose of Jim Crow laws was to impose racial segregation; as such, these laws were one of the major impediments of the achievement gap during the Reconstruction era. By the late 1800s, as Southern law making bodies and communities methodically denied African Americans of equality, the Jim Crow laws evolved into a euphemism used to designate ongoing racial separation in the South (Westbrook, 2001).

Laws against racial segregation appeared briefly during Reconstruction and had quickly disappear by 1896. When Southern conservatives regained social status, they reinstated laws that favored racial segregation. African-American and Caucasian citizens began to be separated in all public facilities including trains station, hotels, places of entertainment and public restrooms, for example, in 1883 the United States Supreme Court overturned of the Civil Rights Act of 1875 and as such African Americans were then barred from hotels, barber shops, restaurants and theaters (Franklin, 1980). As of 1885 most Southern states enacted laws that required separate public schools for African Americans and Caucasians students (Westbrook, 2001). As Southern states began to adopt new constitutions those states reaffirmed the rigorous segregation laws established

by the 1896 the Supreme Court in the aforementioned Plessey v. Ferguson (Franklin 1980). Since the days of Reconstruction the social status of the African-American had steadily declined as Caucasian lawmakers began to enact laws to keep the masses segregated. At this time more than ever segregation became the official mandate in the South and the unofficial mandate in the North as well (Boyer, 1993).

The progressive era. During the Progressive Era, at the start of the 20th century, leaders of the Progressive movement thought only in terms of the White race (Newman, 2007). The Progressive Era coincided with the years when thousands of Blacks were lynched by mobs and progressive leaders did nothing about lynching and segregation (Franklin, 1980). Political gains for African-Americans rapidly disappeared after Reconstruction and Southern Whites made a commitment to destroy them totally. It was only in the field of education that African Americans could be assured of improved social status, in fact, many of the schools that had been established immediately after the days of the Civil War during Reconstruction Era were still flourishing (Gant-Britton, 2006). The quest for education was, in all probability, the greatest goal of African Americans during this time period because many saw enlightenment as the greatest chance to avoid increasing exclusions and injustices that Caucasians were putting on them (Franklin, 1980).

The Progressive Era was marked by the emergence of philanthropy and self-help movements. Many large educational foundation were establish between the end of the Civil War to the beginning of World War I and these educational foundation worked directly to promote the education of African Americans who resided in the South, they include such education foundations as The Julius Rosenwald Fund, The John F. Slater

Fund, The Anna T. Jeanes Fund, The Peabody Education Fund, the Phelps-Stokes Fund and The General Education Board (Horton & Horton, 1997). Between 1902 and 1909 John D. Rockefeller gave \$53 million to the General Education Board (Franklin, 1980). The board seemed particularly concerned in providing a way for the preparation of teachers for African-American schools all over the South, and consequently provided much funding to institutions that were undertaking this mission (Franklin, 1980). Public funds for the education of Southern children were not equally distributed during this time. Whites of the South were of the opinion that if philanthropists were going to educate Blacks, then public taxpayer money could be used to educate Whites, beginning an unequal distribution of public tax dollars used to fund public education (Horton & Horton, 1997). This race-based unequal distribution led to sub-par funding for Southern schools with African-American children. Examples of unequal funding can be found in Florida where the 1898 per capita annual cost of education spent for every White child was \$5.92 and \$2.27 for every Black child and in 1900 where the citizens of Adam County, Mississippi spent \$22.25 for each Caucasian child and \$2.00 to educate each African American child (Bond, 1934).

Although public funds were not equally distributed among White students and Black students in Southern schools the results of the philanthropic efforts to ensure the education of African-Americans were rewarding (Horton & Horton, 1997). From 1900 to 1933 there were 28,560 Negro teachers, more than one and a half million African-American children in attendance in school, 34 institutions for African-Americans were offering collegiate training, and a significant quantity of African-Americans were entering the universities and colleges of the North (Franklin, 1980). Virginia, Arkansas,

Georgia, and Delaware each had a state college for African-Americans; other institutions, founded by private groups or individuals, were later to be taken over by the state (Carson, 2003). By the end of the 1900s, it is estimated that approximately 2,000 or more African Americans had graduated from colleges and universities and that more than 700 colleges existed during that time (Gant-Britton, 2006). The great educational awakening that permeated the United States by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century was certainly and clearly manifested among African Americans as it was among the other ethnic groups in the population (Franklin, 1980).

It was also during the Progressive Era that two of the most influential advocates for the educational and social progress of African Americans emerged. They were in the leadership styles of W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington. Both leaders were foundational in creating an interest group that would advance the lives of African-Americans citizens through the progress of education (Boyer, 1993). As the twentieth century unfolded, Booker T. Washington was the United States' strongest supporter of African-American causes from 1890 until his death in 1915 (Newman, 2007).

Washington was a former slave. In his autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, Washington (1902) narrated his beginnings from impoverish beginnings through honesty, hard work, and the help of friendly supporters (Gant-Britton, 2006). In 1895 Washington attended the Atlanta Exposition. In a speech given at the Exposition Washington said that the education and economic progress of Black people should be the most important goals of Black people at that time and that Black citizens should focus on learning industrial skills to get better wages rather than struggle for immediate social equality (Jones-Wilson, 1996). Washington believed that only after obtaining a sound economic foundation can

African-Americans look forward to realizing other social and political ambitions (Newman, 2007). He insisted that schools remain segregated and that African-Americans learn basic skills before endeavoring to study humanities or the classics (Boorstin, 1965). Many African-American leaders at that time labeled Washington as accommodating with White segregationist because he favored self-help through economic ways more than political and civil rights; many Southern conservatives of the era used this philosophy as a reason to continue their segregationist efforts (Horton & Horton, 1997). An unfortunate result of this thinking was that when African-Americans did acquire a skill or trade and were prepared to enter the workforce, they were frequently disheartened because employment was still not given to African American people (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

As previously mentioned, W.E.B. DuBois was one of the most influential African-Americans of the twentieth century. DuBois was an educator, journalist, sociologist, historian, and above all, a civil rights leader (Jones-Wilson, 1996). Significantly, DuBois was the first African-American to obtain his PhD from Harvard University in 1895 (Newman, 2007). DuBois taught from 1896 to 1910 at Atlanta University (Boyer, 1993). A cultivated scholar of refined manners and distinguished appearance, DuBois expressed his disagreements on social and political issues with Washington in *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903 (Boorstin, 1995). DuBois rejected the need for patience and the exclusive cultivation of physical skills and manual labor espoused by Washington and demanded that African Americans receive the identical intellectual choices given to Caucasians (Franklin, 1980). DuBois also stated that African Americans must not allow racism to passively stand but that African Americans must actively resist all forms of

racism (Carter, 2005). DuBois worked as one of the original members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP; Boyer, 1993). Radical leaders founded the NAACP and they were comprised of White socialist, liberals, and conservatives from the core group of Niagara (Horton & Horton, 1997). The NAACP gained support from Northern White philanthropist, supporters of Washington's organization that favored accommodating second class citizenship for Blacks, and those who favored racial fairness and equality expressed by DuBois; together they created a middle role of interracial cooperation (Ashmore, 1954). Subsequently the NAACP established a national office with a board of directors and made DuBois the director of publication and research where he later found a journal called *Crisis* (Boorstin, 1995). The NAACP's major aspirations were to fight for civil rights, to protest against the lack of opportunity for African-Americans in the American economic, and to work to increase social and educational equality (Boyer, 1993). Booker T. Washington's (1910) pragmatic approach to economic advancement illustrated by the course of study at Tuskegee University, founded by Washington and W. E. B. DuBois' militant demands for equal rights, framed a debate in the African-American community that continued throughout much of the 20th century.

During the Progressive Era African-Americans were beginning to understand the importance of education and how it could improve their situation (Franklin, 1980). The movement of changing the thought processes of African Americans, making them conscious of their educational abilities, instilling confidence in their possibilities, and enhancing their determination for self-assertion became the most important objective for many of the African American leadership during the Progressive Era, nevertheless, the

escalating barriers to African Americans receiving a quality education still stemmed from racial discrimination in the South and institutional discrimination in the North (Ashmore, 1954). According to the U.S. Supreme Court precedent of 1896, Black and White facilities were supposed to be *separate but equal* but where majority White populations existed, facilities were usually more adequately funded than where a majority Black population existed (Ashmore, 1954).

Today's African Americans can trace their cultural legacy to a time period a long history of racial cruelty, enslavement, disenfranchisement, legally sanctioned segregation, and subordination in the segregated South and extreme racial prejudice in the North (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Slaves were not given the opportunity to learn to read and write because even a small amount of education might have encouraged a dangerous thirst for freedom (Franklin, 1980). After the emancipation of the slaves, African Americans demonstrated a strong desire for education, but Southern states responded only halfheartedly by creating separate and tremendously inferior segregated schools. It was not easy for African Americans to gain much education and when they did get education and tried to enter the world of work that determination and education paid very little dividends, in fact, most jobs that required the skills that were learned in school were closed to African-Americans (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

The Great Depression to the Civil Rights Era. The Great Depression of the 1930s was devastating to African-American education in general, and to adult education in particular, as African-American unemployment reached crisis levels (Jones-Wilson, 1996). Carson (2003) stated that the unemployment level for African-Americans in major cities hovered around 50%, double the national average, during the era of the Great

Depression. The financial crises and the depletion of spending during the Depression Era had disastrous effects on African-American educational institutions, as previously noted. What is salient about this information is the fact that nothing was more persistent in the 20th century than the disproportion between the funds allotted for the education of Caucasian children and that allotted for the education of Black children (Franklin, 1980). In fact, *The Crisis*, the official publication of the NAACP, ran a series of articles from September 1926 through July 1928 based on studies it had conducted on school financing in several Southern states (Carson, 2003). Those studies revealed a huge disparity in state expenditures for African American and Caucasian students. An example of the disparities in state educational funding can be found in the state of Georgia where from 1920 through 1928 the state public school system spent an average of eight times more per Caucasian student than per African American student, average teacher salaries were \$49.41 for African American and \$97.80 per month for Caucasians and the class size for African American students was, on average, double that of Caucasians students (Carson, 2003). Alabama, in 1930, the state public school system spent less than five times the money per student to educate African American children than it did to educate Caucasians children (Carson, 2003). In 1900, southern states spent \$1.00 more for the education of Caucasians students than for African American students but in 1930 \$7.00 was spent for Caucasians students to every \$2.00 spent for African American students and from 1935 to 1936 the state public school expenditures per White pupil in 10 Southern states averaged \$37.87, yet such expenditures for African American students was a meager \$13.09 (Franklin, 1980).

In the late 1930s The American Council on Education discovered that a good number African American students attended school in Southern states less than 20 weeks per year and those African American students were taught by under skilled teachers with antiquated textbooks in substandard schools and facilities (Carson, 2003). The study also showed that the greatest percentage of African American students who were enrolled high school in North Carolina, a southern state was, 20% and the report continued to state that almost 90% of the secondary schools for African Americans in the South were basically teaching elementary school level curriculums (Carson, 2003).

W. E. B. DuBois, editor of *The Crisis*, wrote an editorial after the completion of the series of the articles that started the argument that the NAACP should start a movement that would protect the interest and provide justice for African American students (Carson, 2003). DuBois further insisted that state and federal courts begin to hear cases based on school desegregation and in the 1930s, DuBois' proposed desegregation movement was initiated (Ashmore, 1954). In 1929 Charles Hamilton Houston was hired by Howard University to create a top notch law school designed to train African American attorneys to employ the legal system to put a stop to school segregation (Franklin, 1980). Houston trained his students in both theoretical and practical law, with a strong emphasis on civil rights law. One of his best students was Thurgood Marshall. In 1935 Houston left Howard University to become the NAACP's chief legal counsel (Carson, 2003).

From 1938 until 1954, under the leadership of the NAACP attorneys, Blacks won several victories in court demonstrating the inequality of separate facilities (Willie, as cited in Willie, Garibaldi, Reed, & William Monroe Trotter Institute, 1991). NAACP

lawyer, civil rights leader and future Supreme Court member Thurgood Marshall organized many important wins before the Supreme Court that led to the ultimate demise of the Jim Crow Laws and reversing the Plessy decision (Carson, 2003). The Supreme Court cases of *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* (1938), *Morgan v. Virginia* (1946), *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948), *Sweatt v. Painter* (1950), *McLauren v. Oklahoma State Regents* (1950) all fought against the Plessy decision and for the integration of facilities and public schools and as time progressed it became increasingly difficult for segregation to continue and the Supreme Court began to favor federal intervention on a more consistent basis (Tafari, 2002). Thurgood Marshall used the victories in these court cases to prepare himself for an attack on segregation in the nation's public school systems in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In *Brown v. Board*, Marshall argued that segregation was innately unconstitutional and that it neglected to provide African Americans the equal protection guaranteed to them by 14th Amendment (Gant-Britton, 2006).

In the early 1940s a Black social psychologist named Kenneth Clark led a study of African American and Caucasian children in which they were shown Black and White dolls and asked which they favored whereby Clark discovered that most of the children, including most of the African American children, chose the White doll, particularly when questioned about intelligence, physical appearance and hygiene (Carson, 2003). Clark's revolutionary research was used by the NAACP Legal Defense Fund to build its argument that segregated public schooling made African American children feel inferior to Caucasian children, furthermore, Clark's findings were so persuasive that Thurgood

Marshall used this research as a basis against segregation in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas I* (1954; Carson, 2003).

The Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka Kansas I* (1954) was the most significant ruling on race and equal access to education in the history rulings litigated in the United States Supreme Court (Boyer, 1993). Before the *Brown v. Board I* ruling, all of the lower courts based their decision to uphold segregation on the harmful *separate but equal* rule accepted by the Supreme Court ruling in *Plessy versus Ferguson* but in *Brown I* the court ruled that the accepted practice of segregation of students in public schools on the basis of race neglected minority and African American students of equal educational opportunities in direct violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment (Jones-Wilson, 1996). *Brown v. Board of Education* actually were four class-action lawsuits brought on behalf of African-American students who were not given access to schools attended by White children because of laws that either required or allowed racial segregation (Tafari, 2002). The *Brown* rulings also gave rise to the stoppage of state-subsidized segregation in other public places (Tafari, 2002). Chief Justice Earl Warren penned the following in remarks in the landmark decision in the *Brown* case:

It is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms...Does segregation of children in public schools solely on the basis of race...deprive the children of the minority group of equal educational opportunities? We believe that it does... we conclude that, in the field of public education, the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal. (as cited in Gant- Britton, 2006, p. 255)

Clearly, *Brown I* and *Brown II* set the stage for a myriad of far-reaching changes in American society. Yet as significant as these rulings were, questions about their

meaning continue to be debated. For example, is it not clear whether *Brown* focuses primarily on the issues of race or education; that is, although the Supreme Court relied heavily on the data from the social sciences in *Brown I*, it subsequently struck down other forms of segregation without any reference to its psychological effects. Equally uncertain is whether it guaranteed the rights of African-American students to be free from de jure segregation or whether it imposed on the states the affirmative duty to ensure their right to attend integrated schools (Jones-Wilson, 1996). Carson (2003) states that there were two basic arguments on how to apply the ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education I*. One, favored by Marshall, was that the desegregation should proceed at once, by direct order. The court adopted the second, more cautious, choice, remanding the matter to district court, which should “take such proceedings and enter such orders and decrees consistent with this opinion as are necessary and proper to admit to public schools on racially nondiscriminatory basis with all deliberate speed the parties to these cases” (p. 114). The oxymoronic phrase *with all deliberate speed* proved to be the salvation of segregationists and a stumbling block for integrationists for years to come. For most southern localities, *with all deliberate speed* sparked violent episodes in school desegregation after the *Brown* Decision, as well as by various programs that ignored service to integration while maintaining the status quo, as attested to by the 1957-1960 Little Rock, Arkansas Crisis (Carson, 2003). The shortcomings of *Brown I* and *II* notwithstanding, these rulings represent the dawn of a novel and revolutionary period in American history, a period dedicated to creating equal opportunities for Americans of all races as evidenced by the civil rights movement that it helped to engender (Jones-Wilson, 1996).

The Civil Rights Era to the present. Prior to the Civil Rights Era, the African-American community had suffered years of social inequality; mental, physical, and verbal abuse; abject poverty; and discrimination (Carson, 2003). One of the most significant factors that have changed the lives of African-Americans, since 1940s, has been the advent of the civil rights movement (Franklin, 1980). Mainly, the civil rights movement was a movement of African Americans organized by African Americans who were intensely receptive to the historic goals and objectives of their people in America (Willie et al., 1991). It was apparent to the African-American Diaspora that assistance would not come from the government, but rather from the community (Carson, 2003). Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, “this legislation was written in the streets” (King, as cited in Willie et al., 1991, p. 5). In 1963, a highly placed education official declared “thank god for the civil rights movement” (Keppel, as cited in Willie et al., 1991, p. 5), giving voice to an increasing reality that the civil rights movement was becoming the major driving force for educational change in this country (Keppel, as cited in Willie et al., 1991, p. 5).

During the 1960s, the struggle for equal education continued among African-Americans yet schools remained segregated, particularly in the South (Carson, 2003). As late as 1964 fewer than 2% of African American students in the 11 former confederate states were in integrated schools (Franklin, 1980). According to Carson (2003), numerous states spent far less money educating Black students than they did educating White students. Fortunately, the statistics were about to change. Under the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the executive branch of the government gained the means of doing what the Supreme Court had been unable to do. Since the act barred discrimination in federally

funded projects and programs, school districts receiving federal funds were required to desegregate or present acceptable plans for desegregating their schools (Franklin, 1980). In 1965 Congress approved the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), to date; this legislation was the widest reaching federal education legislation ever passed and a significant part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" initiative (Brown-Nagin, 2011, p. 344). The ESEA was designated to deal with the problems of discrimination in education that had exposed by civil rights activists who fought for passage of the groundbreaking anti-discrimination statute, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Brown-Nagin, 2011). The ESEA had an appropriation of \$1.3 billion as an added incentive for compliance (Franklin, 1980).

The ESEA legislation has had several reauthorizations since first being enacted by Congress in 1965, most recently in 2002 (U.S Department of Education, 2008). The ESEA has five titles for which the government gives funding to 90% of the United States' public *and* parochial schools as stipulated by ESEA legislation (U.S Department of Education, 2008). Title I that provides monies and set guidelines for educating educationally disadvantaged students, Title II provides funds for disadvantaged schools to buy library materials and audio/visual equipment, Title III provides funds for programs who's purpose is to meet the educational needs of students at risk of school failure, including foreign language programs, after-school tutorial, media, and counseling, and Title IV provides funds for higher education research on education and Title V provides monies to individual state departments of education (U.S Department of Education, 2008). Title VI, outlines the law's basic stipulations (U.S Department of Education, 2008).

In response to passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the ESEA of 1965, by September 1965 all but 124 of the school districts in states located in the South and near border had presented acceptable plans for compliance, including freedom of choice plans, which required Black pupils to take the initiative in seeking admission to all-White schools. In the 11 former confederate southern states, however, only 6% of Negro children were attending desegregated schools in the 1965-1966 school year. Southern states were typically learning how to satisfy Federal requirements and receive Federal funds while at the same time preserving the old order (Franklin, 1980).

By the late 1960s the Supreme Court, impatient with the rate at which states had begun the desegregation process, again took an active role in the desegregation of schools. In the spring of 1967 the school desegregation process received an unanticipated boost from a decision by the United States Circuit Court, Fifth District. In this decision in the United States v. Jefferson County, a case arising from school systems in Alabama and Louisiana, the court declared that “the only school desegregation plan that meets a constitutional standards is one that works” (Franklin, 1980, p. 482). Shortly thereafter some 40 desegregation units were instituted, and the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare stepped up its pressure on school districts (Franklin, 1980). By the beginning of the 1968-1969 school year, some 20.3% of the Negro students in the former Confederate states were attending all integrated schools (Franklin, 1980). The Supreme Court ruled in the case of Green v. County School Board of New Kent County Virginia (1968) that the *freedom of choice* plans operating in many school districts were just new versions of segregation and in the case of Alexander v. Homes County (Mississippi) Board of Education (1969), the Supreme Court ruled that it is the

responsibility of all school district to stop the separate but equal systems immediately and to operate only one school system henceforth (Carson, 2003). As a result of federal legislation, executive mandates, and judicial precedents, southern school districts slowly began to comply for example, by 1970 more than 9 of 10 school systems in the South were categorized as desegregated, and school systems in the South and even in the North responded to the pressures applied by the courts and the public (Franklin, 1980). By the 1972-1973 school year, nearly 50 % of the African American students in the 11 southern states were enrolled in schools that had been mostly White (Carson, 2003).

In the years following the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the ESEA of 1965, opposition to the desegregation of public schools continued in many locales (Franklin, 1980). Franklin states that in the South, a great amount of segregation remained, as African American and Caucasian students were separated by class race or as African American students were not allowed to participate in extracurricular activities (Franklin, 1980). As this occurred, African American school administrators and teachers were either fired from their positions or were reassigned subpar positions in places where Caucasians with no better teaching skills or work experience were granted better position (Franklin, 1980). In northern states, even where school administrators enacted programs to create racial balance, people opposed to integration showed fierce determination, and in most places neighborhood schools, which very often equaled racially homogenous schools, were supported with as much passion as Southern Whites had supported racially segregated schools (Franklin, 1980). The 1970s also saw the period of *White flight* where Caucasians abandoned the inner cities for the suburbs (Carson, 2003). When the political landscape began to shift in the late 1960s and early 1970s in cities such as Detroit,

Chicago, Cleveland, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia, White citizens and their tax dollars left these cities for the suburbs. As Whites in major northern cities migrated to the suburbs in the 1960s and 70s, poor Blacks and other people of color were left behind (Horton & Horton, 1997). As a result of this emigration the tax bases in the Black communities became too low to support quality schools (Kozol, 1991). So, while White, suburban children were provided with the best public education tax money could buy, inner cities struggled to provide basic instruction; as a result inner city schools suffered dilapidated facilities and lacked educational resources (Carson, 2003). This began a period of re-segregation, a topic that will be examined later.

School desegregation suffered a setback when in 1973 when the Supreme Court ordered Virginia to end its minority to majority program, a form of busing where minority inner city students were racially mixed with majority suburban students (Franklin, 1980). The school desegregation issue suffered a further setback in 1978 when the Supreme Court ruled in the case of *University of California Regents v. Bakke*. In the case of *University of California Regents v. Bakke* case, the Supreme Court ruled that it constituted reverse discrimination for the school to set aside a set number of places for admission for Black students. The Supreme Court found that the factor of race exclusively cannot be used to assure the admission of a guaranteed quota of African Americans to a public medical college in California (Carson, 2003).

During the 1980s and 1990s, most of the demographics of the United States' public schools included students of many races, but, in a surprising trend, more than 50 years after the United States Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*, many school children were increasingly separated according to race, particularly in the

inner cities. In some areas, schools that had been integrated many years previously were mostly Black or mostly White, a situation that some people call re-segregation (Gant-Britton, 2006). As large numbers of White and middle class Black families moved into the suburbs the tax base of many urban school districts declined. As a result, inner city schools often lacked adequate funding, which created obstacles to effective education.

In *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (1991) Jonathan Kozol outlines the differences in education between schools of middle class and affluent students schools that distinctly different racial makeup's based upon his observations of diverse classrooms in the public school systems of East St. Louis, Camden, Cincinnati, and Washington DC (Kozol, 1991). Kozol's observations are held in schools with both the highest and lowest per capita spending on students where per capita spending ranges from just over \$3,000 in Camden, New Jersey to a maximum expenditure of up to \$15,000 in Great Neck, Long Island (Kozol, 1991). In his visits to these areas, Kozol vividly describes the unsanitary, overcrowded, and very under staffed environments that don't have the basic textbooks and necessities required for teaching (Kozol., 1991). Kozol notes that there are huge amount of Hispanics and African Americans living in areas that have the smallest annual budgets, regardless of the increased tax rates on these individuals who live in poor areas within the school district (Kozol, 1991). Kozol further says that "racial segregation is still very apparent in the American educational system and this segregation is due in large part to inequalities that came from unequal distribution of monies collected through both property taxes and monies allocated by the State in an attempt to provide equality to the expenditures of schools" (Kozol, 1991, p.142).

In Kozol's following book, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, Kozol (2005) assails the inequality in education expenditures between metropolitan urban areas and upper middle class suburbs, and the system of property taxes on which a lot of school systems and states depend on for funding (Kozol, 2005). In *Shame of the Nation* Kozol refocuses on the large amount of segregation in urban schools coupled with his common theme of the inadequacy of education provided to poor and minorities children (Glazer, 2005). Kozol expresses outrage at inequities in expenditures, noting that in the 2002-03 school year New York City spent \$11,627 on the education of each individual student, while in Nassau County, the town of Manhasset spent \$22,311 per student, and Great Neck \$19,705 per student (Kozol, 2005). Kozol discovered that there are glaring differences in other metropolitan areas. Kozol (2005) notes that most funding for public education is locally based and he details how schools that are only a few miles apart offer very different levels of educational opportunities, for example, a primarily White school offers classes that are college prep while mostly African American school offers classes that are basically vocational training (Kozol, 2005).

From 1990 to today, schools have undergone tremendous change. A number of schools are experiencing large incidences of alcohol and drug use, violence, teen pregnancy, meager technological resources, inadequate school funding, the advent of high stakes tests and parental indifference (Carter, 2005). The dropout rate for African-American students continues to increase and many African-American students are academically deficient. African American students continue to fall behind in urban

schools and schools administrators are exhausting the strategies and programs needed to correct this situation.

Summary. The history of the struggle to teach African Americans in general and African American children in particular is one that is rarely discussed in the age of integrated schools because social and community activist have led the movement for full social equality in the United States (Madhubuti, 1994). Many Caucasians used violence to thwart the educational revolution that took place in this country (Carter, 2005). The changes in educational opportunities given to African Americans after years of social, political and educational inequality were astonishing and created an enormous amount of chaos in society (Franklin, 1980). After more than 50 years of legalized discrimination, the Supreme Court overturned the Plessy decision which mandated the immediately desegregation of all school systems but this mandate would not come to fruition until about 20 years later (Carter, 2005). African American students need concentrated and focused instruction in school because African American students are academically lagging behind their Caucasian counterparts unfortunately rather dealing directly with this issue many African American children are mislabeled as mentally retarded and assigned to special programs (Brookings Institution, 1998).

Today's African-American leaders continue to emphasize that the proper education of all children is the key to making progress towards narrowing the social and economic inequality gap that exist in the U.S. They point out that the achievement gap still remains between Caucasian and African American students. As a group, African-American students have higher dropout rates and lower scores on standardized tests than do Caucasian students. African-Americans also face challenges in family stability,

socioeconomics, and achieving higher education standards and these maladies are directly related to the achievement gap. The percentage of African-Americans who attend college is disproportionately lower than that of other Americans. Almost 13% of African-Americans seeking higher education are enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities; they are enrolled not traditional mainstream colleges and universities (Gant-Britton, 2007). In 2001 more than 1/5 of all bachelor's degrees awarded to Blacks were from historically Black colleges, however, in the past few decades even African-American enrollment at historically Black colleges has declined (Gant-Britton, 2007). Wynn (2007) states that although statistics may be shocking to the public at large, the statistics concerning the African American achievement gap has affected all African American males and their families (Wynn, 2007). The negative perceptions of society, negative interactions with police departments, negative peer pressures of friends and families who don't have and don't seek education, or involved in criminal activity has a negative effect on the lives of African American men (Wynn, 2007). The issue for America and particularly for African Americans is more than just narrowing the achievement gap; it is based on guaranteeing that later generations of African American are employed, are proper parents, and add to the economic well being of America (Wynn, 2007).

Fifty years since the *Brown v. Board of Education* court cases, the gaps in educational achievement between Caucasian and Hispanic and African American students continue to be large, and the differences among educational opportunities are steadily increasing, however, the idea of public high schools giving all youth an equal chance to get a high quality education continues to be heartfelt and thoughtful (Balfanz &

Legters, 2004). Citizens who don't have proper education will not be viable commodities in the labor market (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Although the United States must hire individuals educated overseas to fill many of its high-tech jobs, there is an increasing percentage of U.S. citizens that are very under qualified and forced to accept government assistance or who are incarcerated and this represents a strain on the United States' social and economy health rather than providing a positive addition to the country's health and welfare (Darling-Hammond, 2007).

The remaining portions of this literature review will examine what theorists conclude might be some successful strategies in curbing the African-American achievement gap and how some school systems have consistently been successful in reducing the achievement gap in comparison to national averages of school systems with a population of 10,000 students.

Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Studies

Most theorists agree that the reasons for the achievement gap are multifaceted, and according to research, they are principally categorized as: (a) causes that have to do with a student's social status and income, cultural surroundings, and family backgrounds; and (b) causes that have to do with where a student attends school (Jencks, 1998; Rothstein, 2004; Yeung & Conley, 2008). Most of the theorists researched also believe that poverty is also one of the core factors associated with low student achievement. Rothstein (2004) declares that children from more affluent backgrounds come to school with more skills and better prepared to achieve academic success than do students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Rothstein 2004).

Yeung & Conley's (2008) article entitled *Black-White Achievement Gap and Family Wealth* examines the extent to which family prosperity affects the Black-White test score gap for young children from ages 3-12 based on information provided by the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (Yeung & Conley, 2008). In opposition to some theorists, this study concluded that there is minimal evidence that income affects the achievement gap (Yeung & Conley, 2008). Yeung and Conley did find that socioeconomic had a larger connection to the cognitive ability of children in elementary school than that of preschoolers, and more a correlation with elementary school children and their reading scores rather than their math scores (Yeung & Conley, 2008). Further Yeung and Conley (2008) found that family wealth had a positive correlation with young student's school scores on test and that family there was a positive correlation between income and stable and productive home environment, improved parenting skills, and increased private school enrollment (Yeung & Conley, 2008).

Research supports that poverty stricken children are more likely to have conditions that impede their learning and that these conditions usually include poor health care, inadequate prenatal care, frequent transitions in living conditions, very little educational resources in the home, parents with very little education, and wavering family structures (Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Rothstein et al., 2008; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003).

Some researchers believe that cultural ideologies and racism may also have a major role in the achievement gap. Recent studies have proposed that some African American and Hispanic youth are of the mind set that the Caucasian culture perceives their skill set as sup par and therefore don't have high expectation of them (Ogbu, 2003).

Some researchers suggest that since some minority students believe that the dominant culture has a negative perception of them anyway, that there is no point in making an effort to be successful in school. A theory proposed by some researchers is that some African American students continue to perform at minimal academic levels to avoid being perceived as trying to emulate and assimilate into the Caucasian culture thus maintaining the approval of their African American friends (Ogbu, 2003). John McWhorter (2000), a professor of linguistics at the University of California, Berkeley, and Senior Fellow at the Manhattan Institute who extensively comments and writes on, cultural, ethnicity, and racial matters, comments on his personal upbringing and experiences. He said that the reports of black children being teased because they were smart is well documented and that this type of activity causes Black children to be disinterested in school at a very early age (McWhorter, 2000). Harvard sociologist Orlando Patterson, author of *Taking Culture Seriously: A Framework and an Afro American Illustration* (as cited in Huntington & Harrison, 2000), argues in a similar fashion that the explanation of the glaring racial gap and education performance cannot be attributed to genetic differences between the races, but rather to differences in social class and culture. Patterson (as cited in Huntington & Harrison, 2000) states it is the cultural beliefs and practices as well as cultural values can have significant outcomes on a child's success (Patterson as cited in Huntington & Harrison, 2000). Patterson further states that "family, teachers, and other sources of influence in the culture signal what is important to the growing child, and these messages have both short – and long-term impact" (p. 206).

The late John U. Ogbu (2003), former anthropology professor at the University of California at Berkeley and author of *Black American Students in an Affluent Suburb: A Study of Academic Disengagement* (2003), was a well-known figure in the field of anthropology and race and intelligence. Ogbu's research gave rise the phrase "acting White" in the mid 1980s to try explain why African American students might disregard behaviors linked with high achievement, such as striving for intellectual triumph, openly displaying academic prowess in front of their peer groups, and speaking standard grammatical English (Lee, 2002). Ogbu argues that the cultural attitudes of African-Americans themselves are the true detriment and that neglecting this issue has persisted for too long. Ogbu (2003) posits that it doesn't matter how schools are reformed, the problem of the achievement gap is not going to be solved and Ogbu reasons that this is a dual dilemma: society and schools is one dilemma and the African American community is the other (Ogbu, 2003).

Ogbu's findings are detailed in a study of African-American students in Shaker Heights, Ohio, a prosperous Cleveland suburb whose school district is divided equally between Caucasian and African American students (Ogbu, 2003). When professor Ogbu performed his research the Shaker Heights population was estimated at 30,000 citizens. (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003). Figures from the 1990 census estimate that about 32.6% of African American families and 58% of the Caucasian families had an average annual income of \$50,000 to over \$100,000 (Stupay, as cited in Ogbu, 2003). The Shaker Heights average family income varied from under the official poverty level of about 10% to millionaires with a median family income of an estimated \$66,000 (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003). The reputation of Shaker Heights residents was that of a highly educated,

middle and upper class community, where an estimated 61% of the residents over the age of 25 held at minimum a bachelor's degree, this is estimated at about three times the national average (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003). The residents of Shaker Heights also included many African American and Caucasian academics, professionals, and corporate executives. (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003).

Some researchers believe that the Shaker Heights school system was and still is one of the best in the nation. (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003). The shaker heights community is very proud of its excellence in education and this is demonstrated in its motto that says a community is known by the schools it keeps, in addition to high academic standards, the Shaker Heights school district has a lot very well organized extracurricular programs (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003). Estimation revealed that 85% of Shaker Heights high school graduates attended college and a large portion of those graduates attended some of the most elite colleges and universities in the U.S. (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003). Shaker Heights has more graduates that were national merit scholarship finalists or semifinalists than those from similar school districts (Ogbu, 2003). Due to the aforementioned, reasons people who were relatively affluent were drawn to reside in Shaker Heights and they were willing to pay the high taxes that the citizens of Shaker Heights voluntarily imposed in an effort to keep its superior standards of education (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003). Further, in the not so distant past, the Shaker Heights community had the largest school tax rate in Ohio as well as once having the largest school tax rate the United States (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003).

The Shaker Heights public school system recently spent \$10,000 a year per student (McWhorter, 2000). Rather than the teachers making decisions for the students,

students note their own individual progress into advanced courses. The Shaker Heights public school system offers a program where older African American students tutor younger African Americans in after-school tutorial sessions, in weekend tutorial sessions and in summer programs to assist students whose grades might be deficient (McWhorter, 2000). Students who are in need of assistance with English or Language Arts can receive that assistance as early as kindergarten; they can also receive special tutoring in the form of coaching sessions on standardized testing, additionally students who have high potentials but earn low grades can get assistance from counselors who specialize in this area (McWhorter, 2000). McWhorter stated that Shaker Heights is obviously so perfectly modified to helping minority students succeed that if one did know it was real one might suppose it was a fiction (McWhorter, 2000). Surprisingly, the African-American students in Shaker Heights, as is the case in a great number of racially integrated public school districts, have fallen behind their Caucasian counterparts in test scores, placement in high-level classes, and grade-point averages (McWhorter, 2000). In 1996-1997, African American students consisted of 50% of the student population, but in that year's graduating class they were 90% of the bottom fifth of their classes and only 7% of the top fifth also 84% of the students who did not master at least one part of the ninth grade proficiency test were African American (McWhorter, 2000; Ogbu, 2003). Because of these statistics, in 1997, Ogbu was asked by African-American parents to examine the district's 5,000 students to help solve what might be the reason for the persistent achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students (Singham, as cited in Ogbu, 2003).

Based upon his research his research Ogbu (2003) concluded that middle-class general the African American parents of the Shaker Heights community did not spend any additional time doing homework or monitoring their children's schooling than lower income Caucasian parents and professor Ogbu also noted that while African American students discussed in great lengths what strategies were warranted to get excellent grades and about their wishes to achieve them, many however rejected the effort needed to achieve that goal (Ogbu, 2003). Professor Ogbu notes that he was surprised that children who come from middle class families revert to urban hip-hop stars, who often times identify with poverty as a significant social standing, as role models and its those types of values that hinder today's generation of young people from achieving further progress (Ogbu, 2003).

Ogbu (2003) also makes several recommendations for communities and schools similar to those in Shaker Heights, Ohio, who aim to close the achievement gap:

1. To raise African-American students' performance and academic focus public schools should provide additional education programs use funds from business and local communities to create a comparable educational system;
2. Showcase people who have achieved academic success so that African American students build strong self-awareness, in turn, this may thwart the idea that to achieve is to be anti African American. Also encourage schools to incorporate multicultural point of views into the academic prospectus.
3. Schools need to consistently create strategies that assist parents in taking a more active role in the academic life of their children and to provide strategies that foster self-encouragement and a determination to succeed;

4. Students must assist one another to create better study skills and learning routines and to defend against negative peer pressure that does not promote learning. Also students must learn how to take courses that offer long term sustainable careers rather than short terms immediate jobs;
5. Teachers must be aware that the beliefs that they have about their students intellect and expectations has an effect on the student's own self awareness and as a result can cause students to develop positive or negative attitudes towards learning; and
6. Schools should provide parents with information on the academic prowess of their child including how students who take honors and Advanced Placement classes are tracked and how regular and remedial classroom placement students are tracked. It is also very important that parents assist teachers to monitor their children's academic development. (p. 6)

Ogbu's (2003) conclusions have gained popularity in educational circles and have been advocated by such renowned personalities as entertainer, educator, author, and philanthropist Dr. Bill Cosby, and Dr. Alvin F. Poussaint, who is a Professor of Psychiatry and Faculty Associate Dean for Student Affairs at Harvard Medical School and the director of the Media Center of the Judge Baker Children's Center in Boston (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007). Together, the two co-authored *Come On, People: On the Path from Victims to Victors* (2007), in which they surmise that in order to move forward in their lives African-American citizens need address the problems that they face by conquering their feelings of low self-esteem, fearfulness, and anger (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007). They argue that seeing themselves as victims hampers the efforts of the African-

American community (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007). McWhorter (2000) is in agreement with Cosby and Poussaint (2007) and Ogbu (2003) when he states that African American children do not seek academic success because to achieve is seen by some impoverished African American children as trying to assimilate in Caucasian culture and it is that misguided ideology that assimilation means not respecting African American culture that has become detrimental to African American children (McWhorter, 2000).

Although the Shaker Heights finding has its supporters, the study does not come without its detractors as well. In opposition to Ogbu's (2003) findings, Peggy Caldwell, who at the time of the Shaker Heights research was a spokesperson for the Shaker Heights City School District, said that minority families were deeply concerned about their children accomplishing academic success and that the Shaker Heights school district was assisting education specialists to limit the achievement gap and she also motioned that while Ogbu referred to many Shaker Heights residences as middle class, actually 10 to 12% are classified as poor (Lee, 2002). Ronald F. Ferguson (as cited in Lee, 2002), a senior research associate at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard who examined a more recent study of 40,000 high school and middle school students in 15 middle class school districts, as well as Shaker Heights, said, "When we asked if friends made fun of kids who do well in school, we don't find any racial difference in that" (p. 4). The Minority Student Achievement Network an organization that examines strategies that might be used to narrow the achievement gap between low performing and affluent students, performed the study, and concluded that African-American and Hispanic students perform as diligently and have as much concern about school as

Caucasian and Asian students do (Lee, 2002). Ferguson also pointed out that that while African American fall behind Caucasians in matters such as finishing their homework, it is incorrect to conclude that low income groups aren't concerned about academics (Lee, 2002). He states that the African American community should help African American children learn how to use good judgment and make common sense decisions such as not spending too much time playing video games and not enough time reading thereby encouraging more academic success (Ferguson, 2002).

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Ferguson (2002) recommends some reforms based on the research he performed and those reforms basically involve changing the attitudes, performance and behavior of classroom educators:

1. Teachers should not be of the mindset that there are differences in the academic performance levels of different ethnic groups. Teachers need to understand that no matter the ethnic groups all students are capable of performing at the same academic levels;
2. Where there are specific knowledge deficit problems, schools should respond to the specific problems of a particular group will also noting that some different racial groups respond differently to standardized testing;
3. Teachers need to customarily provide encouragement because students respond to and value it; and
4. Schools need to provide a variety of learning materials and expanded educational resources because impoverished students might have disadvantages due to their family's income inequality. (p.37)

In their conclusions Ferguson (2002) and Ogbu (2003) don't vary in their opinions of how schools can help African American students to be more scholarly and better learners; rather, they only vary in how the process should take place. Ferguson believes that teachers and schools systems should work to motivate students to become more academically successful by altering classroom habits and behaviors (Benitez, Davidson, & Flaxman, 2009). Ogbu (2003) believes that students will increase academic performance and become more involved in the educational process if they are encouraged to change some of their identity that reflect academic achievement by the use of caring teachers and nurturing schools (Benitez et al., 2009). The difference in perspective of the two theorists is important because Ogbu contends that African American and Hispanic students are not involved in the opportunities the United States has because they African-American and Hispanic minorities have chosen to relate to and accept their oppressed position in American society, furthermore, schools have to aggressively schools change the identity of minorities as outsiders (Benitez et al., 2009). In contrast Ferguson, believes that the educational system needs to implement some reforms that enhance African-American and Hispanic students' capability to have a strong desire for learning through academic support and he suggest that minorities will become successful when their self-concept and character improve (Benitez et al., 2009).

In 2003, William Darity Jr, an economist and Karolyn Tyson, a sociologist, both at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, conducted a one year and 6-month research study in 11 North Carolina schools (Carter, 2005). Their research discovered that African American and Caucasian students basically have the same mind-sets about academic success and that African American and Caucasian students equally wanted to

be successful in school and display higher levels of self-esteem when performing well in academic settings (Carter, 2005). The results of this study were published in a book by Stanford sociologist Prudence Carter entitled *Keepin' It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*, in which Carter argues that schools need to display a wider appreciation of the unique cultural styles and practices that African American and Hispanic students bring to the learning environment (Carter, 2005). Based upon a number of interviews and surveys of students in New York, it was shown that the school systems that were most successful with those that used a variety of multicultural strategies; they are usually culturally wise teenagers that use multiple customs and traditions, whether they be knowledge of pop culture, urban rap music or classical music, to attain social gains (Carter, 2005). Carter argues that African-American and Hispanic students acting White are for cultural purposes, not educational and Carter directly relates the phenomena of acting White to student disapproval of unsuccessfully organized schools that are not unaware of students' social, cultural, and material needs and unique differences (Carter, 2005). Carter further believes that those authenticities give educators important cultural insight into the part that cultural differences and uniqueness have in the achievement gap (Carter, 2005). A 2005 study titled *An Empirical Analysis of "Acting White"* by Fryer, Jr. and Torelli suggested that the occurrence of acting White and its negative academic impact on African American students has an important effect on the success of African American students especially schools with high interracial enrollments and among high academic achievers, but had little or no effect in schools that had mostly African American enrollments or parochial based schools (Fryer & Torelli, 2005).

The findings, conclusions, and opinions expressed by educational researchers have, to date, in no way closed the debate concerning the causes for the achievement gap. Different researchers have focused on other causes, such as sub standard schools, decreased teacher expectations, families that are extremely poor or some combination heretofore. This researcher believes that most educational analysts would agree that students who come from disadvantaged communities usually attend schools where dilapidated conditions are more the norm than the extreme. It is very likely very that poor and/or minority students will attend schools that are poorly funded, staffed with under qualified employees, and exposed to inadequate learning resources. In summation, in schools that have significant levels of poor and minority student enrollment, teachers usually have very little expectations of those students thus leaving the students to have very little expectations for themselves (Haycock, 2001; Ogbu, 2003; Rothstein, 2004).

Solutions for Narrowing the African-American Achievement Gap

While there tends to be some disagreement on the cause of the achievement gap, few can argue that a significant Black-White achievement gap exists, and researchers tend to agree regarding successful strategies that might be used to curb the gap. Some of the more common solutions examined by this researcher were curricular reform at the state and local levels, improved teacher training, updated facilities and resources, better understanding of cultural needs, and more parental involvement. Edmonds (1979) believes that the first step to closing the achievement gap is to start with an examination of the educational system itself. Edmonds states, "We know all we need to know to educate Black children whose education is of importance to us" (p. 43). Yet too many Black children find themselves at the lower in end of the educational competence

continuum. Reasons for this placement vary. Too often, when studying conditions in education, researchers examine the victims and not the institutions. Analyzing the motives of education, in addition to analyzing the clients, will give balance to a perplexing situation (Edmonds, 1979). Edmonds examined schools in which poor African American children were performing as well as children from higher social economic backgrounds (Edmonds, 1979). Edmonds research recognized three commonalities in schools where low income African American students were meeting the basic criteria, he discovered that all of the institutions had three distinct traits:(a) a principal who was a strong instructional leader, (b) an orderly school that is not strict or pretentious, and (c) a school where children are not allowed to fall below minimal levels and a school that promotes a climate of lofty expectation (Edmonds, 1979; Moody, as cited in Strickland & Cooper, 1987).

Mychal Wynn (2007) author of *Empowering African-American Males: A Guide to Increasing Black Male Achievement*, has similar theories regarding solutions that might be used to narrow the Black-White achievement gap. Wynn states that increasing the achievement of the African American males will call for a systematic and constant partnership between school stakeholders and the school community and Wynn emphasized that a varied array of stakeholders has be involved in the conversation of problems, the detection of solutions, and the acceptance of roles in applying strategies (Wynn, 2007). Wynn's strategies focus on sociological, communal, economic, and religious perspectives. Wynn states:

1. Parents must provide a home environment created with religious standards and academic expectations that promote academic, social, spiritual, and

physical development and parents must initiate the process of celebrating the success of their sons' academic progress. Fathers and mothers must accept responsibility for opening communication and building relationships with the influential adults in the lives of their sons, i.e., teachers, principals, coaches, pastors, and mentors. On a regular basis they must inquire about school, the application of something learned in school, and what their sons are planning to do with their lives after school;

2. Teachers must have an honest desire to ensure that African American males have many chances to obtain academic success in their classrooms and teachers should be ready and willing to better understand what the needs of parents are and what varied learning styles African American males may have;
3. Instructional coaches and guidance counselors should be able to make up for the deficiency of information that students and their family might have in regard to academic planning, successful school strategies, and how to prepare for postsecondary education;
4. Administrative leadership must be willing to support the causes of minority males populations in their schools and academic programs should encourage and expose African American males to variety of intellectual, personal, and creative development;
5. Site based-school personnel, in the form of front office staff, school resource officers, media center staff, and custodians, and others, must be willing to take

an active part in providing protection, encouragement, and the cultivation of African American males from elementary school through college; and

6. Local churches and other institutions of faith-based have to realize that they should provide for the needs of families and therefore should align their efforts with that of the local schools. (p. 8)

In similar fashion to Wynn's (2007) suggestions, the Educational Research Service (ERS), a nonprofit foundation serving the research and information needs of educators and the public, stated in an article entitled *What Can Schools Do to Reduce the Achievement Gap* (2001) that much of the strategies needed to lower the achievement gap is not in the power of local schools but is actually in the control of the federal government, the ERS cite attempts to narrow the income inequality gap as an example, but emphasize that there are reforms that schools implement do to increase the academic achievement for students from all demographics (Educational Research Service, 2001). According to the ERS, schools that are interested in educational reform efforts should be guided by the following research-based suggestions for narrowing the achievement gap:

1. Teachers should have high expectations for all students and teachers must be cognizant not to deliver a message that they have low expectations for underperforming students by providing them with less instructional attention.
2. Educators need to realign the curriculum so that the curriculum relates to what African American students might already know. When there is cultural similarity in instruction then academic achievement tends dramatically rise;

3. Teaching strategies that encourage significant participation, cooperative learning strategies, group activities and instructional strategies that accentuates the students' personal abilities and talents;
4. The incorporation of smaller learning communities because data has shown that low income students produce more positive results when their class sizes are smaller;
5. The need to retain highly skilled teachers because many researchers say that the most important caveat of success for low income students is to have quality teachers in every classroom; and
6. The need to create programs that enhance summer learning programs that function from a position that impoverished children loose academic skills learned during the school year thereby contributing to lower cumulative achievement over many years of schooling.(p. 26)

In a report entitled *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives Of High School Dropouts* (2006), a sequence of focus groups and a survey were conducted with youths who's ages ranged from 16-25 and who acknowledged that they were high school dropouts, these studies were conducted in 25 different areas of the United States and the sole the purpose of the research was to gain a better understanding the lives and circumstances of high school dropouts (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). The authors of the research, Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) state that while there are no easy resolutions to the dropout dilemma, there are obvious sustainable solution that can be provided in schools and in the home that would improve students' chances of not being a dropout and they also believe that while most students who dropout fault themselves for not

graduating, there are different strategies schools could have provided that could have helped them to graduate (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison make the following suggestions for school reforms needed to close the African-American male achievement gap and increase overall graduation rates:

- Revise the teaching curriculum to make school more meaningful and relevant to the work world and incorporate real-world learning experiences so that students can understand the connection between academic success and getting a good job.
- Create a school environment that provides improve instruction, higher quality teachers more, individualized instruction, smaller class sizes and more support for struggling students.
- Schools need to create climate that fosters academics and implement classroom discipline strategies where necessary so that students are protected from bullying and violence.
- Schools should make certain that students have a one adult in the school with which they have a trusting relationship; this could also include more parental involvement.
- Schools should increase the communication between parents, schools and the community. School should be in sustained contact with parents and community leaders so that parents and community leaders have a working knowledge of school activities. (p. 3)

Rothstein (2004) believes that the biggest obstacle to closing the achievement gap is income inequality and he notes that the government could do more to close the

achievement gap by narrowing the income inequality gap (Rothstein, 2004). Rothstein states that if the United States really want to narrow the academic achievement gap that exist between low income and middle class children, then supplementing the wages of low income parents can be a significant contributor, a promise to lower the unemployment rate of low income families would be very helpful to minority and low income groups who are disproportionately affected by recessions (Rothstein, 2004). Further Rothstein says that in recent years, poor families incomes have grown far less than middle and upper income families and as a result, more families earn far less incomes to provide economic security for their children and that narrowing the wide income gap between lower and middle class parents could be one of the most significant educational reforms that researcher should consider (Rothstein, 2004). A tremendous number families with children in the bottom of the income distribution, especially African American and Hispanic families, have salaries that are too minimal to sufficiently take care of children (Rothstein, 2004). Rothstein states that in the year 2000, at the end of the 1990s boom, 11 of every 100 Americans had incomes below the poverty threshold and this rate was unchanged from the poverty rate of 1973 (Rothstein, 2004). The racial differences in poverty rates has decreased as the poverty rate for African Americans has dropped from 31% in 1973 to 23% in the year 2000, while the poverty rate for Caucasians has gone up from 8% to 10% yet still leaves the African American poverty rate more than double that for Caucasians (Rothstein, 2004). In addition, Rothstein says that 33% of African American children under the age of six were classified as poor in the year 2000 as compared to 13% of young Caucasian children and according to researchers the official poverty line, about \$18,000 for family of four in

2001, sets too minimal a threshold to depict the income families needed to guarantee even the smallest level of stability (Rothstein, 2004). To solve the economic gap problem, Rothstein advocates a number of economic-centered reforms that the public sector should undertake. They include:

- Provide subsidized housing for lower class families with high mobility rates.

Rothstein believes that the government should enact a national wide housing standard dedicated to decreasing the transiency that poor and working families endure and this might assist in increasing test scores because low income families will be more stable thus their children will consistently attend the same schools.

- Public schools should implement school community clinics. Rothstein believes that a school - community clinic must include services that are common for middle class families to receive but not always accessible to low-income families. This will guarantee that poor children will perform better in school settings because healthier children will perform better on test and as such those schools might experience a jump in test scores.
- Create early childhood education programs. Rothstein believes that impoverished children should hear more stylish speech, discover a variety of new book, and experience stories read, told, and discussed in ways that are new and exciting and low- income should be challenged to think and talk about stories by considering counterfactuals and relations to other experiences.

- The implementation of after school programs that include structured after school activities that might include fine arts, sports, gender or religious based activities, and painting lessons because these types of extra-mural activities can add to academic aptitude of low income children.
- The implementation of summer programs for low income children that includes reading books, going camping, traveling, and visiting museums. (p. 137)

Rothstein understands that such endeavors would raise taxes among the U.S. citizenry but in response he says that if society chooses to maintain the huge differences in income inequality, it must also be prepared to accept the fact that there are large academic achievement differences between poor and middle income students (Rothstein, 2004). Rothstein says that narrowing the achievement gap will involve structural reforms in the economic and social institutions that are preparing children to learn and this change will require the use of very diverse methods, school can not be the only focus, further Rothstein believes that closing the achievement will be a costly but worthwhile endeavor (Rothstein, 2004). Eliminating the achievement gap requires eliminating the effects that the income inequality gap has on America's children and it requires getting rid of the false notion that only school reform will solve the problem, in conclusion society has to make difficult policy and economic decisions (Rothstein, 2004).

When examining the reforms needed to stem the achievement gap, Kati Haycock (2002), director of Education Trust, an advocacy group for young people and poor minority groups, and former executive vice president of the Children's Defense Fund, shares the same sentiments as McWhorter (2000), Ogbu (2003), and Rothstein (2004).

Haycock (2002) argues that lack of parental support and negative social influences can have devastating effect on the academic prowess of the poor, stating:

Before talking specifically about what schools can do, let me be clear up front that it would help if there were changes outside of schools, too: if parents spent more time with their children; if poverty didn't crush so many spirits; and if the broader culture didn't bombard young people with so many ultimately destructive messages. (p. 7)

Haycock's (2002) reforms focus on initiatives that should be instituted first at the state level. They include the following:

1. State level government's needs to implement well defined standards for what students should learn and those expectations should serve as a benchmark at ever grade level and should serving as a learning guide so that administrators, teachers, parents, and students are familiar with those expectation;
2. The state establishment curriculum that is challenging and associated with those aforementioned standards;
3. Provide extra academic help for students who are not mastering content. Programs should be in place for students who need more assistance and individualized instruction;
4. Highly qualified teachers who are very proficient in their subject matters and pedagogies, Haycock finds that the most unqualified teachers are usually placed in the poorest schools;
5. Clear and measurable standards that align the skills and knowledge of high school students with the skills necessary to succeed in college;
6. Create a college prep curriculum that is standard for all students;

7. Stop the hiring of uncertified or under qualified teacher and vehemently screen teacher applicants so that highly skilled educators are placed in low-income schools, not just in middle class environments; and
8. Provide better support for teachers that might allow teacher to increase their skill set through work shops, professional development courses and summer seminars. (p. 8)

In school that have a population of a 90% minority enrollment, Haycock found that only half of the math and science teachers in those locations were qualified to teach in their subjects, in comparison, this was about 30% less than in schools that have a mostly Caucasian population (Haycock, 2002). In dealing with resource inequity, Haycock emphasizes that throwing money at the problem is not the only solution, but Haycock notes that the distribution of resource in some states is so unbalanced and without merit that it is difficult to phantom how to eliminate the gap in academic achievement without closing the inequities in the funding gap because the two are so closely related (Haycock, 2002).

In 2006 Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) released a report entitled *The Silent Epidemic: Perspectives of High School Dropouts* designed to more clearly comprehend the lives and circumstances of the nearly 33% of the nations' public high school students, and 50% of African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans, who each year become high school dropouts. The researchers discovered the ideas and opinions of teachers and administrators were missing from the discussion of why students dropout of school. For a clearer perspective in relationship to the concerns of educators and what might be needed close to the achievement gap, Bridgeland, DiIulio, and

Morison conducted focus groups and nationally representative surveys researched in large metropolitan areas, suburbs and small towns with schools that had a high amount of low-achieving and high dropout rate students, high school teachers who work with low-income students, principals, superintendents and school board members throughout the United States (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Balfanz, 2009).

In a 2009 report by Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Balfanz (2009) entitled *On The Frontlines Of Schools: A Perspective Of Teachers And Principals On The High School Drop Out Problem*, the researchers noted the suggestions of educators thought were necessary to improve graduation rates, including the following:

1. Create alternative learning environments, smaller classes and schools, more hands-on learning that connects the classroom to real-world experiences, stronger early warning systems, and more parental and mentor involvement because 61% of teachers and 72% of principals thought at least some improvements such as these were needed in high schools;
2. Give students who are in jeopardy of becoming a dropout a more diversity and a wider array of teaching and learning styles might create increased success rates. More than 7 of ten teachers and 7 of 10 principals were in agreement that differentiated teaching and learning styles might help to reduce the dropout rate;
3. Reduce the size of classes. 3 of 4 teachers and more than half of principals surveyed were in favor of reduced class sizes. The three most important indicators used to predict dropouts are: absenteeism, behavioral problems, and course failure; and

4. Focus on attendance problems. 8 of 10 sixth graders, who attended schools only 20% of the time, did not graduate within 1 extra year of their anticipated graduation date. Not surprisingly, these students also exhibited conduct problems and trouble in mastering basic math and science courses. (p. 3)

Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Balfanz (2009) further noted that school officials and administration also saw a need for connecting school curriculums to opportunities that might exist in the work place, especially through service-learning, with 68% of principals and 70% of teachers stating that linking classroom learning to real-world opportunities would lower the number of dropouts, in addition, 60% of teachers and 67% of principals supported more hands-on, project-based learning to make school more relevant to students' lives (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Balfanz, 2009). Due to the importance educators placed on parental involvement in a student's education, it's not surprising that 63% of teachers and 51% of principals strongly endorsed increasing parental outreach initiatives (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Balfanz, 2009). Bridgeland, DiIulio and Balfanz state that recent studies have shown that parents holding high expectations of their children are associated with enhanced academic achievement. Moreover, the researchers outline one study indicating that a parent's involvement in a student's education is exceptionally valuable, as schools would have to increase their per pupil spending by just \$1,000 to get the advantages that an involved parent provides (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Balfanz, 2009).

School officials, teachers, and administrators were also in favor of other reforms to reduce dropout rates. 61% of teachers and 58% of principals surveyed strongly favored more access to college-level learning opportunities to address the dropout problem, in addition, 41% of teachers and 50% of principals surveyed also strongly favored creating

a state to state required that students remain in school until age of 18 and schools should provide the necessary support for students who are struggling to help deter them from dropping out of school (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Balfanz, 2009). Further this researcher finds that states have began to require that students are mandated stay in school until they are 18 years old (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Balfanz, 2009). A huge majority of educators don't believe that eliminating would decrease drop out rates in fact, about 3 of 4 teachers and just fewer than 8 of 10 principals thought that eliminating graduation test requirements would make no difference (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Balfanz, 2009).

The previously mentioned Robert Balfanz, who has worked as a research scientist at the Center for Social Organization of Schools at Johns Hopkins University and as associate director of the Talent Development Middle and High School Project, concentrated his efforts on turning research findings into effective reforms for low-income high schools. Professor Balfanz has worked with over 50 low-income high schools to institute a broad range of comprehensive reforms (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). His work, along with co-author Nettie Legters, includes *Locating the Dropout Crisis: Which High Schools Produce the Nation's Dropouts? Where Are They Located? Who Attends Them?* (2004), identifies the numbers and locations of high schools with high dropout rates (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). In reference to efforts needed to close the achievement gap, Balfanz and Legters believe that educators already know how to reforms low-performing, poverty ridden schools, they believe that prototypes and models of success already exist so they believe that the difficulty lies in developing the capacity, knowledge, and the fortitude to institute those reforms (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). According to Balfanz and Legters, the most important issue that society needs to

recognize is that wide sweeping reforms are necessary and will require society to have strict determination to meet these demands and school reformers must be ready to tackle more than one issue at a time and at various levels (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Balfanz and Legters call for increased personalization and student outreach, high standards of academic achievement, instructional programs that are specifically designed to have to narrow the achievement gap, qualified teacher training, teacher support programs that includes offsite training, resources and professional development class teacher, school programs that teach students lessons that are related to real world activities, and increased and sustained relationships between high schools, colleges and employers that might ease the transition from high school to college to the world of work for low-income students (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

In similar fashion to Haycock (2002) and Rothstein (2004) in the call for more federal funding, Balfanz and Legters (2004) note that in an effort to equally distributed the financial resources needed to reform high schools, Title I funds could be used to increase the budget of schools that have a high dropout rate because there is a correlation between schools that do not promote students on a consistent basis and high poverty schools, Title I funding could be used to build funding equity (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). Balfanz and Legters further state that schools that get the additional funding must put into practice demonstrated reforms needed to implement marked improvements in teaching pedagogy and learning activities and states and school districts will need to commit to hiring qualified teachers and commit to enhanced school resources for both teachers and students (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

Although they propose a number of different measures for closing the achievement gap, Balfanz and Legters (2004) believe that no one strategy will suffice, a combination of strategies is probably more beneficial and each to school district and location has to be considered on an individual basis and Balfanz and Legters further state school reform must be implemented in a pragmatic fashion (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). An example of these reforms might include creating smaller high schools, middle schools that serve as a dual purposes or that combine middle and high school facilities, high schools converted into converted small learning communities with a common teaching staff, faculty and administration that equally serves all the schools (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

In a different analysis on causes of the African-American achievement gap and the strategies that might be needed to close them, Jawanza Kunjufu, author and educational consultant, asserts that gender affects learning styles and may play a major role in contributing to educational disparities. Kunjufu (2005) says that in a lot of Americans schools, African-American males do not receive a conventional education, in comparison to their Caucasian counterparts, because they consistently receive disciplinary punishment and are then placed in special education classes (Kunjufu, 2005). Kunjufu believes that the greatest reason why there is an unusually high number of African-American males in special education classes and disciplinary retention programs is because school systems are not doing enough to prepare for the difference in learning styles that African American males have and one of the reasons for this problem is that there are a disproportionately high number of Caucasian women that teach elementary

school and Kunjufu sees a correlation that says that young Caucasian girls are least likely be placed to special education (Kunjufu, 2005).

He views the placing of African-American males in special education classes as a result of the cultural misunderstanding between Caucasian female teachers and African-American male students (Kunjufu, 2005). To create a more balanced learning environment for African-American males, Kunjufu says that teachers should modify their techniques for the specific learning differences that are related to gender and since educators know that girls have a faster maturity rate than boys, it will be more beneficial to put males in single- gender classrooms (Kunjufu, 2005). Kunjufu also says that further adjustments for the education of African-American males could include allowing for more mobility in the classroom, creating shorter lesson plans, and allowing African-American males to take part in physical education classes on a regular basis (Kunjufu, 2005).

To make up for the differences in gender verbal skills Kunjufu (2005) suggests that if educators are aware that girls are more verbal than boys, educators should know that males will not communicate as quickly as females therefore males should not be expected to participate in such classes that require reading, language arts or some sort of verbal expression at an early age (Kunjufu, 2005). Because learning patterns based on gender are so apparent, countries such as Belgium, Germany, and Switzerland either hold off the enrollment of their young males into schools until approximately 6 or 7 years of age, or they completely separate males and females while they are in school (Kunjufu, 2005). To date, the United States has very few single- gender schools (Kunjufu, 2005).

Kunjufu (2005) does see promise as it relates to how schools are reacting to accountability pressures from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act that was reauthorization 2004, for example, a school in Maryland created a process of pre-referral so that teachers can't suggest that child be placed in special education unless a 6-week pre-intervention process of mainstreaming strategies has been attempted and as a result, Kunjufu says that the Maryland school has seen African-American boys in special education reduced to 68% (Kunjufu, 2005). Gender-based classes have been instituted in school systems in Georgia, California, New York, and Maryland and since they are in the experimental stage, data on their success are currently not wide spread. Gender-based classes have been instituted in school systems in Georgia, California, New York, and Maryland. Since they are in the experimental stage, to date, data on their success is unavailable.

Noted Successes in Curbing the African-American Achievement Gap

Although the possibility of closing the Black-White male achievement gap looks bleak, school systems have had successes in narrowing the gap. A 2004 report by the Schott Foundation for Public Education showed that African-American boys in the Baltimore County school district obtained the highest rate of graduation among school districts that enroll large populations of African American students and report the praised Baltimore County for having graduated 80% of African-American males in 2004, almost equal to number of their Caucasian males who had an 81% graduation rate, the study also gave high accolades to Maryland's Montgomery and Prince George's counties (Holzman, 2004). A more recent report released by the Schott Foundation concluded that the Baltimore Maryland school district still ranks among the highest in the nation in

graduating African-American males (Schott Foundation, 2008). The estimated graduation rates for the 2005-2006 school year shows that in Baltimore County, with a population of Black males at 21,444, an estimated 72% graduated with their cohort compared to 79% Whites males, a difference of 6%. Montgomery County, with an estimated enrollment of 16,266 Black males, graduated an estimated 69% Black males as opposed to 87% White males, a 17% gap. Prince George's County, with an enrollment of 51,845 Black males graduated and estimated 59% Black males as opposed to 58% White males, a gap of -2% (Schott Foundation, 2008). Some educational researchers who have examined the graduation rates of African-American and Hispanic students say that the success of these counties has more to do with the fact that their demographics comprise affluent middle-class neighborhoods rather than any specific reforms that they've implemented (Kay, 2006). According to the Schott Foundation, a 2004 study of Montgomery and Prince George's counties resulted in graduation rates that were just below those of Baltimore County and when considered together, the three school districts accounted for the nation's third-largest population of African American male students, yet the 2004 graduation rate of these students barely differed from that of Caucasian males on nationwide scale (Holzman, 2004).

Educational scholar Christopher Swanson, director of the Editorial Projects in Education Research Center and co-author of numerous papers on minority graduation rates with the Harvard University-based Civil Rights Project, stated, "What is going right probably doesn't have a whole lot to do with the schools. Prince George's, Montgomery and Baltimore counties all have been on the receiving end of Black middle-class flight" (as cited in Pinkus, 2006, p. 1). Swanson believes that the African-American populations

of Prince George's County and Baltimore Maryland region's are middle class neighborhoods and because they're middle class neighborhoods students do not suffer the same maladies as students from impoverished neighborhoods and he alludes to the fact that less than 50% of the students in the three Maryland school districts qualify for free or reduced lunch, oftentimes used as a measurement of poverty (Pinkus, 2006).

Impoverished districts, such as Cincinnati, are ranked as having some of the lowest graduation rates for African American males where many children are considered impoverished (Pinkus, 2006). With respect to the graduation rates of African-American males Balfanz and Legters (2004) state that graduating high school is expected for students who are from affluent neighborhoods but it does not mean that children from poverty-stricken areas are not destined to graduate, for example, Baltimore City's elite magnet schools enroll a lot of students from poor neighborhoods who do meet the graduation requirements and who go on to become very successful (Balfanz & Legters, 2004).

It is quite evident that the Maryland area school districts have been successful in curbing the Black-White achievement gap, but the Schott Foundation's (2008) report entitled *Given Half a Chance: The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* highlights 10 school districts with populations of 10,000 or more African-American males that have been successful in curbing the Black-White achievement gap.

The other best performing large districts are:

- Fort Bend, Texas, with a population of 10,851 Black males, 82% of whom were expected to graduate as opposed to 85% White males, a gap of 3%;

- Newark, New Jersey, with a population of 12,630 Black males, 60% of whom were expected to graduate as opposed to 73% White males, a gap of 13%;
- Gwinnett County, Georgia, with a population of 18,379 Black males, 58% of whom were expected to graduates opposed to 64% White males a gap of 6%;
- Cobb County, Georgia, with a population of 15,998 Black males, 57% of whom were expected to graduate with their cohort as opposed to 70% White males, a gap of 16%;
- East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana, with a population of 19,776 Black males, 57%, of whom were expected to graduate with their courts as opposed to 63% White males, a gap of 7%;
- Cumberland County, North Carolina, with a population of 13,619 Black males, 56% of whom were expected to graduate with their cohort as opposed to 76% White males, a gap of 21%; and
- Guilford County, North Carolina, with a population of 15,687 Black males, 56% of whom were expected to graduate with their cohort as opposed to 76% White males, a gap of 21%. (p. 11)

Notably, the Schott Foundation (2008) reported that of districts serving student population of 10,000 or more, two local Georgia school districts, Cobb County public schools and Gwinnett County Public Schools, ranked sixth and seventh nationally in closing the Black-White male achievement gap.

The outlined data in *Given Half a Chance* (Schott Foundation, 2008) substantiate what some of the literature has stated previously: graduation rates are more of a reflection of the quality of education that is available to students rather than students' capabilities

(The Schott Foundation, 2008). The study reiterates the theme that African Americans do not perform well because they are not given access to adequate resources, that the living conditions of African Americans are not very different from other ethnicities throughout the country (The Schott Foundation, 2008). *Given Half a Chance* also corroborates that the failure of African-American males to perform successfully on standardized achievement test and continue to have consistently low graduation rates reflect the differences in the quality of the opportunities available to them, not differences in their particularly abilities (The Schott Foundation, 2008). When African-American males are enrolled in schools that have the majority Caucasian and Asian population those African-American males tend to fare much better academically and are graduation rates tend to increase consequently when Caucasian males and Asian males are and enrolled in schools that have a majority African-American population those Caucasian and Asian populations do not do well academically and their graduation rates tend to be consistently lower (Schott Foundation, 2008). The Schott Foundation surmises that it is not the fact that African-American students gain academic prowess by being in classrooms that have Caucasian and Asian majorities rather it is the fact that schools that have Caucasian and Asian majority populations tend to have better learning resources and more qualified teachers (The Schott Foundation, 2008).

Gwinnett and Cobb County Public Schools

In relationship to this research, the Schott Foundation (2008) reported that although Georgia ranked 41 out of 50 nationwide in relation to state graduation rates for African-Americans males with enrolled populations of 10,000 or more, two local Georgia school districts, Gwinnett and Cobb County have made significant strides over the past

few years in closing the achievement gap in comparison to state wide results. At the time of this research, Gwinnett County Public Schools (GCPS), located in the metro Atlanta area, is the largest school system in Georgia and GCPS projects that they will continue to enroll over 1,000 new students each year (Gwinnett County public Schools, 2011). Currently GCPS serves over 158,000 students in the metro Atlanta area. The GCPS district enrolled approximately 1,600 new students for the 2008-2009 school year. Currently the district's student demographics are 34.8% White, 28.0% African-American, 22.1% Hispanic, 10.6% Asian American, 4.4% Multiracial, and 0.1% American Indian. In 2007-2008, Black male students in GCPS graduated at rates higher than the national average (Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2008). The benchmark for graduation rates of male Black students for school districts enrolling more than 10,000 male Black students is 75% (Newark, New Jersey). As graduation rates for White male students were lower than the national average, although higher than the state average, the achievement gap was much narrower than that of most other districts (Schott Foundation, 2008). In fact, a 3-year comparison of graduation rates for GCPS shows that from years 2006-2007 to 2008-2009 GCPS has continuously increased the rate of graduation for African-American males in comparison to state averages and has consistently narrowed the Black-White graduation gap (see Tables 1, 2, & 3). GCPS also ranks sixth nationally in closing the Black-White male achievement gap of districts that serve a student population of 10,000 or more, with an enrollment of 18,379 Black males, 58% graduated in 2005-2006 compared to 64% White males, a difference of 6% (Georgia Department of Education, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Table 1

Gwinnett County Graduation Rates of White Males vs. Black Males: 2005-2006

Location	Black Male Population Enrollment	Black Male Graduation Rate	White Male Graduation Rate	Gap
USA	4.2 million	47%	75%	28%
Georgia	316,342	40%	58%	18%
Gwinnett County	20,312	58%	64%	6%

Note. Adapted from *Table 1. Public School Student Membership, By Grade and State or Jurisdiction: School Year 2009–10*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/snf200910/tables/table_01.asp. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Table 2

Gwinnett County Graduation Rates of White males vs. Black Males: 2007-2008

Location	Black Male Population Enrollment	Black Male Graduation Rate	White Male Graduation Rate	Gap
USA	4.2 million	47%	78%	31%
Georgia	316,342	43%	62%	19%
Gwinnett County	20,312	58%	66%	8%

Note. Adapted from *Table 1. Public School Student Membership, By Grade and State or Jurisdiction: School Year 2009–10*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/snf200910/tables/table_01.asp. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Table 3

Three-Year Comparison of Graduation Rates for Gwinnett County Public Schools

Year and Ethnicity	System	State	Increase/Decrease
2006-07			
White	85.5%	77.5%	
Black	68.5%	65.5%	+3%
Hispanic	53.4%	63.3%	
Asian	84.1%	86.2%	
2007-08			
Whites	87.3%	80.2%	
Black	72.4%	69.2%	+3.2%
Hispanic	60.9%	65.5%	
Asians	84.8%	88.7%	
2008-2009			
Whites	82.7%	83.7%	
Black	76.9%	74.1%	+2.8%
Hispanic	65.9%	72.0%	
Asian	90.1%	90.0%	

Note. Adapted from *Georgia Graduation Rates by Counties*, by the Georgia Department of Education, 2009, retrieved from <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/ReportingFW.aspx?PageReq=102&CountyId=667&T=1&FY=2009>. Copyright 2009 by the author.

The Cobb County School District (CCSD) is the second largest school district in the state of Georgia and has the task of educating more than 106,000 diverse students in an ever changing metro suburban community (Cobb County School District, 2009). At the time of this research The CCSD had a total number of 114 schools and an enrollment population of 106,000 students (Cobb County School District, 2009). At present, CCSD's student demographics are 46.2% White, 30.6% African-American, 14.4% Hispanic, 4.7% Asian, 3.9% multiracial, and 0.2% American Indian. African American male students in CCSD graduated at higher rates in 2007/8 than the national average, as they had in 2005/6 and as graduation rates for Caucasian males were a little lower than national average the achievement gap was narrower than that of most other districts, coincidentally the graduation rate benchmark for African American male students for school districts that have enrollments of more than 10,000 African American male students is 75% (The Schott Foundation, 2008). A three year comparison of graduation rates for CCSD also shows that from years 2006-07 to 2008-09 CCSD has continuously increased the rate of graduation for African-American males in comparison to state averages and has also consistently narrowed the Black-White graduation gap (see Tables 4, 5, & 6; Georgia Department of Education, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Table 4

Cobb County Graduation Rates of White Males vs. Black Males: 2005-2006

Location	Black Male Population Enrollment	Black Male Graduation Rate	White Male Graduation Rate	Gap
USA	4.2 million	47%	75%	31%
Georgia	316,342	40%	58%	18%
Cobb County	16,216	57%	73%	26%

Note. Adapted from *Table 1. Public School Student Membership, By Grade and State or Jurisdiction: School Year 2009–10*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/snf200910/tables/table_01.asp. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Table 5

Cobb County Graduation Rates of White Males vs. Black Males: 2007-2008

Location	Black Male Population Enrollment	Black Male Graduation Rate	White Male Graduation Rate	Gap
USA	4.2 million	47%	78%	31%
Georgia	316,342	43%	62%	19%
Cobb County	16,216	51%	73%	22%

Note. Adapted from *Table 1. Public School Student Membership, By Grade and State or Jurisdiction: School Year 2009–10*, by the National Center for Education Statistics, 2010, retrieved from http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2011/snf200910/tables/table_01.asp. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Table 6

Three-Year Comparison of Graduation Rates for Cobb County Public Schools

Year and Ethnicity	System	State	Increase/Decrease
2006-07			
White	82.2%	77.5%	
Black	70.3%	65.5%	+ 4.8%
Hispanic	60.5%	69.3%	
Asian	91.4%	86.2%	
2007-08			
White	89.8%	80.2%	
Black	77.0%	69.2%	+ 7.8%
Hispanic	67.5%	65.5%	
Asian	91.4%	86.2%	
2008-09			
White	90.8%	82.7%	
Black	79.9%	74.1%	+ 5.8%
Hispanic	72.1%	71.0%	
Asian	96.2%	91.0%	

Note. Adapted from *Georgia Graduation Rates by Counties*, by the Georgia Department of Education, 2009, retrieved from <http://www.doe.k12.ga.us/ReportingFW.aspx?PageReq=102&CountyId=667&T=1&FY=2009>. Copyright 2009 by the author.

The Schott Foundation (2008) states that the variables that separate high-performing schools from low-performing schools in any particular state are not some surprising nor are they difficult to discern (The Schott Foundation, 2008). They state that high performance schools usually exhibit the characteristics of qualified teachers and staff that is supportive and well-trained, an administrative staff that has particular interest in their students personal and academic well-being and updated and well maintained educational resources; in addition, schools that exhibit consistent high performance have high expectations for their students and consistently institute a challenging curriculum for all students, in contrast, impoverished schools (where majority African American enrollments can be found) have inadequate resources and the expectations for success are not very high (Schott Foundation, 2008).

A review of GCPS and CCSD 2009 accomplishments lends additional evidence to this assertion:

- One hundred eight Gwinnett schools (99.1%) made “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) based on test scores and participation;
- All Gwinnett elementary and middle schools made AYP in 2009. Two Gwinnett schools made AYP in 2009 after not making AYP in 2008.
- Three Gwinnett schools moved off the needs improvement list, having made AYP for 2 consecutive years;
- Three GCPS schools will offer choice and or supplemental services during the 2009-10 school year;
- Five CCSD schools have been named 2009 Georgia Schools of Excellence by the Georgia Department of Education;

- For the second consecutive year, CCSD had the highest number of Schools of Excellence from any school district in the state; and
- CCSD schools have received 50 Georgia School of Excellence designations since the program's inception, including 15 in the past 3 years (Cobb County School District, n.d., p.1).

Although GCPS and CCSD have shown promise in narrowing the achievement gap, the districts have not lacked their share of challenges:

- In 2006-07 GCPS's African American male student population was assigned to out-of school suspension was equivalent to 12% of that assigned to GCPS's non-Latino White male student population, in contrast; the percentage of out-of-school suspensions assigned to GCPS's White male student population was equal to approximately 4%;
- In 2006-7 GCPS's Non-Latino White male students were enrolled in Gifted and or Talented programs at more than three times the rate for non-Latino Black male students and Non-Latino Black male students were categorized as having Mental Retardation at a rate much larger rate than White male students;
- In 2006-07 GCPS's African American male population were allowed to participate in Mathematics and Science Advanced Placement courses at a rate approximately 25% that of non-Latino White male students;
- In 2006-07 CCSD's Black male students number of out-of-school suspensions was equivalent to 19% of the CCSD's non-Latino White male population and

the percentage of out-of-school suspensions given to White male students in CCSD was approximately 6%;

- In 2006-07 CCSD's African American male population participated in Mathematics and Science Advanced Placement courses at a rate between 20% and 33% that of non-Latino White male students; and
- In 2007-08 CCSD's Black male student population graduated at higher rates than the national average, as they did in 2005-06 and as graduation rates for White male students were somewhat lower than the national average, the achievement gap was smaller than it was for many other districts (Holzman, 2006, p. 32).

The GCPS website boasts that Gwinnett County citizens highly value the significant function that education has in creating a thriving, global community and Gwinnett County citizens' greatly support the school system's pursuit of excellence and that the most qualified teachers in the profession, committed parents, and a community that is very supportive are fundamental elements in the district's mission to become a system of first-rate schools (Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2011). CCSD boasts that its mission is "to provide an academically rigorous, caring and safe educational environment in partnership with families, students and the community" (Cobb County School District, n.d., para. 3). Their vision is that "all children will receive the respect, encouragement and opportunities they need to build the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful, contributing members of a global society" (Cobb County School District, n.d., para. 4). While it is obvious that the GCPS and CCSD have had levels of success narrowing the African-American achievement gap, questions remains as to what specific

strategies these school systems used to narrow the achievement gap and what strategies other school systems may be able to adapt.

Summary

This literature review has sought to examine the educational reform movement initiated by Bush administration that has given rise to the current fervor over the African-American achievement gap. The literature review also examined the social, economic, and historical impact of educational institutions in relationship to African-American people, including but not limited to their history of racial inequality. The literature review examined what theorists perceived might be some reasons why the achievement gap continues to occur and what might be some strategies that can be used to narrow the gap. This literature highlighted data released by the Schott Foundation (2008) indicating that two schools systems in Georgia were successful in narrowing the achievement gap over the past few years: GCPS and CCSD. Although these school systems have narrowed the achievement gap it is unclear what methods were used to do so.

Few will argue that the one of the most important issues in modern American education is the achievement gap. If the African-American male continues to suffer from high dropout rates and inadequate education then we can expect that as a result African-Americans males will continue to suffer from high rates of imprisonment high unemployment minimal college graduation rates and family backgrounds that continue to be transient and stable (Sen, 2006). Studies indicate that minority students are far more likely than non-minority students come from low socioeconomic families. Studies of the income inequality gap also show that the national poverty rate for African Americans, Hispanics, and American Indians is three times that of Caucasians (U.S. Census Bureau,

2003). In the past, the difference poverty rates between Caucasians and African Americans, Hispanics and Native Americans have been even larger; further, there are more Hispanics, Native Americans, and African Americans living in poverty than Caucasians, regardless of the fact that Caucasians comprise an estimated total of 74% of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). These trends will not only have a devastating effect on the African-American and Hispanic and Native American communities; it will have a devastating effect on American as a whole. Each child that fails to receive an adequate education can have a significant cost to taxpayers because the uneducated are likely to require some sort of monetary government subsidy. Every child should have equal access to education.

The achievement gap has existed for quite some time, and now is the time to close it. Noting and eliminating the differences in student achievement and creating an increased sense of awareness of the achievement gap will help society to find solutions and closing the achievement gap will not be easy but finding solutions to narrowing the gap is necessary not only for particular groups of people but for the nation as a whole (Rothstein, 2004).

CHAPTER 3: Methodology

Restatement of Problem and Purpose

One of the most pressing problems faced by educators in metropolitan communities today is the African-American male academic achievement gap, to which numerous factors contribute. Research on the achievement gap points out that the areas that have the greatest impact African-American academic performance are: schools, family backgrounds, and structural factors (Haycock, 2001). These areas suggest several interventions that there might be multiple strategies that might be used to narrow or closing the gap, including: smaller class sizes, faculty and staff cultural sensitivity, teacher quality and support, attendance in preschool and Head Start programs, and continued efforts of desegregation (Haycock, 2001). Thernstrom & Thernstrom (2003) state that if America wants to closing the gap then we must improve school facilities and we must demand that teachers are highly qualified (Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003). Educators who have studied the achievement gap realize that although some school systems have had varying levels of success, the achievement gap remains prevalent in many metropolitan schools and further investigation might provide more varied strategies that could serve as a catalyst in narrowing the gap.

The purpose of this study were to examine the perceptions of eight public high school administrators in GCPS and CCSD that had successfully narrowed the achievement gap for high school African-American males as to:

1. Why the academic achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States;

2. What successful strategies they credit for narrowing the academic achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and;
3. What additional strategies they might consider to continuously curb the academic achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools.

Restatement of Research Questions

The following research questions were the basis of this study:

1. What strategies have been implemented by principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools to successfully close the achievement gap for low income African-American students?
2. What additional strategies, if any, might principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools consider implementing in their continuing efforts to close the African-American achievement gap?
3. What are the perceptions of Gwinnett and Cobb County high school administrators who are successfully closing the achievement gap in their respective schools regarding how to narrow the achievement gap for high school African-American males in metropolitan districts in the United States?

Methodology/Design of the Study

This was a qualitative research study. The history of qualitative research in education in the United States is rooted in early American sociology and anthropology (Bogdan & Bilken, 2003). Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) state that “qualitative methods may be most simply and parsimoniously defined as the techniques associated with gathering, analysis, and interpretation, and presentation of narrative information” (p. 6).

Leedy & Ormrod (2005) note that “there are five types of qualitative research studies: case study, ethnography, phenomenological, grounded theory study, and content analysis” (p. 134). Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) say that “qualitative research has become well known in educational circles in recent years, as much for its naturalistic approach to research questions and techniques as for the implications of its alternative paradigm structure” (p. 106). Creswell (2006) states that “qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems in inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 37). Creswell further advises that “to study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (p. 37). In beginning the qualitative research process Creswell advises researchers that “the qualitative research design process begins with philosophical assumptions that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study” (p. 15). Creswell says that researchers should also:

bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or sets of beliefs to the research project, which informs the conduct and writing of the qualitative study and that qualitative research is usually conducted out of a need to study a subgroup of the population, to identify variables that can then be measured, and hear silenced voices. (p. 15)

The study of the African-American achievement gap fits this lens perfectly.

The eight subjects studied in this research were local-level high school administrators who were directly involved in creating curriculum and evaluating outcomes of high school students in GCPS and CCSD. The data instrument used was an open-ended questionnaire that examined common themes related to narrowing the achievement gap and the data collection process involved recording responses for

commonalities and perspectives related to strategies that might be used to further close the achievement gap.

For this research study, the researcher chose open-ended semi-structured interviews. In relation to open-ended qualitative interviews, Rubin and Rubin (2005) state that “qualitative interviews are conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion, further, the researcher elicits in-depth details about the research topic by following up on answers given by the interviewee during the discussion” (p. 4). Creswell (2006) says: that “interviews in a qualitative study are rarely as structured as the interviews conducted in a quantitative study. Instead, they are either open-ended or semi-structured, in the latter case revolving around a few central questions” (p. 38). Creswell further states:

Unstructured interviews are more flexible and more likely to yield information for which the researcher had not planned; their primary disadvantage is that the researcher obtains different information from different people and may not be able to make comparisons among the interviewees. (p. 38)

Rubin & Rubin (2005) note:

The advantage of this type of research is that unlike survey research, in which the exact same questions are asked to each individual, in qualitative interviews each conversation is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share. (p. 4)

Qualitative interviewing reflects the basic philosophy of qualitative research – to discover what others feel and think about their world without imposing one's own personal worldview and biases (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). As a research tool, the qualitative interview allows researchers to understand how others make meaning of their life experiences. This researcher believes that the qualitative semi-structured interview was the most appropriate data collection method for this research study because the purpose

was to discover how the participants made meaning of their experiences in relationship to narrowing achievement gap for African-American males.

The interview questions selected for the study were collected from the body of research work of theorists and researchers who have extensively studied the achievement gap and offered suggestions as to how the gap may be further narrowed. Open-ended interview questions and prompts were used because they invited interviewees to examine strategies from the local-central, state, and federal levels. Creswell (2006) recommends that for any single interview, the number questions should be limited to a small number of questions or prompts, perhaps five to seven (Creswell, 2006). He further notes that the researcher will not necessarily need to ask every question explicitly, as the questions to some may emerge while the participant is responding to others (Creswell, 2006). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) state that “ideally, interview questions should encourage people to talk about a topic without hinting that they give a particular answer; in other words, researchers should avoid asking leading questions” (p. 147). Shank says that “a question such as what is going on now, what is it like to work here and what’s a typical day like can stimulate an informative conversations without suggesting that one kind of response is somehow more desirable than another” (Shank as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p. 147). Based on these recommendations, the researcher will ask ten open-ended questions related to narrowing the achievement gap based on the findings of theorists and researchers discussed in the literature review. The researcher will use prompts to elicit additional response where necessary.

Subjects

This study was conducted in the state of Georgia in the GCPS and CCSD. These schools systems were chosen because they ranked sixth and seventh, respectively, over the last 3 years among school systems with enrollments of 10,000 African-American males or more who have been consistently successful in narrowing the African-American male achievement gap (Schott Foundation, 2008).

GCPS is the largest public school in the state of Georgia, with a 2010-11 school year projected enrollment of approximately 161,744 students. The most recent student demographics as of May 2010 describe the following ethnic breakdown of the student population: 32.8% White, 27.9% African-American, 24.7% Hispanic, 10.3% Asian-American, 3.9% multi-racial, and 0.4% Native American. The percentage of students qualifying for free/reduced lunch for the 2009-10 school year equaled 52.37%. In the area of student performance, 8,500 students graduated from GCPS schools in 2009-10; 1,890 of those were honor graduates and 90% of those graduates are planning to attend college/postsecondary schools. In the 2009-10 school year, 74% of seniors took the SAT, and the district SAT average was 1532. The number of Advanced Placement courses taken by 2009-10 seniors was 11,304. The total scholarship amount earned by the class of 2010 was more than \$105.3 million, this does not include the HOPE Scholarship (Gwinnett County Public Schools, 2011).

Table 7

Gwinnett County Graduation Rates 2006-2010

School Year	African-American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Caucasian	All Students
2010-11	80.10%	91.00%	75.70%	89.40%	87.40%
2009-10	76.90%	90.10%	69.50%	88.60%	82.00%
2008-09	72.40%	84.80%	60.90%	87.30%	79.10%
2007-08	69.40%	84.10%	53.40%	85.90%	77.30%
2006-07	64.90%	80.50%	49.90%	82.10%	73.80%

Note. Adapted from *2009-2010 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*, by the Georgia Department of Education, 2010, retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2010/second.asp?SchoolID=667-0000-b-1-0-0-0-0-0-8-0-0>. Copyright 2010 by the author.

As of March 2011 the CCSD is the second largest public school in the state of Georgia with a total enrollment of 106,719 students and as of March 2011. The student demographics for the CCSD were as follows: 44.5% White, 31.2% African-American, 16.5% Hispanic, 4.8% Asian-American, 2.7% multi-racial, and 0.1% Native American (Cobb County School District, 2011). The following are a list of the accomplishments that are highlighted by the CCSD:

- In the 2009-10 school years, the percentage of students that qualified for free/reduced lunch equaled 43% (Cobb County School District, 2011). District wide: 91% of Cobb schools made Annual Yearly Progress in the 2010 school year and CCSD was named to the College Board Advanced Placement Achievement List.
- In 2009-10 the CCSD ACT scores' increased for the sixth year in a row (22.2 average composite score), and that Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores improved for third, fifth and seventh grades, these results were above national averages (Cobb County School District, 2011).

- The CCSD senior class of 2010 outperformed students in comparison to their state and national peers on the SAT test for college readiness, had an overall average SAT score of 1523 in Reading, Math, and Writing), beating the state average by 70 points and the national average by 14 points and 50% Cobb high schools that took the SAT had combined totals higher than the national average of 1509, further six schools of the 14 showed improvements over 2009 scores (Cobb County School District, 2011).
- CCDS had two seniors that scored a perfect 2400 on the SAT and Seventy-five Cobb students were asked to take part in the Georgia's Governor's Honors Program. 40 awards were given in Academics, 26 awards were given in the Fine Arts and 9 awards were given in Career Technology.
- *Atlanta* magazine wrote many feature articles in its 2011 "Best High Schools" feature section touting such programs as Science, Math, Sports, and Fine Arts, programs the the magazine considers the best in such categories (Cobb County School District, 2011).
- The Georgia Department of Education honored 34 Cobb County schools for improved performance on the Georgia High School Graduation Test (GHS GT) and on the Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT)
- One noted CCSD high school achieved the largest gain in SAT scores with an average of 1655, this equaled a 15-point increase from last year

and an 81-point improvement over 2008 scores (Cobb County School District, 2011).

- A total of 5,098 Cobb students voluntarily took the SAT in 2010, and this was just under three-fourths of the entire graduating class, a one percent increase over 2009, but still well below historical participation rates (see Table 8).
- Since 2006, Cobb has seen SAT participation has decreased from 77% to 67% but during that same period, CCSD students taking the ACT has increased by the same percentage from 27% to 37%, reflecting the fact that CCDS students view the ACT as opposed to the SAT as a more accurate barometer of college readiness.
- The CCSD improved scores on 5th, 8th, and 11th grade writing tests, earning top state averages at all levels, and 15 CCDS seniors were awarded the National Merit and National Achievement scholarships.
- 141 U.S. Presidential Scholars were issued nationally, only 4 were awarded in Georgia, and two of those were awarded the CCSD.
- Thirteen Cobb high schools rank among the nation's top challenging schools (Matthews, 2011).
- In 2010, CCDS schools received two U.S. Presidential Scholars, only 4 others were issued in Georgia and only 141 were awarded nationally (Cobb County School District, 2011).

Table 8

Cobb County Graduation Rates 2006-2010

School Year	African-American	Asian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Caucasian	All Students
2010-11	81.90%	94.00%	79.00%	91.60%	87.30%
2009-10	79.90%	96.20%	72.20%	90.89%	86.00%
2008-09	77.00%	94.30%	67.50%	89.80%	84.20%
2007-08	70.30%	90.10%	60.50%	88.20%	81.30%
2006-07	72.80%	89.70%	56.50%	87.60%	81.50%

Note. Adapted from 2009-2010 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), by the Georgia Department of Education, 2010, retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2010/second.asp?SchoolID=667-0000-b-1-0-0-0-0-0-8-0-0>. Copyright 2010 by the author.

The researcher interviewed eight principals from the previously aforementioned local school districts, four principals from each district. The following criteria were utilized to select subjects to participate in the study:

- Individuals were selected if they were serving as a public high school principal in GCPS or CCSD and if their schools had exhibited continued success in improving graduation rates over or beyond a 3 year period as identified by district level administration, i.e., district administrator in charge of student assessment records. Improvement was indicated by any percent of increase.
- Eight total principals, four from each respective district, of schools in GCPS and CCSD where African-Americans comprised at least 10% of the entire high school population.
- Principals with at least 3 years of experience within the district or at their current high school site.
- Principals with a valid administrative credential.

Human Subjects Considerations

Letters of permission to conduct the study (Appendix A) were sent to the Superintendents of the schools districts where the selected schools were located for district approval of principals to participate in the interview process. Once district approval was received and university IRB approval was granted, designated principals were contacted via an introductory letter (Appendix B), and a follow up phone call (Appendix C) provided them with an overview of the study and determined their interest in participating in the study. Those principals that indicated an interest in participating in the study were mailed an informed consent form with a cover letter (Appendix D). In accordance with Pepperdine University requirements, the researcher gave participants a letter (Appendix B) meeting the requirements for the written statement regarding the research, as well as the informed consent form (Appendix D) to the participants requesting their participation in this study. The researcher thoroughly discussed the letter of informed consent with each participant via telephone call. Subjects who agreed to participate were instructed to return the consent forms to the researcher via a self-addressed stamped envelope provided by the researcher. The researcher also took time during the phone call to determine the proper time and a suitable location for scheduling the interview.

The subjects were exposed to minimal risks, if any. Potential risks might have included fatigue, boredom, anxiety, and inconvenience of time. In an effort to minimize these potential risks, the researcher limited the number of questions to a reasonable number and provided the subjects with the questions in advance of the scheduled interview. Creswell (2006) states that in theory interviews can be conducted anywhere

that people are willing to talk, but the researcher will have more success if interviews are conducted in a quiet place where interviewees are unlikely to be distracted or interrupted. For this reason, the interviews were conducted in a comfortable location that was mutually agreed upon by the subject and researcher and that provided an environment in which the interview could be conducted without distractions and interruptions. The interview process was estimated to last for approximately 45 minutes. The interviewee was asked a series of open-ended questions and responses were digitally recorded for accuracy. The researcher listened to and digitally recorded the experiences of site level administrators who dealt directly with creating curriculum and strategies designed to narrow the African-American achievement gap and to improve graduation rates for African-American males. Listening is most important qualitative interviewing technique because the researcher must effectively listen in order to hear the meaning of what is being said (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

In an effort to establish and maintain rapport, the researcher began the conversation with small talk to break the ice. The researcher was courteous and respectful at all times and showed genuine interest in what each subject had to say. In an effort to reduce boredom, the researcher tried to always sense when the conversation was drifting in an unproductive direction and gently guided it back on course. In an effort not to coerce or offend, the researcher let interviewees choose their own way of expressing their thoughts and the researcher recorded responses verbatim.

The researcher kept his reactions to himself and did not show surprise or disapproval of anything that had been said. Once the study was completed, the researcher provided the subject with copies of the interview transcripts to review for accuracy. The

researcher also offered to provide an abstract copy of the completed research report to subjects who were interested. If requested the researcher provided, by mail or electronic database, access to a copy of the dissertation in its entirety or only the abstract.

After completion of the interviews, recorded responses were transcribed into a written document, which was available only to the researcher. All individual responses were consolidated for reporting purposes only in open-ended response form. In describing school and subject identity, schools and subjects were known only to the researcher and their identities were protected and kept confidential in manuscript. Each school was assigned a research number and or a letter known only to the researcher. Interview notes were stored in a secure location in the researcher's home and will be shredded 3 years after the conclusion of the study when the information is no longer deemed needed.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation used for this study was an open ended semi-structured interview. The interview protocol used for this research study consisted of 10 interview questions. The use of open-ended interview questions served to collect perceptions regarding specific practices that contributed to sustained success in narrowing the achievement gap in their schools. The interview protocol (Appendix E) that was used during the interviews was based on the review of the literature on the causes and consequences of African-American achievement gap in Chapter 2 of this manuscript.

The literature revealed three constant themes regarding reasons for the achievement gap between Black and White students in metropolitan areas: socioeconomic status; negative cultural environment and or family background; and a

lack of adequate resources, qualified teachers, and comprehensive curriculum in schools. An examination of Table 9 reveals that 8 of the 14 theorists or theorist teams believe that socio-economic status plays a direct role in the achievement gap between Black and White students. Five of the 14 theorists believe that negative culture environment and or family background have a direct impact on the achievement gap, and 5 of the 14 theorists believe that the lack of adequate resources, qualified teachers, and comprehensive curriculum in schools have led to the continuation of the achievement gap .

Table 9

Reasons for Achievement Gap between African-American and Caucasian Students in Metropolitan Areas

Theorist(s)	Theme 1: Social/Economic Status	Theme 2: Negative Cultural Environment and/ or Family Background	Theme 3: Schools (lack of adequate resources, underqualified teachers, and poor curriculum)
Bridgeland et al., 2006		Lack of mentors in school and little parental involvement	Improve teaching by curricula relate to students needs
Carter, 2005			Ineffectually organized schools
Cosby & Poussaint, 2007	Feelings of low self esteem, anger, and victimhood have hampered the efforts of African-Americans.		
Ferguson, 2002			Poorly trained teachers have increased the African-American achievement gap
Fryer & Torelli, 2005	Low socioeconomics have led to poor learning resources for African-American students		Schools in low socioeconomic areas lack resources to teach African-American students

(table continues)

Theorist(s)	Theme 1: Social/Economic Status	Theme 2: Negative Cultural Environment and/ or Family Background	Theme 3: Schools (lack of adequate resources, underqualified teachers, and poor curriculum)
Haycock, 2001	Low socioeconomics have led to poor learning resources for African-American students		Poorly trained teachers have increased the African-American achievement gap.
Jencks & Phillips, 1998	Income inequality directly affects test score results.		
McWhorter, 2000		Negative self esteem from family and community enables low achievement for African-American males	
Ogbu, 2003		African-American students may maintain low levels of achievement to avoid the “acting White” stereotype.	
Patterson (as cited in Huntington & Harrison, 2000)		Negative cultural beliefs and practices affect academic performance.	
Rothstein, 2004	Low socioeconomics have led to poor learning resources for African-American students.		
Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003	Increased funding at site level for social programs		
Wynn, 2007	Increased funding at site level for social programs	Lack of mentors in school and little parental involvement.	
Yeung and & Conley, 2008	Family wealth has a strong association with cognitive achievement.		

An examination of the literature review, found several basic themes related to suggested practices that might be implemented in public high schools in metropolitan areas to close the achievement gap. These included:

1. The use of resources family resources, including income, in ways that strengthens capacity for successful parenting;
2. The avoidance of isolating children into racial group is schools that serve only students similar to themselves;
3. Narrow the income inequality gap;
4. Provide students with competent and compassionate and concerned teachers who have the desire to teach and are motivated as well;
5. Help students cope with social forces that might distort their judgment and support young people's efforts to cooperate and behave in ways that enabled themselves and others to learn;
6. Increase funding at the federal and state levels for programs that provide more resources for disadvantaged schools;
7. Increase early childhood learning environments to equip children of social, emotional, and cognitive skills that support kindergarten readiness; and
8. Connect children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community (see Appendix F).

Of all the suggestions made by theorists, only Kunjufu (2005) suggested that African-American males in particular be isolated in gender-based classes in order to improve their graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap. Also, every theorist except Kunjufu

(2005) and Wynn (2007) argued for some use of federal, state, and local taxes to create programs and curricula to close the income inequality gap.

Research Questions and Corresponding Interview Questions

Research question 1 asked, What strategies have been implemented by principals of GCPS and CCSD Georgia high schools to successfully close the achievement gap for low income African-American students? The following interview question and prompts were related to this research question:

1. What specific programs or strategies, instructional or otherwise, have been instituted at your school in an effort to narrow the African-American achievement gap and to increase graduation rates for African-American males?

Prompts: What programs or strategies have been most successful and why? What programs are strategies have been least successful and why? What role might school administrators and teachers play in the process?

This interview question and these prompts connected to the following themes found in the literature review (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006; Edmonds, 1979; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003; Wynn, 2007):

- Connecting children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community.
- Avoiding isolating children into racial groups that serve only students similar to themselves;
- Providing students with competent, compassionate, concerned, and motivated teachers.

Research question 2 asked, What additional strategies, if any, might principals of GCPS and CCSD Georgia high schools consider implementing in their continuing efforts to close the African-American achievement gap? The following interview questions and prompts were related to this research question:

2. What might be some further extracurricular or community-based strategies undertaken by teachers, administrators, and or districts that can be used to narrow the African-American achievement gap?

Prompts: What are your thoughts about connecting children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community? How might students be helped to cope with social forces to help them behave in ways that enable learning?

3. Based upon your overall experience in managing a school that has consistently narrowed the achievement gap and increased the graduation rates of African-American males for the past three 3 years, what might be some further strategies undertaken by middle and elementary schools?

Prompt: If yes, where and what were the results of any of these strategies?

These interview questions and prompts connected to the following themes found in the literature review (Ferguson, 2002; Haycock, 2002; Kunjufu, 2005; Rothstein, 2004; Ogbu, 2003; Wynn, 2007):

- Connecting children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community.
- Helping students cope with social forces that might distort their judgment.

- Supporting young people's efforts to cooperate and behave in ways that enabled themselves and others to learn.
- Utilizing intervention strategies in elementary and middle grades to detect and deter students who may need tracking or early intervention assistance

Research question 3 asked, What are the perceptions of GCPS and CCSD Georgia high school administrators who are successfully closing the achievement gap in their respective schools regarding how to narrow the achievement gap for high school African-American males in metropolitan districts in the United States? The following interview questions and prompts were related to this research question:

4. What programs have been instituted by the state, that you are aware of, that are specific to narrowing the African-American achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males?

Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

5. How might the federal government assist school districts with populations of over 10,000 or more African-American male enrollment in narrowing the achievement gap?

Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

6. What are your perceptions of increasing federal funds in an effort to increase educational funding for programs that are directly designed to close the African-American achievement gap, i.e. health clinics located directly inside of schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in urban areas

as well as after-school summer tutorial programs, summer enrichment programs that include trips to museums, and or parenting classes that teach parents how to assist their children or children with homework?

Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

These interview questions and prompts connected to the following themes found in the literature review (Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison, 2006; Edmonds, 1979; Ferguson, 2002; Haycock, 2002; Jencks & Phillips, 1998; Ogbu, 2003; Rothstein, 2004; Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003):

- Promoting some use of federal, state, and local taxes to create programs and curricula that close the income inequality gap.
- Increasing funding at the federal and state levels for programs that provide more resources for disadvantaged schools.
- Increasing early childhood learning environments to equip children with social, emotional, and cognitive skills that support kindergarten readiness

Interview Procedures

The method of data collection for this research was semi-structured interviews. Leedy & Ormrod (2005) cite “Interviews in a qualitative study are rarely as structured as interviews in a quantitative study” (p. 137). An interview, in a qualitative study, is “essentially a vocal questionnaire” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 267). Silverman (as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) states:

Interviews can yield a great deal of facts and the researcher can ask question related to: facts (e.g., biographical information), peoples’ beliefs about the facts, feelings, motives, present and past behaviors, standards for behaviors (i.e., what people think should be done in certain situations), and conscious reasons for

actions and feelings (e.g., why people think that engaging in a particular behavior is desirable or undesirable). (p. 138)

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principals at schools with who have narrowed the achievement gap for African-American males over the past 3 years with a school district enrollment population of 10,000 or more. In order to collect qualitative data, the researcher requested approval to collect data for the proposed study from the school districts as well as from Pepperdine University. Once permission was granted, the researcher contacted prospective principals by letter (Appendix B), and conducted a follow up phone call (Appendix C) to advise them of the topic and purpose of the study and to ask for their participation; prospective participants also received a copy of the informed consent (Appendix D), which addressed the procedures for the study, potential risks, benefits, voluntary participation, and provided the required contact information. If a prospective principal accepted the invitation to participate in the study, the researcher scheduled a time for the interview and reviewed the informed consent with them. Participants were asked to return the informed consent prior to the interview. A copy of the interview questions (Appendix E) was sent to participants prior to the scheduled interview time to allow time for them to consider their answers and get input from key staff members.

Interviews were conducted in person, unless otherwise requested, and digitally recorded for accuracy. The digital recordings were later transcribed into text documents for analysis. All participants were asked the same questions (Appendix E). At the beginning of the interview, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the interview, the reasons their school was selected, the interview questions, human subject considerations,

and answered any questions the participants had. The researcher introduced the data instrument with a restatement of the purpose:

The purpose of this interview is to explore your perceptions regarding your school's practices that have successfully contributed to sustained success in narrowing the achievement gap for African-American males. During this interview, I would like you to think about the specific practices implemented at your school that helped your school and what might be some further strategies that might assist other schools in this endeavor.

After each question and subject response, the researcher prompted additional response if the subject's response does not touch upon the common themes from the literature. For example, in response to question one, if the subject did not mention the segregation of students as a possible cause of the academic achievement gap, the researcher then inquired about the subject's beliefs regarding segregation of students and whether or not they perceive segregation as contributing to the academic achievement of African-American males.

During the interview, follow-up questions were asked, as needed, for further clarification. Interview notes were recorded on a digital recording device and the researcher took personal notes on a note pad during the interview. Once the interview data were collected, participants' responses were analyzed for common themes within each of the research questions. Interview data and themes were reviewed by a professional colleague with expertise on school reform to prevent researcher bias and increase research credibility. A follow up thank you letter (Appendix G) that summarizes the key findings was sent to participants following the interviews in order to allow participants the opportunity to confirm the findings.

Data instrument questions. Based upon the research questions and corresponding literature review, six qualitative interview questions were generated:

1. What specific programs or strategies, instructional or otherwise, have been instituted at your school in an effort to narrow the African-American achievement gap and to increase graduation rates for African-American males i.e. climate? Prompts: What programs or strategies have been most successful and why? What programs or strategies have been least successful and why? What role might school administrators and teachers play in the process? Jencks and Philips (1998), Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003), and Wynn (2007) suggest that it is important to connect children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing the community. Bridgeland et al. (2006) and Wynn (2007) state that in order to narrow the achievement gap it is important to avoid isolating children into racial groups in schools that serve only students similar to themselves. Edmonds (1979) states that it is necessary to provide students with competent, compassionate, concerned, and motivated teachers.
2. What might be some further extracurricular or community-based strategies undertaken by teachers, administrators, and or districts that can be used to narrow the African-American achievement gap? Prompts: What are your thoughts about connecting children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community? How might students be helped to cope with social forces to help them behave in ways that enable learning? Ferguson (2002), Haycock (2002), Ogbu (2003), Rothstein (2004), and Wynn (2007) all state that it is important to connect children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community. Ferguson (2002),

Ogbu (2003), and Wynn (2007) believe that students might be better served if they could get assistance from educators and community leaders who might help them deal with negative forces that might impede their judgment and cause them to act in inappropriate ways thereby affecting their ability to be more scholarly citizens and narrow the achievement gap.

3. Based upon your overall experience in managing a school that has consistently narrowed the achievement gap and increased the graduation rates of African-American males for the past 3 years, what might be some further strategies undertaken by middle and elementary schools? Prompt: If yes, where and what were the results of any of these strategies? Haycock (2002) and Rothstein (2004) state that the use of family resources, including income, in ways that strengthen the capacity for successful parenting could help to narrow the achievement gap.
4. What programs have been instituted by the state that you are aware of, are specific to narrowing the African-American achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results? Haycock (2002), Kunjufu (2005), Ogbu (2003), and Rothstein (2004) state that an increase in funding at the federal and state levels for programs that are designed to provide more resources for disadvantaged communities could be a successful strategy to narrow the achievement gap.
5. How might the federal government help school districts with populations of over 10,000 or more African-American male enrollment narrow the

achievement gap? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results? Haycock (2002), Kunjufu (2005), Ogbu (2003), and Rothstein (2004) state that an increase in funding at the federal and state levels for programs that are designed to provide more resources for disadvantaged communities could be a successful strategy to narrow the achievement gap.

6. What are your perceptions of increasing federal funds in an effort to increase educational funding for programs that are directly designed to close the African-American achievement gap, i.e. health clinics located directly inside schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in urban areas as well as after-school summer tutorial programs, summer enrichment programs that include trips to museums, and or parenting classes that teach parents how to assist their children or children with homework? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results? Rothstein (2004) states that the use of federal funds to implement social programs (i.e. health care clinics in schools) could be used to narrow the income inequality and the achievement gap.

Conducting the interview. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher shared that he was about to start the recording device. The researcher then started recording and formally introduced himself and began with the following questions:

1. How long have you been employed or directly involved in the field of education and in your district?

2. How long have you been a principal or administrator in your current district that has direct knowledge concerning strategies that were implemented to improve graduation rates or narrow the African-American achievement gap?
3. What percent of the students at your current high school are African-American males?
4. To what degree (percent), if at all, has your graduation rate increased for African-American male students at your high school over the recent 2 or 3 year period and beyond?

After the introductory questions, the researcher asked each of the phenomenological questions with necessary aforementioned prompts:

1. What specific programs or strategies, instructional or otherwise, have been instituted at your school in an effort to narrow the African-American achievement gap and to increase graduation rates for African-American males i.e. climate? Prompts: What programs or strategies have been most successful and why? What programs are strategies have been a successful and why? What role might school administrators and teachers play in the process?
2. What might be some further extracurricular or community-based strategies undertaken by teachers, administrators, and or districts that can be used to narrow the African-American achievement gap? Prompts: What are your thoughts about connecting children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community? How might students be helped to cope with social forces to help them behave in ways that enable learning?

3. Based upon your overall experience in managing a school that has consistently narrowed the achievement gap and increased the graduation rates of African-American males for the past 3 years, what might be some further strategies undertaken by middle and elementary schools? Prompt: If yes, where and what were the results of any of these strategies?
4. What programs have been instituted by the state, that you are aware of, that are specific to narrowing the African-American achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?
5. How might the federal government assist school districts with populations of over 10,000 or more African-American male enrollment in narrowing the achievement gap? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?
6. What are your perceptions of increasing federal funds in an effort to increase educational funding for programs that are directly designed to close the African-American achievement gap, i.e. health clinics located directly inside schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in urban areas as well as after-school summer tutorial programs, summer enrichment programs that include trips to museums, and or parenting classes that teach parents how to assist their children or children with homework? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

The researcher concluded the interviews by thanking participants and explaining that once completed, the researcher would send them a copy of their respective transcripts to review for accuracy and representativeness. The researcher also offered to provide each participant with study findings when available.

Validity of instrument content. Once the interview protocol was developed, the researcher contacted experts for feedback. The criteria for selecting experts were based on the following:

- Experts were expected to hold at least a doctorate in the field of education.
- Experts were expected to have at least 5 years in the field of education with at least 3 years of classroom teaching experience.
- Experts were expected to have knowledge of the African-American achievement gap, curriculum strategies to increase graduation rates for African-American males, methods of educational testing, and or cultural proficiency awareness.

The researcher provided the experts with an overview of the study, background related to the construction of the interview instrument, and copies of the interview instrument. The researcher asked that they review the instrument and suggest any changes or additions to ensure that the interview instrument was clear, unbiased, grounded in the research literature, aligned with the study questions, and constructed in a manner that was meaningful and easily understood by subjects. Experts were asked to record their recommendations and or suggestions directly on the prototype instrument that was provided. Once this was done the researcher reviewed and discussed their

feedback with the dissertation chair and then make any changes to instrument as appropriate.

Results of instrument validation. Four experts were chosen to validate the data instrument. The first expert chosen to validate the data instrument was Dr. O. This expert has been in the field of education for over 17 years, holds a doctorate degree in educational leadership, and is an assistant principal of testing and instruction in a metro Atlanta school system. Dr. O. suggested that the data instrument consistently use the term “African-American males” when discussing the achievement gap. Dr. O. also suggested that it might be necessary to re-word questions six using the phrase “federal funds” rather than “federal income tax” when noting efforts to increase educational funding for programs that are directly designed to narrow the achievement gap for African-American males by the Federal government. This expert also stated that rephrasing “federal income taxes” to “federal funds” might elicit more biased responses and may politically divide the respondents’ answers. Finally, Dr. O. suggested that the researcher change the examples portion in questions six, suggesting that the researcher eliminate the wording “health clinics located directly inside of schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in it in urban areas.” Dr. O. stated that these examples were not related to the achievement gap. Upon consultation with the researchers dissertation chair it was decided that the researcher would adjust the data research instrument to include the phrasing “African-American male achievement gap” consistently throughout the data instrument. The researcher also changed the phrase in question six from “federal income taxes” to “federal funds” but the examples of “health clinics in urban areas...” was included because the researcher and dissertation

chairperson believe that the phrase denotes a theoretical assertion found in the literature review. Instead, the researcher, with the support of the dissertation chair, decided to include other additional in question six, namely:

such as health clinics located directly inside of schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in urban areas as well as after-school summer tutorial programs, summer enrichment programs that include trips to museums, and or parenting classes that teach parents how to assist their children or children with homework.

The next expert chosen to validate the instrument was Dr. C, who has a doctorate degree in educational leadership, over 15 years of educational experience inside of the classroom as well as in education consulting, and currently serves as a graduation specialist in a local metro Atlanta school system. Dr. C advised that the questions concerning the African-American male achievement gap were “too specific.” This expert thought that the questions were not open-ended as the person perceived a qualitative interview using grounded theory should be. Upon further advice and consultation with the researcher’s dissertation chairperson, the researcher decided not to change any of the questions based upon this expert’s recommendation.

The third expert chosen to validate the instrument was Dr. S. This expert holds a doctorate degree in educational leadership, has over 30 years of classroom experience, has experience as a department head and school administrator, and currently works as a testing coordinator for the University of Princeton. The most salient aspect of this expert’s recommendation was related to question two. The expert thought that the words “social forces” needed to be explained. Upon consultation with the dissertation chairperson, the researcher decided that the term “social forces” was an acceptable term and would not need modifying or explanation unless requested by the research subjects.

The final expert chosen to validate the instrument was Dr. W. This expert holds a doctorate degree in organizational change. This expert has over 25 years as a teacher-trainer and educational consultant. Currently this expert serves as a graduation/intervention counselor and high school curriculum advisor in a metro Atlanta area school system. Dr. W deemed no areas of the qualitative interview instrument in need of changing.

Pilot Study

A pilot of the interview questions was conducted with two principals at local high schools in the metro Atlanta area that have populations of African-American males of 10,000 or more. The principals of the schools were given copies of the data instrument before the interviews were conducted. The specific purposes of pilot testing were: (a) to ensure that subjects would respond in accordance with instructions; (b) to uncover and decide how to handle unanticipated problems; and (c) to learn how to use and to check the adequacy of equipment, if necessary (Cone & Foster, 2006). In order to fine tune the pilot study, the researcher asked subjects to give feedback on the data instrument. The researcher asked subjects as to whether or not the instructions were clear, what difficulties they had, if any, following the instructions, whether or not anything about the environment was distracting or could be improved, and whether or not anything about the researcher's performance or behavior interfered with their ability to complete the task. The pilot subjects were asked to provide verbal and or written feedback on ways the researcher might potentially improve the instrument and interview procedures. The researcher observed the subjects as they completed these procedures. On the basis of the first participant's feedback and the researcher's observations, the researcher made

appropriate changes and ran the pilot with the next subject. At the end of the second pilot the researcher asked for feedback and kept a journal of the procedures until the researcher was satisfied that the qualitative research would run smoothly. The researcher kept written notes used in training for future replication of this protocol. At the end of the pilot interview, the researcher thanked each principal for participating and contributing to the study.

The most salient aspects of the pilot study revealed that in the first pilot study, conducted with a female research subject, the subject expressed the sentiment that “understanding what strategies might be needed to close the African-American male achievement gap at this juncture is most critical” and that “the same significance was not a need for African-American females.” In fact, this respondent noted that the African-American achievement gap for females was “not of her specific interest.” In stark contrast, the second subject interviewed during pilot testing expressed that it would be “equally important to examine strategies needed to close the African-American female achievement gap” and that “more studies need to be done to find out what strategies might assist in this process.”

Data Analysis and Summary of Procedures

No matter how a researcher proceeds, the data analysis for a qualitative study is a complex and time-consuming process. Researchers must wade through a great deal of information, some of which will be useful and some of which will not (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In an effort to make the data clear, concise, and useful to the readers, by using a combination of tables and narratives, the researcher identified general categories or themes and subcategories and themes as well, and then classified each piece of data

accordingly. The researcher highlighted key aspects that were provided by the research subjects, attempted to record multiple or varying perspectives on any single issue or event, and made a concerted effort to look for evidence that contradicted the researcher's hypotheses (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). In an effort to ensure that any interpretation was free from any potential bias the researcher used multiple coders who coded separately from one another and who then compared their respective findings. The researcher and coders compared findings and discussed any discrepancies. The researcher kept notes regarding these discussions and negotiations (these will be shared in Chapter 4). This process was designed so that the researcher and readers can get a general sense of patterns and what the data means (Creswell, as cited in Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

The following procedures were used to conduct the study:

1. Identify the total number of high schools in the Gwinnett and Cobb County school systems. Create a word document table that lists the total number of high schools. Assign each school an identification code to ensure confidentiality.
2. If possible identify each school's sub group graduation rates for 3 years dating back to 2006 to 2009.
3. By accessing graduation rates, a list of schools were developed that indicated which schools sustained positive success in narrowing the African-American achievement gap for the past 3 years. This list was used to identify the schools invited to participate in principal interviews.
4. Letters of permission (Appendix A) were sent to the Superintendents of the school districts where the selected schools are located for district approval of

participation in the interviews. Once district approval was received, designated principals were contacted via letter (Appendix B), and a follow up phone call (Appendix C), which were used to determine their willingness to participate in the study.

5. Once permission to participate was provided, each principal was contacted to schedule a time to interview him or her. A copy of the interview questions was sent to participants at least one week prior to the scheduled interview time to allow time for them to consider their answers and get input from key staff members (Appendix E).
6. A semi-structured interview was conducted using an interview protocol (Appendix E).
7. Interview responses were digitally recorded during the interview with participants' permission and transcribed to a text document for analysis.
8. At the end of the interview, an interview debrief question was asked. Each participant was asked for feedback on the interview instrument for further studies: If we were to replicate this protocol in the future, please give us feedback as to how much time you spent in preparing for this interview. The researcher thanked them for their participation and contribution to the study. Participants who were interested in receiving the study results received a copy of themes identified from the interviews to allow an opportunity for them to confirm the accuracy of the data. Interested participants were invited to contact the researcher by email or phone number. Depending upon participant preference, the researcher mailed or e-mailed the results.

9. Interview notes were coded and analyzed for themes within each interview question. Interview data and themes were reviewed by professional colleagues with expertise on school reform to prevent researcher bias and increase research credibility.
10. A follow up thank you letter (Appendix G) was sent to participants following the interview. The letter summarized the studies key findings and allowed interview participants to confirm the accuracy of the analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

CHAPTER 4: Results

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of administrators in GCPS and CCSD Georgia high school that are successfully closing the achievement gap for high school African-American males as to:

1. What successful strategies they credit for closing the achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and:
2. What additional strategies they might consider to curb the achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools;
3. Why the achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States.

The following three research questions were the basis of this study:

1. What strategies have been implemented by principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools to successfully close the achievement gap for low income African-American students?
2. What additional strategies, if any, might principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools consider implementing in their continuing efforts to close the African-American achievement gap?
3. What are the perceptions of Gwinnett and Cobb County high school administrators who are successfully closing the achievement gap in their respective schools regarding how to narrow the achievement gap for high school African-American males in metropolitan districts in the United States?

Review of Methodology

The method of data collection for this research was a series of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals at eight schools, four from GCPS and four from CCSD, who have narrowed the achievement gap for their African-American male population over the past 2-3 years. A copy of the interview questions was sent to participants prior to the scheduled interview to allow time for them to consider their answers and get input from key staff members. Interviews were conducted in person, unless otherwise requested, and digitally recorded for accuracy. The digital recordings were transcribed into text documents for analysis. All participants were asked the same questions. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the interview, the reasons their school was selected, the interview questions, human subject considerations, and answered any questions the participants may have had.

The researcher introduced the data instrument with a restatement of the purpose:

The purpose of this interview is to explore your perceptions regarding your school's practices that have successfully contributed to sustained success in narrowing the achievement gap for African-American males. During this interview, I would like you to think about the specific practices implemented at your school that helped your school and what might be some further strategies that might assist other schools in this endeavor.

After each question and subject response, the researcher prompted additional responses if the subject's responses did not touch upon the common themes from the literature.

During the interview, follow-up questions were asked, as needed, for further clarification.

Interview notes were recorded on a digital audio-recording device and the researcher took personal notes on a note pad during the interview.

Once the interview data were collected, participants' responses were analyzed by research question for common themes. Interview data and themes were reviewed by two

professional colleagues with expertise on school reform to prevent researcher bias and increase research credibility. Two external coders examined the research transcripts and were in agreement with the data figures, themes, and frequency tables provided. One external coder noticed that only one teacher stated that having strong attendance monitoring programs were necessary strategies needed to narrow the achievement gap and stated the researcher should include that theme as a frequency; both coders and the researcher agreed and the researcher accommodated this request.

Based upon the research questions and corresponding literature review, four background-oriented and six core interview questions were generated. The four introductory questions were:

1. How long have you been employed or directly involved in the field of education and in your district?
2. How long have you been a principal or administrator in your current district that has direct knowledge concerning strategies that were implemented to improve graduation rates or narrow the African-American achievement gap?
3. What percent of the students at your current high school are African-American males?
4. To what degree (percent), if at all, has your graduation rate increased for African-American male students at your high school over the recent 2 or 3-year period and beyond?

The six core interview questions were:

1. What specific programs or strategies, instruction-oriented or otherwise, have been instituted at your school in an effort to narrow the African-American

achievement gap and to increase graduation rates for African-American males i.e. climate? Prompts: What programs or strategies have been most successful and why? What programs or strategies have least successful and why? What role might school administrators and teachers play in the process?

2. What might be some further extracurricular or community-based strategies undertaken by teachers, administrators, and or districts that can be used to narrow the African-American achievement gap? Prompts: What are your thoughts about connecting children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community? How might students be helped to cope with social forces to help them behave in ways that enable learning?
3. Based upon your overall experience in managing a school that has consistently narrowed the achievement gap and increased the graduation rates of African-American males for the past 3 years, what might be some further strategies undertaken by middle and elementary schools? Prompt: If yes, where and what were the results of any of these strategies?
4. What programs have been instituted by the state, that you are aware of, that are specific to narrowing the African-American achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?
5. How might the federal government assist school districts with populations of over 10,000 or more African-American male enrollment in narrowing the

achievement gap? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

6. What are your perceptions of increasing federal funds in an effort to increase educational funding for programs that are directly designed to close the African-American achievement gap, i.e. health clinics located directly inside schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in urban areas as well as after-school summer tutorial programs, summer enrichment programs that include trips to museums, and or parenting classes that teach parents how to assist their children or children with homework? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

Data Findings and Results

This chapter is organized into two sections. The first section addresses introductory questions one through four and examines principals' experience in education, experience in their respective districts as it relates to curriculum development, and graduation rates of African-American students in general and African-American males in particular for the past 3 years. The purpose was to discern any commonalities, abnormalities, or extenuating circumstances that might potentially influence graduation rates. The second section addresses the core research questions in relation to the three overarching study questions and provides a summary of the principal interviews, what they credit as sustaining student achievement as identified by graduation rates for African-American students, and sustainability themes. A total of eight research subjects were interviewed for this study. It was the objective of the researcher to secure 10

research subjects, but local district IRB regulations limited the researcher's interview subjects to four principals per county.

Section One: Introductory Questions

The first introductory question asked subjects how long had they been employed or directly involved in the field of education and in their district. Figure 1 presents the average total years of educational experience of the research subjects in the GCPS and CCSD. The researcher found that the total years of educational experience of the research subjects in GCPS and CCSD were 46 years and 45 years respectively, a difference of 1 year.

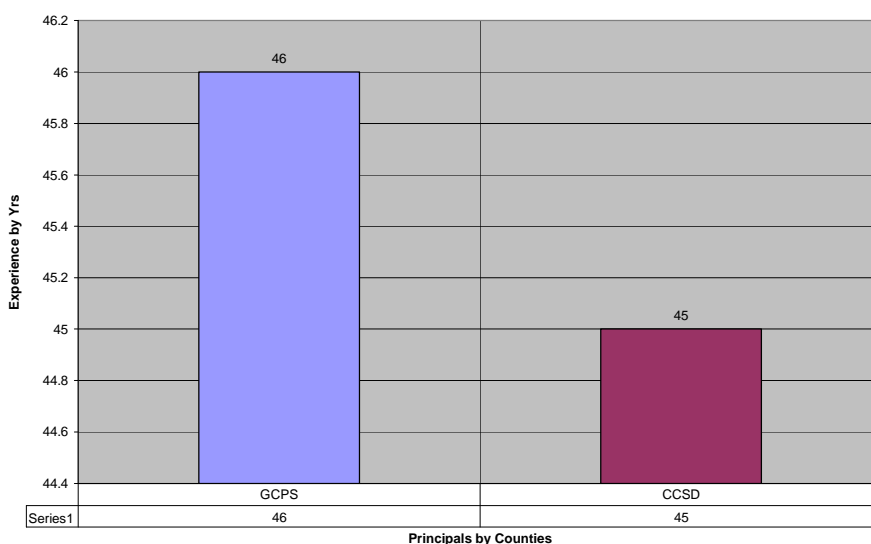


Figure 1. GCPS and CCSD principals' average years in education.

Figure 2 represents the individual principals' years of experience in education:

- The individual principals' years of education experience in education for both GCPS and CCSD principals spanned from 12 years to 44 years of overall experience in education.
- The eight principals had an average of 21.25 years of experience.

- GCPS principals ranged in educational experience from 15 years of experience to 44 years of experience with an average of 24 years of experience.
- CCSD principals ranged in educational experience from 12 years of educational experience to 31 years of educational experience with an average of 18.5 years of experience.
- Three of the eight principals interviewed or 37.5% had at least 20 years of overall experience in education and seven of the eight principals or 87.5% had at least 15 years of overall experience in education.
- All eight principals or 100% had more than 10 years of overall experience in education.

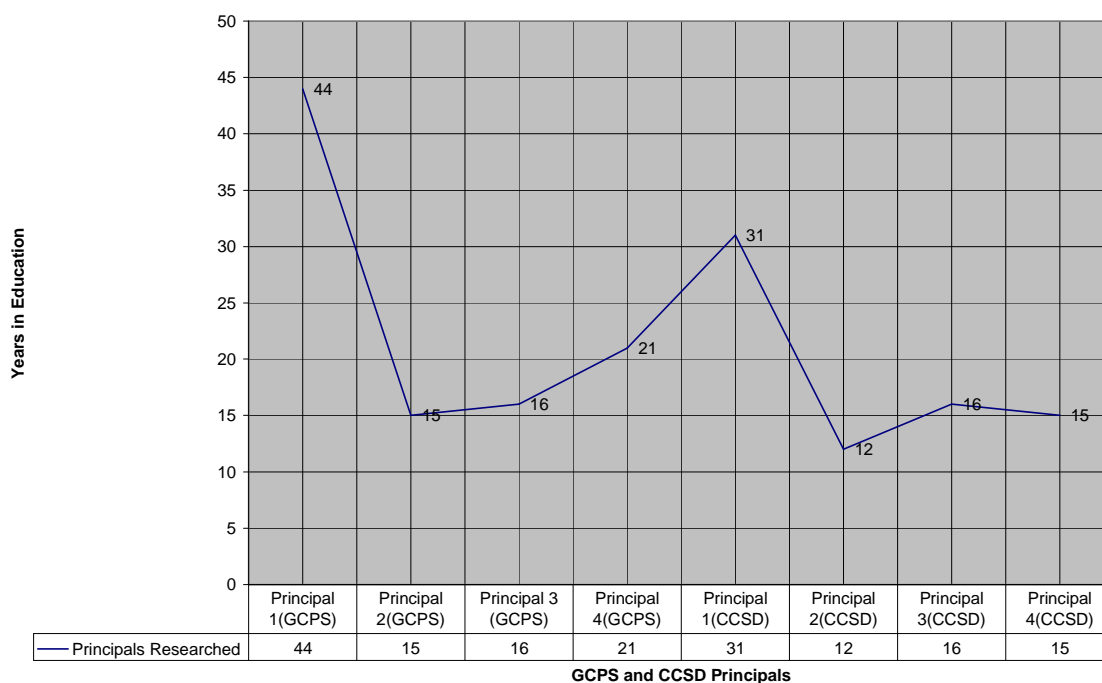


Figure 2. GCPS and CCSD principal experience in education.

Responses to introductory question two, which inquired about participants' administrative experience related to curriculum development, yielded the following information, which is also summarized in Figure 3:

- Five of the eight principals interviewed or 63% had over 10 years of experience in the subject area and all eight principals or 100% had at least 6 or more years as a principal or administrator with direct knowledge concerning strategies that were implemented to improve graduation rates and narrow the African-American achievement gap.
- GCPS principals had an average of 15 years of curriculum development.
- CCSD principals had an average of 11 years of curriculum development.

These data suggest that although it is not a necessity, having 10 or more years experience in education and at least 5 years of direct knowledge relate to curriculum development in strategies designed to improve graduation rates might be a key component of a principal whose focus is to increase graduation rates and narrow the African-American male achievement gap.

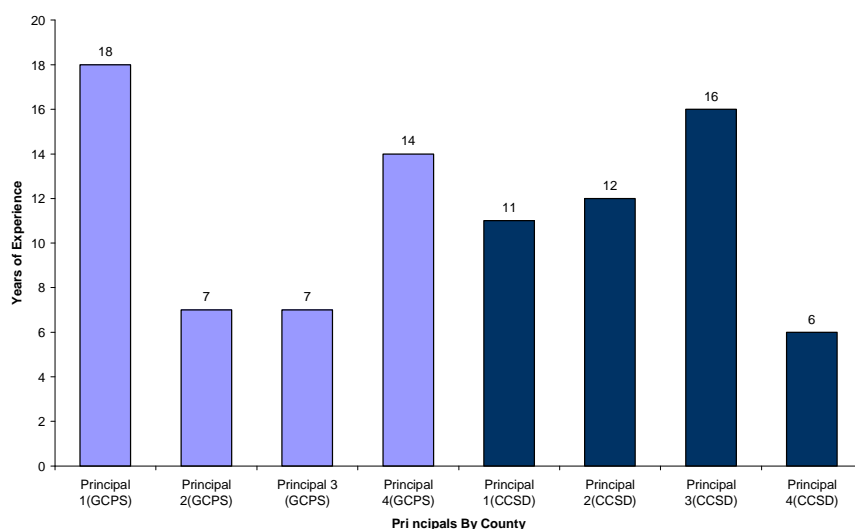


Figure 3. Administrative experience related to curriculum development.

In response to question three of the background introductory question, what percent of the students at your current high school are African-American, the researcher found that:

- All of the schools researched met the criteria for having at least a 10% African-American student population. The researcher was not able to determine each school's African-American male population enrollment because subgroup demographics were not available.
- Only two of the eight schools or 25% of the schools researched had an African-American population of greater than 20%.
- Six of the eight schools or 75% had a population of African-American students of over 10% or more.
- The average population of African-American students in the GCPS for the years researched was 13%.
- The average population of African-American students in the CCSD for the years researched was 18%.
- An average difference of 6 % (see Figure 4).

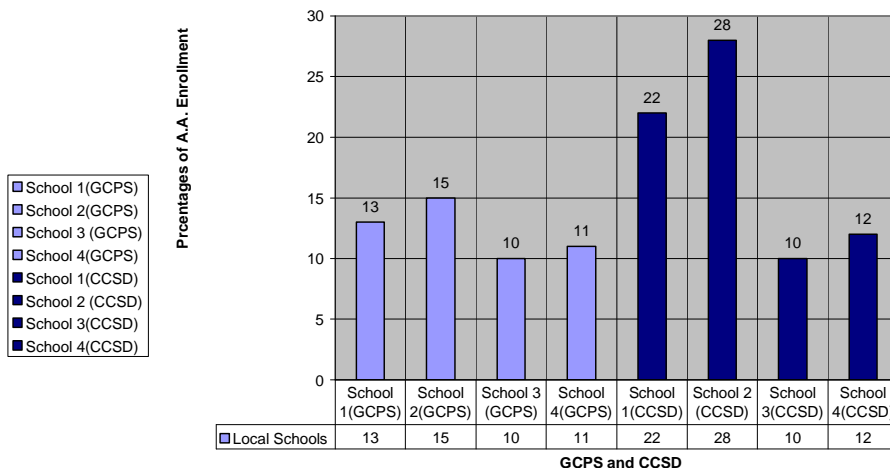


Figure 4. Current percentage of African-American enrollment.

With respect to introductory question four, to what degree (percent), if at all, has your graduation rate increased for African-American male students at your high school over the recent 2 or 3-year period and beyond, the researcher found that graduation rates for African-American students across the board have shown steady inclines since 2007-2010. Figures 5 and 6 detail graduation rates for all African-American students from 2007-2010 (Georgia Department of Education, 2010).

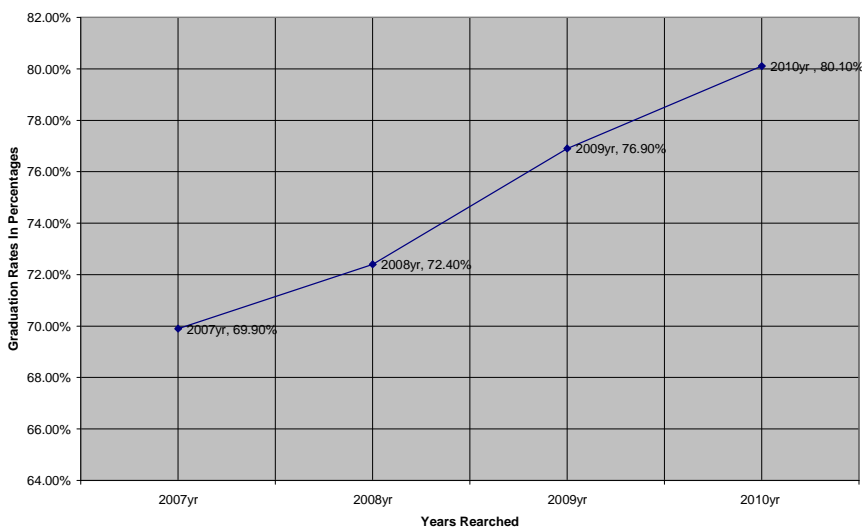


Figure 5. GCPS African-American graduation rates 2007-2010. Adapted from 2009-2010 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), by the Georgia Department of Education, 2010, retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2010/second.asp?SchoolID=667-0000-b-1-0-0-0-0-0-8-0-0>. Copyright 2010 by the author.

In relationship to graduation rates specifically for the African-American male subgroup, data from the Georgia Department of Education (2010) show that all of the schools researched in the GCPS had an overall increase in graduation rates from 2007-2010 (see Figure 7).

- GCPS School 1 averaged an 82% graduation rate for African-American males from the 2007-2010 school years with a graduation increased graduation rates increase of 10% from the 2007-2010 school years.
- GCPS School 2 had an average graduation rate for African-American males of 77% from the 2007-2010 school years, with an increase of 10% from the 2007-2010 school years.
- GCPS School 3 had an average graduation rate for African-American males 76% from the 2007-2010 school years with a graduation increase of 16% from the 2007-2010 school years.
- GCPS School 4 had an average graduation rate of 92% for their African-American male population from the 2007-10 school years, with an average increase of less than 1% from the 2007-2010 school years.

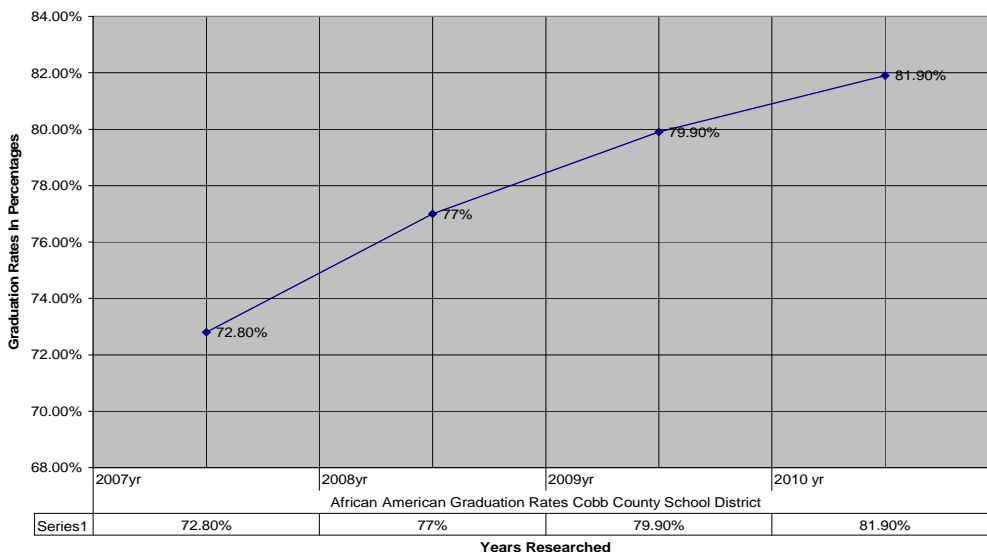


Figure 6. CCSD African-American graduation rates 2007-2010. Adapted from 2009-2010 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), by the Georgia Department of Education, 2010, retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2010/second.asp?SchoolID=667-0000-b-1-0-0-0-0-0-0-8-0-0>. Copyright 2010 by the author.

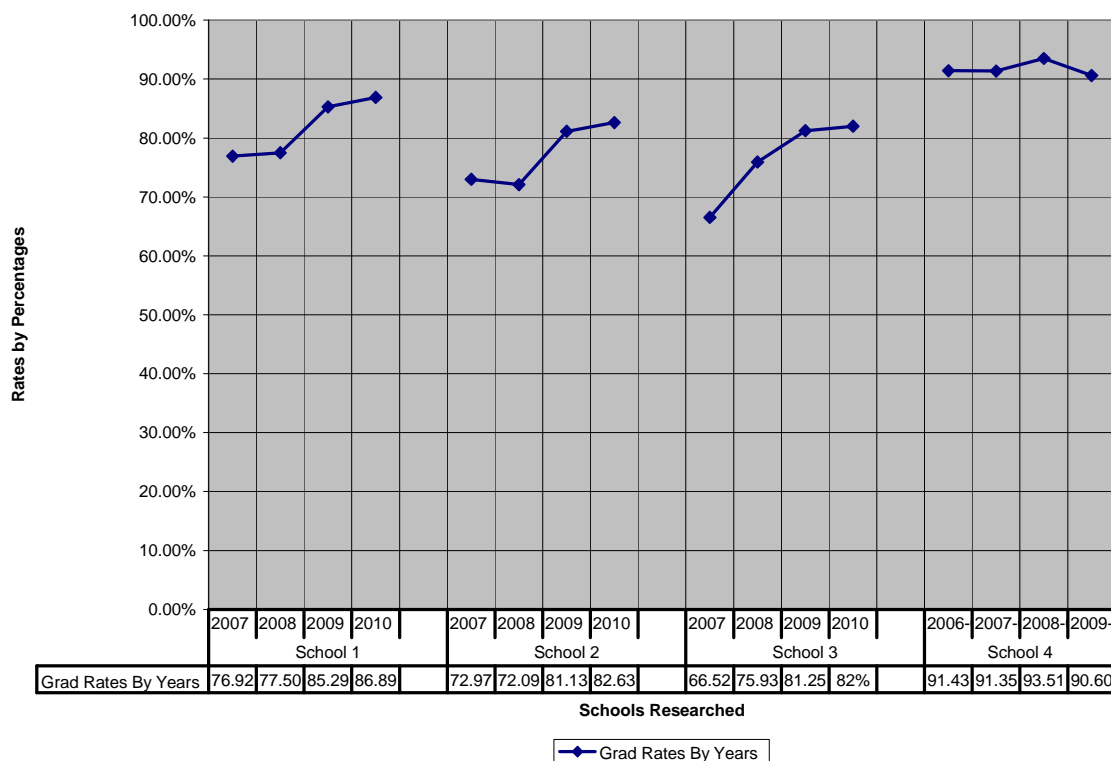


Figure 7. GCPS graduation rates for African-American males 2007-2010. Adapted from 2009-2010 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), by the Georgia Department of Education, 2010, retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2010/second.asp?SchoolID=667-0000-b-1-0-0-0-0-0-0-8-0-0>. Copyright 2010 by the author.

In relationship to graduation rates specifically for the African-American male subgroup for the schools researched in CCSD, data from the Georgia Department of Education (2010) show that all four schools showed an overall increase in graduation rates for the African-American male subgroup population from the 2007-2010 school years (see Figure 8).

- CCSD School 1 had an African-American male graduation rate of 69% over the time period and CCSD School 1 had the largest graduation rate increase of 20% from the 2007-2010 school years.
- CCSD School 2 had an African-American male graduation average rate of 77% from 2007-2010 school years with a graduation increase of 7% from the 2007-2010 school years.
- CCSD School 3 had an average of 79 % graduation rate for African-American males from the 2007-2010 school years with a graduation increase of 13% from the 2007-2010 school years.
- CCSD School 4 had a 75% graduation rate for African-American males from the 2007-2010 school years with a graduation increase of 5% from the 2007-2010 school years.

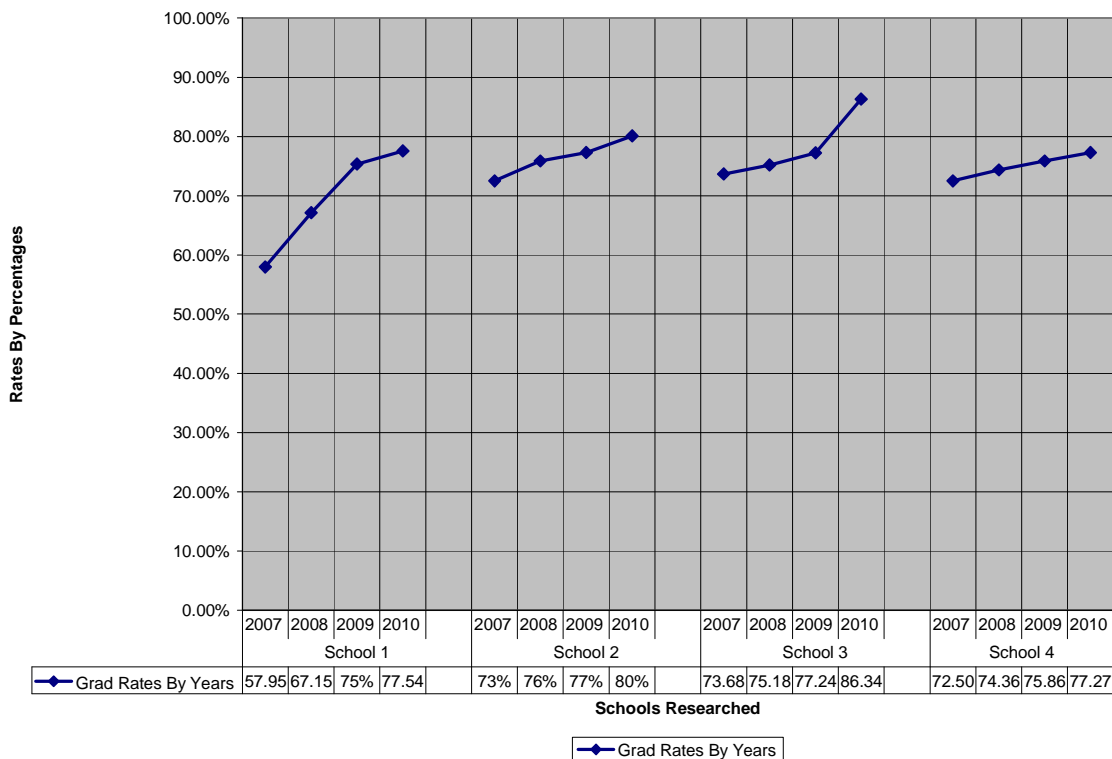


Figure 8. CCSD graduation rates for African-American males 2007-2010. Adapted from *2009-2010 Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*, by the Georgia Department of Education, 2010, retrieved from <http://public.doe.k12.ga.us/ayp2010/second.asp?SchoolID=667-0000-b-1-0-0-0-0-0-0-8-0-0>. Copyright 2010 by the author.

Figure 9 shows a comparative analysis of average graduation rate increases and overall graduation rates of African-American males in GCPS and CCSD for the 2007-2010 school years. The researcher found that GCPS School 4 did not have a graduation rate increase nor did it exhibit a significant decrease due to the fact that the graduation rate consistently remained around 90% throughout the 2007-2010 school years.

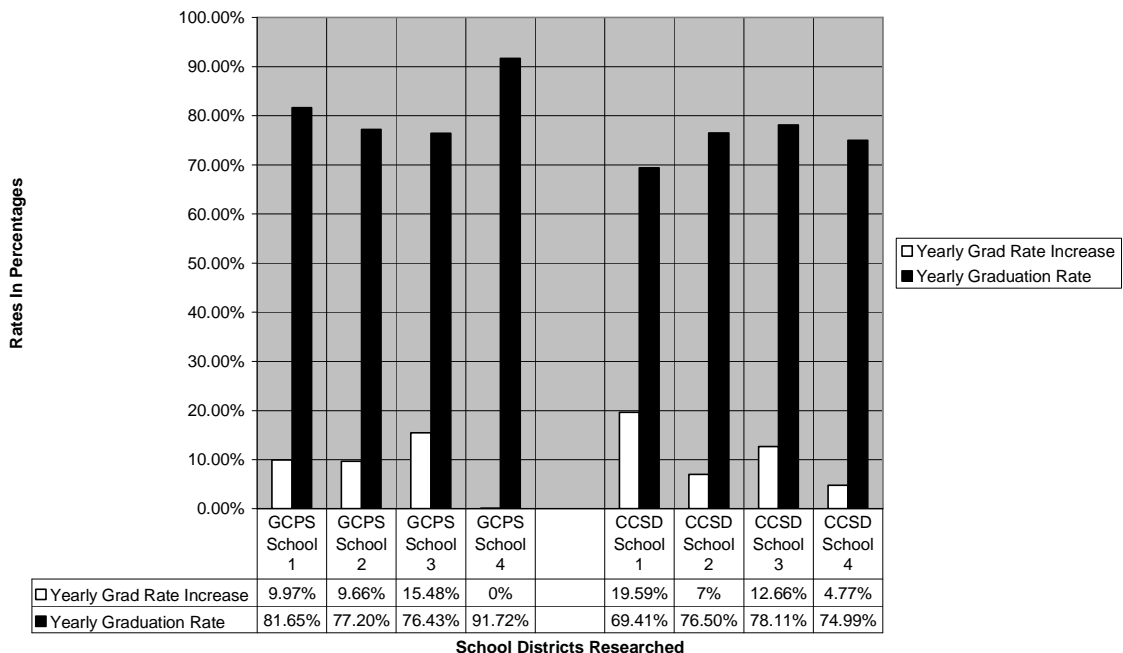


Figure 9. GCPS and CCSD graduation rates: Comparative analysis 2007-2010.

Figure 10 shows that of the schools researched, GCPS had an average graduation rate of 82%, whereas CCSD had a graduation rate of 75%, a difference of 7% from the 2007-2010 school years.

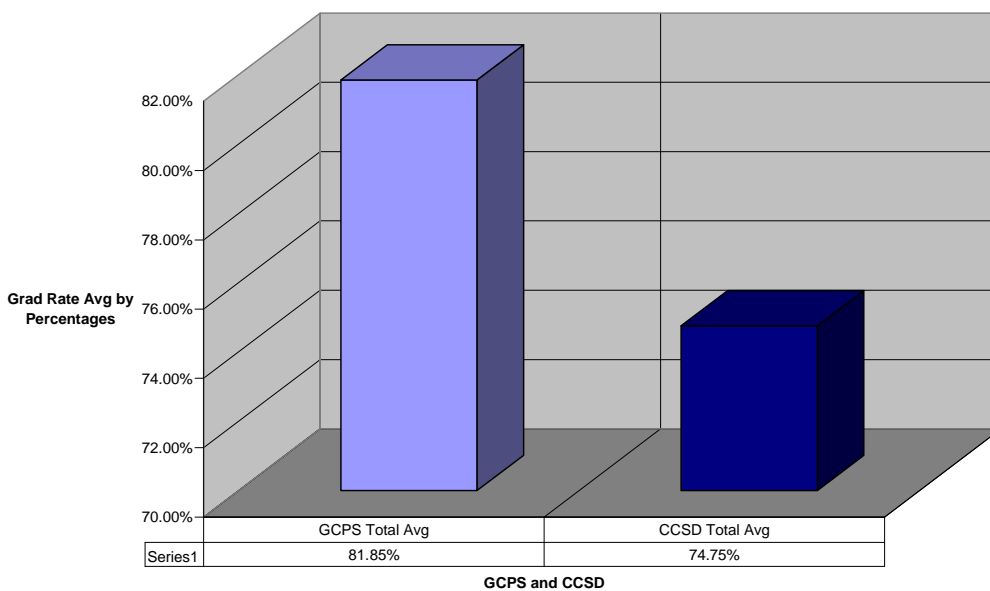


Figure 10. GCPS and CCSD average graduation rates: Comparative analysis 2007-2010.

Further examination revealed that of the schools researched CCSD had an average increase of graduation scores of 11 points or 11% compared to GCPS, which had an 9 % increase from the 2007-2010 school years (see Figure 11).

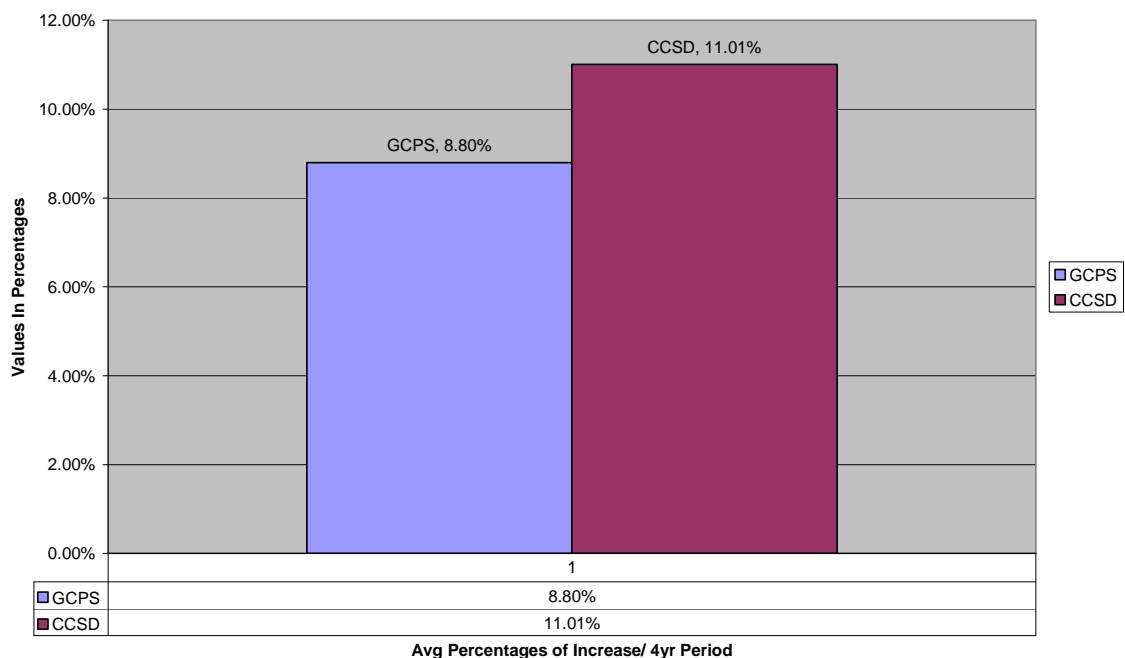


Figure 11. GCPS and CCSD average graduation rate increases for African-American males 2007-2010.

Section Two: Core Interview Questions

Research question 1. What strategies have been implemented by principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia High Schools to successfully close the achievement gap for low income African-American students?

Corresponding interview question. What specific programs or strategies, instructional or otherwise, have been instituted at your school in an effort to narrow the African-American achievement gap and to increase graduation rates for African-American males?

Principals' responses: GCPS. Please note that the block quote materials in this section are the direct responses from interviews conducted with participants in this study.

In response to research question number one and the corresponding interview question, all GCPS principals interviewed mentioned that having mentoring programs, implementing tutorial programs, and establishing local improvement programs were keys to their success in increasing graduation rates for African-American students. GCPS

Principal 3 stated,

I think it is important for African-American males to have access to other African-American males as role models whether we bring speakers in, whether we use coaches, or whether we use community members; I think it is very important.

Furthermore, all GCPS principals interviewed also found it important to have quality teachers in the classroom so that effective learning might take place. GCPS Principal 2 stated,

Ensure that teachers have the skills to teach students, that includes differentiated instruction. They (teachers) need to understand the expectations between teaching and learning. Finally, I would say that the teachers and students must be held accountable for learning. Expectations must be clear.

One GCPS principal mentioned the JROTC (Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps) program as having a significant impact on African-American males' leadership abilities in their school thus having an overall positive effect on academic performance in the classroom. Another GCPS principal noted that getting parents involved was their least successful strategy, but all GCPS principals felt that parental involvement was an integral strategy to increasing graduation rates for African-American subgroups.

Principals' responses: CCSD. In response to research question number one and the corresponding interview questions, all CCSD principals noted that tutorial programs were essential in helping to improve graduation rates. Two CCSD principals mentioned

leadership programs as having a significant impact on the overall climate in their schools.

CCSD Principal 1 said,

One of the most significant areas that has truly grown over the last six to seven years has been our JROTC program. We have a very dynamic African-American person who is the chief warrant officer and a former first sergeant who's in charge of the program. The program has grown so big and we now have over 240 students involved and a significant number of them are African-American males. The discipline is incredible and the graduation rate in the ROTC program has been amazing.

Another CCSD principal also mentioned the JROTC program as having a significant impact on African-American males' leadership abilities in their school, thus having an overall positive effect on their performance in the classroom. CCSD Principal 3 said,

I think that our most successful program has been a program that we call Service In Leadership. This program focuses on giving back. We want the kids to know that there is a purpose in being a leader and that purpose is to reach down and to give back to the community and I think that it is a program that has done wonders in developing the students' characters.

Three CCSD principals mentioned data driven assessment as being an important tool to track the progress of students who might be at risk of not meeting or exceeding expectations. Only one CCSD principal interviewed mentioned making a personal connection with students as an integral strategy in relation to increasing expectations and narrowing the achievement gap. CCSD Principal 4 stated, "All African-American kids are not alike, it's the same with Hispanic and Caucasian kids, so we tried to look at the individual needs of the at-risk student and caterer programs to meet those students' specific needs." One CCSD principal mentioned having a strong attendance program as a successful strategy needed to increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap.

Research question 2. What additional strategies, if any, might principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia high schools consider implementing in their continuing efforts to close the African-American achievement gap?

Corresponding interview questions. What might be some further extracurricular or community-based strategies undertaken by teachers, administrators, and or districts that can be used to narrow the African-American achievement gap? Based upon your overall experience in managing a school that has consistently narrowed the achievement gap and increased the graduation rates of African-American males for the past 3 years, what might be some further strategies undertaken by middle and elementary schools?

Principals' responses: GCPS. In response to the corresponding interview questions, two GCPS principals mentioned that some middle and elementary school programs could do more vertical teaming at the middle and elementary grade levels. One GCPS principals stated that elementary schools need to create a leadership program that encourages students to be successful early in their academic development.

All GCPS principals reiterated that a role model program is very important for students. GCPS Principal 2 stated, "When we're not successful is when a kid is not engaged in reference to the social-emotional aspects." GCPS Principal 3 reiterated that students need trusting relationships, stating, "It is about building trusting relationships whether those relationships be athletics, or orchestra, or fine arts, students have to know that they're connected with like minded individuals."

Principals' responses: CCSD. In response to the corresponding interview questions, two CCSD principals mentioned vertical teaming and aligning a vertical

curriculum that includes high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. CCSD

Principal 3 stated,

I think collaboration between the elementary and middle, middle and a high school is what's needed. I think that working with the middle schools in a vertical curriculum is very important. I think that the middle and elementary schools and particularly the middle schools can do a better job in preparing students to attend high school. In middle school, it isn't a fact that students need to have a certain amount of credits to graduate so they don't come prepared for the rigors of high school.

One CCSD principal spoke of the need to have a caring and supportive staff as a strategy that might be used to further narrow the achievement gap. CCSD Principal 2 stated, "We have a lot of caring teachers on our staff who have taken the initiative to help and I believe that when a student knows that you care it can make a huge, huge difference."

All CCSD principals reiterated the need for a strong mentoring program, and two CCSD principals spoke of a need for a mentoring program for students at the elementary and middle grade levels. One CCSD principal expressed the need for an after-school tutorial program for elementary and middle grade student that may strength reading and math scores in an effort to make them more proficient when they enter high school. Another CCSD principal called for a mentoring program at the elementary level as well as an after-school tutorial program.

Research question 3. What are the perceptions of Gwinnett and Cobb County high school administrators who are successfully closing the achievement gap in their respective schools regarding how to narrow the achievement gap for high school African-American males in metropolitan districts in the United States?

Corresponding interview questions. What programs have been instituted by the state, that you are aware of, that are specific to narrowing the African-American

achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males and how might the federal government assist school districts with populations of over 10,000 or more African-American male enrollment in narrowing the achievement gap? What are your perceptions of increasing federal funds in an effort to increase educational funding for programs that are directly designed to close the African-American achievement gap, i.e. health clinics located directly inside schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in urban areas as well as after-school summer tutorial programs, summer enrichment programs that include trips to museums, and or parenting classes that teach parents how to assist their children or children with homework?

Principals' responses: GCPS. In response to the corresponding interview questions, two GCPS principals could not name any state programs that were created to help narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation scores for African-American students. One GCPS principal mentioned more minority teachers and more cultural awareness programs that might be funded by the state.

One GCPS principal stated that he/she would like to see more programs that centered on increasing parent involvement and accountability, making strong connections between the community and the child, and programs that involve behavior intervention to change negative behaviors by at-risk students. Two GCPS principals stated that they did not support an increase in federal funding for programs such as health care clinics located directly in schools, after-school tutorial programs, or summer enrichment programs funded by the federal government. Two GCPS principals did support an increase in federal tax dollars to create federally funded enrichment programs.

Principals' responses: CCSD. In response to the corresponding interview questions, two CCSD principals interviewed were also not aware of any state programs that were used to narrow the achievement gap and increased graduation rates for African-American students. Only one CCSD principal could name an initiative taken by the state to increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap. Two CCSD principals stated that they were not supportive of an increase in Federal taxes to institute enrichment programs in high schools. One CCSD principal mentioned the creation of instructional/academic coaches to assist teachers who might need extra help in creating strategies to teach at-risk students as a state-funded program.

Themes. The following three tables (10, 11, & 12) emerged from GCPS and CCDS principals in response to the strategies that have been tried or are recommended to increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap for African-American subgroups, particularly African-American males. Table 10 lists common themes that emerged from the interviews with GCPS principals, along with the frequency of repeated themes. Table 11 lists common themes that emerged from the interviews with CCD principals, along with the frequency of repeated themes. Table 12 shows the combined frequency of responses from both GCPS and CCSD principals.

Table 10

Themes Identified in Gwinnett County Principal Interviews

Theme	Principal 1	Principal 2	Principal 3	Principal 4
Clear Focus and Goals	x	x	x	x
Improved Instruction	x	x	x	x
Data Assessment	x	x	x	x
Monitoring, Accountability, and Feedback	x	x	x	x
Local Plan of Improvement	x	x	x	x
Strengthen Personal Relationship w/African-American Population			x	
Quality Teacher Training/ Professional Development	x	x	x	x
Before, During and or After School Tutorial Programs	x	x		x
Mentoring Program	x	x	x	x
JROTC Program	x			x
Targeted Intervention	x	x	x	x
Student Leadership Programs	x		x	
Communication with Parents	x	x	x	x

Table 11

Themes Identified in Cobb County Principal Interviews

Theme	Principal 1	Principal 2	Principal 3	Principal 4
Clear Focus and Goals	x	x	x	x
Improved Instruction	x	x	x	x
Data Assessment	x	x		x
Monitoring, Accountability, and Feedback	x	x	x	x
Local Plan of Improvement	x	x	x	x
Strengthen personal Relationship w/African-American Population				
Quality Teacher Training/ Professional Development	x	x	x	x
Before, During and or After School Tutorial Programs	x	x	x	x
Mentoring Program	x	x	x	x
JROTC Program	x			
Targeted Intervention	x	x	x	x
Student Leadership Programs	x	x		
Communication with Parents	x	x	x	x

Table 12

Common Themes Identified in Principal Interviews

Theme	Frequency/Number of Principals Who Mentioned Theme
Clear Focus and Goals	8
Improved Instruction	8
Data Assessment	7
Monitoring, Accountability, and Feedback	8
Local Plan of Improvement	8
Strengthen Personal Relationship w/African-American Population	2
Quality Teacher Training/ Professional Development	8
Before, During and or After School Tutorial Programs	7
Mentoring Programs	8
JROTC Program	3
Targeted Intervention	8
Student Leadership Programs	3
Communication with Parents	8
Vertical Teaming/ Elementary, Middle and High School	2
Strong Attendance Program	1

Summary

Introductory research questions. The researcher found that in relationship to individual principals' years of experience in education both GCPS and CCSD, principals' overall experience in education spanned from 12-44 years. On average, the eight

principals had 21.25 years of experience. All eight principals or 100% had more than 10 years of overall experience in education.

In relationship to subgroup populations, the researcher found that all of the schools researched met the criteria for having at least a 10% African-American student population. The researcher was not able to determine each school's African-American male population enrollment because subgroup demographics were not available. The average population of African-American students in GCPS for the years researched was 13%. The average population of African-American students in CCSD for the years researched was 18%.

In relationship to graduation rates specifically for the African-American male subgroup, data from the Georgia Department of Education (2010) showed that all of the schools researched in GCPS and CCSD had an overall increase in graduation rates from the 2007-2010 school years. Data from the Georgia Department of Education showed that of the schools researched in GCPS, the average 2007-2010 graduation rate was 82%, whereas the CCSD had a graduation rate of 75%, a difference of 7%. Data from by the Georgia Department of Education also showed that of the schools researched in the CCDS the average increase of graduation scores was 11% compared to GCPS, which had an 9% increase of graduation scores from the 2007-2010 school years.

Research question 1. What strategies have been implemented by principals of Gwinnett and Cobb County Georgia High Schools to successfully close the achievement gap for low income African-American students? The researcher found that all GCPS principals researched mentioned that having mentoring programs, implementing tutorial programs, and establishing local improvement programs were keys to their successes and

helped increase graduation rates for African-American students. All GCPS principals felt that parental involvement was an integral strategy to increasing graduation rates for African-American subgroups. All GCPS principals researched also found it important to have quality teachers in the classroom in order to promote effective learning. One GCPS principal mentioned the JROTC program as having an overall positive effect on academic performance in the classroom.

All CCSD principals noted that tutorial programs were essential in helping to improve graduation rates. Two CCSD principals mentioned leadership programs as having a significant impact on the overall climate in their schools. Three CCSD principals mentioned data driven assessment as being an important tool to track the progress of students who might be at risk of not meeting or exceeding expectations. One CCSD principal mentioned making a personal connection with students as an integral strategy in relation to increasing expectations and narrowing the achievement gap. One CCSD principal mentioned having a strong attendance program as a successful strategy needed to increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap.

Research question 2. What additional strategies, if any, might principals of GCPS and CCSD high schools consider implementing in their continuing efforts to close the African-American achievement gap? The researcher found that two GCPS principals mentioned that some middle and elementary school programs could do more vertical teaming at the middle and elementary grade levels. One GCPS principals stated that elementary schools need to create a leadership program that encourages students to be successful early in their academic development. All GCPS principals reiterated that a role model program is very important for students. One GCPS principal reiterated that

students need to build trusting relationships. Two CCSD principals mentioned vertical teaming and aligning a vertical curriculum that includes high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. All CCSD principals reiterated the need for a strong mentoring program. Two CCSD principals spoke of a need for a mentoring program for students at the elementary and middle grade levels.

Research question 3. What are the perceptions of Gwinnett and Cobb County high school administrators who are successfully closing the achievement gap in their respective schools regarding how to narrow the achievement gap for high school African-American males in metropolitan districts in the United States? The researcher found that half of the GCPS principals researched did not support an increase in federal tax dollars for enrichment programs, while half of the GCPS principals did support an increase in federal tax dollars to create federally funded enrichment programs such as health care clinics located directly in schools or after-school tutorial programs. Identical to the GCPS findings, half of the CCSD principals supported and half did not support an increase in federal taxes to institute enrichment programs in high schools.

In conclusion, the researcher found 15 general themes that consistently emerged in response to the interview questions:

1. The need to establish clear and focused goals,
2. The need for continuous improved instruction,
3. Continuous data assessment,
4. Monitoring, accountability and continuous feedback,
5. Local plan of improvement,

6. The need to strengthen personal relationships with the African-American community/student population,
7. A quality teacher training program that includes differentiated instruction,
8. After-school tutorial programs,
9. Mentoring programs,
10. JROTC programs,
11. Continuous targeted intervention,
12. Student leadership programs (at elementary, middle, and high school levels),
13. Ongoing communication with parents,
14. Vertical teaming (that includes elementary, middle, and high school curricula), and
15. The need for a strong attendance monitoring program.

Both the GCPS and CCSD research subjects expressed similar themes in their responses to the interview questions and prompts.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Overview

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school administrators in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, Georgia, that have successfully narrowed the achievement gap for high school African-American males as to:

1. Why the achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States;
2. What successful strategies they credit for closing the achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and
3. What additional strategies they might consider in order curb the achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools.

The following three research questions were the basis of this study:

1. What strategies have been implemented by principals of high schools in Gwinnett and Cobb County to successfully close the achievement gap for low-income African-American students?
2. What additional strategies, if any, might principals of high schools in Gwinnett and Cobb County consider implementing in their continuing efforts to close the African-American achievement gap?
3. What are the perceptions of Gwinnett and Cobb County high school administrators who are successfully closing the achievement gap in their respective schools regarding how to narrow the achievement gap for high school African-American males in metropolitan districts in the United States?

Review of Methodology

The method of data collection for this research was a series of semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with principals at eight schools, four from Gwinnett County and four from Cobb County, who had narrowed the achievement gap for their African-American male population over the past 3 years. A copy of the interview questions was sent to participants prior to the scheduled interview to allow time for them to consider their answers and get input from key staff members. Interviews were conducted in person, unless otherwise requested, and digitally recorded for accuracy. The digital recordings were transcribed into text documents for analysis. All participants were asked the same questions. At the beginning of the interview, the researcher reviewed the purpose of the interview, the reasons their school was selected, the interview questions, and human subject considerations, and answered any questions the participants may have had.

The researcher introduced the data instrument with a restatement of the purpose:

The purpose of this interview is to explore your perceptions regarding your school's practices that have successfully contributed to sustained success in narrowing the achievement gap for African-American males. During this interview, I would like you to think about the specific practices implemented at your school that helped your school and what might be some further strategies that might assist other schools in this endeavor.

After each question and subject response, the researcher prompted additional responses if the subject's responses did not touch upon the common themes from the literature.

During the interview, follow-up questions were asked, as needed, for further clarification.

Interview notes were recorded on a digital audio recording device and the researcher took personal notes on a note pad during the interview.

Once the interview data were collected, participants' responses were analyzed by research question for common themes. Interview data and themes were reviewed by two professional colleagues with expertise on school reform to prevent researcher bias and increase research credibility. Two external coders examined the research transcripts and were in agreement with the data figures, themes, and frequency tables provided. One external coder noticed that only one teacher stated that having strong attendance monitoring programs was a necessary strategy needed to narrow the achievement gap and felt the researcher should include that theme as a frequency; both coders and the researcher agreed and the researcher accommodated this request.

Review of Qualitative Questions

Based on the research questions and corresponding literature review, four background-oriented and six core interview questions were generated. The four introductory questions were:

1. How long have you been employed or directly involved in the field of education and in your district?
2. How long have you been a principal or administrator in your current district that has direct knowledge concerning strategies that were implemented to improve graduation rates or narrow the African-American achievement gap?
3. What percent of the students at your current high school are African-American males?
4. To what degree (percent), if at all, has your graduation rate increased for African-American male students at your high school over the recent 2 or 3 year period and beyond?

The six core interview questions were:

1. What specific programs or strategies, instructional or otherwise, have been instituted at your school in an effort to narrow the African-American achievement gap and to increase graduation rates for African-American males i.e. climate? Prompts: What programs or strategies have been most successful and why? What programs or strategies have least successful and why? What role might school administrators and teachers play in the process?
2. What might be some further extracurricular or community-based strategies undertaken by teachers, administrators, and or districts that can be used to narrow the African-American achievement gap? Prompts: What are your thoughts about connecting children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community? How might students be helped to cope with social forces to help them behave in ways that enable learning?
3. Based upon your overall experience in managing a school that has consistently narrowed the achievement gap and increased the graduation rates of African-American males for the past 3 years, what might be some further strategies undertaken by middle and elementary schools? Prompt: If yes, where and what were the results of any of these strategies?
4. What programs have been instituted by the state, that you are aware of, that are specific to narrowing the African-American achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

5. How might the federal government assist school districts with populations of over 10,000 or more African-American male enrollment in narrowing the achievement gap? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?
6. What are your perceptions of increasing federal funds in an effort to increase educational funding for programs that are directly designed to close the African-American achievement gap, i.e. health clinics located directly inside schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in urban areas as well as after-school summer tutorial programs, summer enrichment programs that include trips to museums, and or parenting classes that teach parents how to assist their children or children with homework? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

Discussion of the Findings

Introductory research questions. Four introductory were asked to determine the principals' individual and overall experience in education, educational experience in their respective districts, and educational experience in the area of curriculum development. The data found that both GCPS and CCSD principals' overall experience in education spanned from 12 years to 44 years. The principals had, on average, 21.25 years of experience. All eight principals or 100% had more than 10 years of overall experience in education. The experience in education showed that all of the principals researched demonstrated consistency and stability in their profession and all principals demonstrated a passion for education as demonstrated by the average years of experience. Although the

literature researched did not speak to years of experience as a necessary component needed to narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males, this researcher believes that consistency and 10 or more years of experience is a necessary skill for principals.

In relationship to subgroup populations, all of the schools researched had at least a 10% African-American student population. The researcher was not able to determine each school's African-American male population enrollment because subgroup demographics were not available.

Qualitative research questions. Six core interview questions were asked to determine principals' perspectives as to how they believe the African-American male achievement gap should be narrowed, what strategies have been implemented by principals of the Gwinnett County Public Schools and the Cobb County School District in an effort to narrow the achievement gap, and what might be some further strategies undertaken by state and federal agencies in a continuing effort to narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males. The researcher believes that a discussion of the findings related to the three research questions is best presented by connecting and interrelating the findings related to all three research questions. The researcher found 15 common themes related to strategies that might be used or have been used to narrow the achievement gap; the researcher believes those themes should be synthesized and discussed as one body of related findings. It is the researcher's observation that synthesizing the common themes into one discussion might add more insight and make the assessment of the 15 common themes a more meaningful discussion. Those themes were:

1. The need to establish a clear and focused goals,
2. The need for continuous improved instruction,
3. Continuous data assessment,
4. Monitoring and accountability and continuous feedback,
5. Local plan of improvement,
6. The need to strengthen personal relationships with the African-American community/student population,
7. A quality teacher training program that includes differentiated instruction,
8. Before, during, and or after-school tutorial programs,
9. Mentoring programs,
10. JROTC programs,
11. Continuous targeted intervention,
12. Student leadership programs (at elementary, middle, and high school levels),
13. Ongoing communication with parents,
14. Vertical teaming (that includes elementary, middle, and high school curricula), and
15. The need for a strong attendance-monitoring program.

An examination of the common themes cited by principals of the two counties revealed that the following themes might be better analyzed as a category of administrative, site-based reforms: the need to establish a clear focus goes, the need for improved instruction, the need for monitoring accountability and feedback, the need for local plan of improvement, the need for targeted intervention, and the need for quality teacher training/profession development.

Administrative site-based reforms. In the area of site-based reforms, a review of the findings reveals that all eight principals cited the need to establish clear and focused goals; the need for improved instruction; the need for monitoring, accountability, and feedback; the need for a local plans of improvement; the need for targeted intervention; and the need for quality teacher training/professional development as necessary strategies that have been used in their district and that might be used in other districts to continue to narrow the achievement gap. Seven of 8 principals cited the need for data assessment as an integral strategy in the continuing effort to narrow the achievement gap. Edmonds (1979) identified three correlates that one would find in schools where Black males were achieving minimal mastery of basic skills:

1. A principal who is a strong instructional leader;
2. An atmosphere that is orderly without being rigid or pretentious; and
3. A climate of high expectations in which no children are permitted to fall below minimal levels.

The Educational Research Service (2001) asserts that high teacher quality is the most essential reason for the success for students, principally for at-risk students (The Educational Research Service, 2001). In the area of site-based reforms needed to narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African males, Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) agree that improved teaching and curricula, improved instruction, and access to supports for struggling students are necessary strategies. Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison's research found that 81% of the students surveyed sought higher quality teachers and 75% surveyed sought smaller classes with more personalized instruction (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). In the area of targeted intervention,

55% of the students surveyed felt that more strategies should be in place to assist students' who might display specific learning difficulties and 70% thought that increased tutoring, summer school and more time spent with teachers would have enhanced their chances to graduate (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006).

Haycock (2001, 2002) also noted that knowledgeable teachers, a challenging curriculum aligned with standards, and easily understandable and unrestricted educational standards for what students should learn at all benchmark grade levels are an integral aspect of solving the achievement gap problem (Haycock, 2001, 2002). Haycock (2002) believes that teachers should know their subjects and how to teach them. According to Haycock, "large numbers of students, especially those who are poor or members of minority groups, are taught by teachers who do not have strong backgrounds in the subjects they are teaching" (p. 2). They are a guide for teachers, administrators, parents, and students themselves as to what knowledge and skills are critical for students to master (Haycock, 2002). Balfanz and Legters (2004) state that

in order to develop, support, and sustain the human resources needed to bring about major improvements in teaching and learning, it will be necessary for states and school districts to make a commitment to put a high quality teacher in every classroom in every high school with weak promoting power and sustain them with ongoing professional development. (p. 22)

Parental communication and involvement. In the area of parental communication and involvement, the researcher found that all eight principals cited the need to have ongoing parental communication and involvement as a necessary strategy needed to narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males. Wynn (2007) states that

parents must be actively involved in the academic, social, spiritual, and physical development of their sons lives and that administrators, teachers, counselors,

coaches and all support personnel must be willing to open the lines of communication between parents and the school. (p. 8)

According to Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison, (2006) 71% of students surveyed believed that one important aspect to keeping students in school was to have better communication between the school and the parents and an increased amount parental involvement in their child's education (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). Due to the importance educators place on parental involvement in a student's education, it is not surprising that the majority of teachers (63%) and principals (51%) strongly endorsed increasing parental outreach in Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison's study. Only 47 % students surveyed said their school made personal contact with their parents or themselves when they were not in school and only 48% said the their school made personal contact with their parents or themselves when they dropped out; moreover, the researchers outline one study showing that a parent's involvement in a student's education is extremely valuable, as schools would only have to spend \$1,000 more per student to get the same gains in student achievement that an involved parent brings (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). Ogbu (2003) states that

schools need to develop strategies to help parents take a greater role in the academic life of their children, and to help them learn to be academically self-motivated and persistent. Schools need to provide parents information on tracking practices, and about differences between honors and Advanced Placement classes, regular classroom placement, and remedial classes. Parents also need to be helped in working with teachers to monitor and effectively enhance their children's academic progress. (p. 6)

Mentoring programs. The researcher found that all eight principals cited the need to have sustained mentoring programs as a necessary strategy needed to narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males. Ogbu (2003) recommends that the community (i.e. schools) provide academically successful role

models, publicly recognize achievement, and infuse multicultural perspectives into the academic curriculum to counter students' idea that to achieve is to *act White* and to help students develop a sound self-concept and identity. Ogbu further recommends that

to increase African-American students' academic orientation and performance, communities need to provide supplementary education programs using the resources of for-profit and non-profit community-based organizations to create a parallel educational system. (p. 6)

Ferguson (2002) recommends that because of students' differences in advantages or disadvantages due to family backgrounds, schools should have more educational resources and more varied learning experiences (Ferguson, 2002).

Wynn (2007) believes that the entire community must become positive role models in the lives of African-American males in an effort to exemplify proper behavior and develop a desire for academic success (Wynn, 2007). Carter (2005) argues that "what is needed is a broader recognition of the unique cultural styles and practices that non-White students bring to the classroom" (p. 34). Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) state that it is quite imperative to guarantee that students have a good personal relationship with at least one adult in the school (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). Their research finds that while 66% of students researched said there was an adult in the school that cared about their success, only 56% said they could seek out a staff person for school problems, and just 41% had someone in school that they could confide in about personal problems and greater than 62% of young persons said that their school needed to do more to help students with problems outside of school (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). Kunjufu (2005) argues that one of the greatest reasons why there is an unusually high number of African-American males represented in special education and referred for disciplinary action is because school systems do not accommodate for the

different learning styles that males in general and African-American males in particular possess and one of the ways that school systems may curtail this phenomenon is to create gender-based classes that accommodate for the differences in gender learning styles (Kunjufu, 2005). One aspect of the problem, Kunjufu argues, is that “less than 1 percent of all elementary school teachers in the United States are African-American men” (p. 15). He believes that what is needed is more African-American males as role models in early grades.

Before, during, and or after school tutorials. The researcher found that seven of the eight principals cited the need to have tutorial programs as a necessary strategy to narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males. The research participants noted that these programs should be ongoing, whether they take place before, during, or after school and, in some cases, even on weekends. Haycock (2002) states that

there should be extra academic help for students who need it. The theorist says that there is now ample evidence that almost all children can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels but it is equally clear that some require more time and more instruction. (p. 7)

She goes on to assert that “it won’t do, in other words, just to throw students into a high-level course if they can’t even read the textbook” (p. 7). Wynn (2007) states “counselors and instructional coaches must be willing to supplement the lack of student/ family knowledge in regard to academic planning, school's success, and postsecondary preparation” (p. 8). According to the Educational Research Service (2001), what contributes to lower cumulative achievement is the fact that children from lower socioeconomic environments don’t have summer enrichment programs to get involved in and thus they lose academic ground over the summer in comparison to more affluent

students; summer enrichment is a necessary component of any effort to narrow the achievement gap Educational Research Service (2001).

Rothstein (2004) believes that government could do more to close the achievement gap by narrowing the income gap. Rothstein advocates a number of economically-centered reforms that the public sector could undertake including structured after school activities that will contribute to academic proficiency and Rothstein further believes that summer programs for lower socioeconomic status children should include more summer literacy programs, outdoor excursions, frequent visits to culture centers, and more intercontinental and overseas traveling (Rothstein, 2004).

Student leadership programs. The researcher believed it was most appropriate to add the theme of JROTC into the student leadership programs category, as JROTC is typically a program that fosters student leadership and is an example of a student-led program in which students take the initiative to direct other students in military-style regimens under the supervision of experienced former military officers. Three principals discussed JROTC programs, and three principals mentioned the need to create student leadership programs as a necessary strategy to narrow the African-American achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males.

The literature review did not reveal any theorists who specifically mentioned the need to create student leadership programs on campus (including JROTC) as strategies for narrowing the achievement gap. It must be noted that a study by Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) states that 77 % of teachers surveyed and 71% of principals strongly favored alternative learning environments to reduce the dropout rate yet they did not mention what those “alternative learning environments” were. The authors did mention

that educators felt that these environments would provide at-risk students more choices and a learning environment that would enable a greater degree of success (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006).

Vertical teaming of elementary, middle and high school. Two of the eight principals stated that vertical teaming of curriculum and standards is a necessary strategy for increasing graduation rates for African-American males. Haycock (2002) states that curriculums and standards must be aligned so that expectations are clear as to what should taught be in elementary, middle and high school and those curriculums should also be aligned with jobs that might be in demand in a particular state (Haycock, 2002).

Strengthen personal relationship with the African-American population. Two of the eight principals stated that strengthening personal relationships with the African-American population is a necessary strategy for narrowing the achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males.

The Educational Research Service (2001) states that teachers should become more cognizant of their approach to teaching minority and underprivileged kids teachers so that they do not give the impression that they have low expectations for students who might be under achieving (Educational Research Service, 2001).

Here again Kunjufu (2005) believes that what is needed is more African-American males as role models so that African-American males can make meaningful connections in early grades (Kunjufu, 2005). Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) note that while 65% of the at-risk students they surveyed said there was a staff member or teacher who cared about their success, only 56% of the at-risk students they surveyed said they knew a staff person who they could to for school problems and only 41% said

they had someone in school to discuss their personal with; also, 62% of students surveyed said their school needed to make a greater effort help students with problems outside of school (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006).

Strong attendance policies. Only one of the eight principals stated that having a strong attendance policy was a necessary strategy for narrowing the achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males. According to research by Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) educators (41% of teachers and 50% of principals) also strongly favored mandating a national compulsory school age of 18 and providing the necessary supports for struggling students to help deter students from dropping out. Many states have raised their compulsory school age to 18 over the last few years, coupled with offering support for struggling students.

Conclusions and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of high school administrators in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, Georgia, that have successfully narrowed the achievement gap for high school African-American males as to: (a) why the achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States; (b) what successful strategies they credit for closing the achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and (c) what additional strategies they might consider in order curb the achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools.

The results of the study can be used to guide policy and practice in working with schools that might be underperforming due to their significant African-American male populations. The following conclusions were drawn from the findings related to all eight

subjects and that were most strongly supported by the literature. Findings from the study supported the following four conclusions:

Site-based reforms are strategies needed to increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap of African-American males. All eight principals cited the following needs in order to narrow the achievement gap: to establish clear and focused goals; for improved instruction; for monitoring, accountability, and feedback; for a local plan of improvement; for targeted intervention; and for quality teacher training/professional development. Seven of eight principals cited the need for data assessment as an additional integral strategy. Research by Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) states that 70% at-risk students favored increasing supervision in school and 62% thought that more classroom discipline strategies were necessary and 57% of students surveyed thought that their schools could do more to help students feel safe from violence (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). Edmonds (1979) found that site-based reforms should include a principal who was a strong instructional leader, a school that has an environment that is non-chaotic without being too strict and the a school an environment that fosters high expectation where all children are encouraged to succeed (Edmonds, 1979). Ferguson (2002) noted that curricula need to be tailored to African-American male students:

because there are observable racial and ethnic group gaps in standardized achievement test scores and self-reported differences in comprehension of the content and lessons. In other words, schools should identify and respond to the specific skill and knowledge deficit problems of particular groups. Schools need to provide more educational resources and learning experiences because of student differences in advantages due to their family background. (p. 4)

Wynn (2007) states that school-based support personnel and other non instructional and administrative personnel must have a desire to play an active role in

providing security, encouragement, and mental cultivation of African American males from elementary school through college (Wynn, 2007). In reference to teacher quality the Educational Research Service (2001) and Haycock (2002) argues that higher teacher quality is needed. A lot of educational researchers believe that the most critical reason for the success of students focuses on teacher quality and this is particularly true for at-risk students (Educational Research Service, 2001). Haycock (2002) states that students who attend high-poverty schools are more likely to be taught by under qualified teachers, in all academic subjects (Haycock, 2002). Regarding site-based reforms, Haycock says that knowledgeable teachers, a challenging curriculum aligned with standards, and easily understandable and unrestricted educational standards for what students should learn at all benchmark grade levels are an integral aspect of solving the achievement gap problem (Haycock, 2002). The achievement may greatly improve if teachers can find ways to organize their curricula so that peak the learning interest of minority students (Educational Research Service, 2001).

Mentoring programs that promote self-esteem, encourage African-American males to strive to achieve at the highest academic levels, and encourage them to be productive members of society are strategies needed to increase graduation rates and narrow the achievement gap. All eight principals cited the need to have sustained mentoring programs as a necessary strategy to narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males. Additional strategies could also include strengthening personal relationships with the African-American community (endorsed by two of the eight principals) as well as providing leadership programs that develop personal character (endorsed by three of the eight principals). Two of the eight principals

stated that strengthening personal relationships with the African-American population is a necessary strategy to narrow the African-American male achievement gap. Wynn (2007) states that administrative leaders must be willing to speak on the behalf of African American males within their schools, and school-based academic programs must promote and give students access to a varied amount of personal, intellectual, and artistic development opportunities (Wynn, 2007). Edmonds (1979) says that school must create a school atmosphere where no child is permitted to fail and where learning expectations remain high. Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) state that it is critical to increase the relationship between the school staff and students and those relationships should be a relationship built upon trust so that students know they have an adult in the building whose they can confide in.

Tutorial programs are strategies needed to increase graduation rates and narrow the African-American male achievement gap. These tutorial programs should take place before, during, or after school, and on weekends, whenever possible. Seven of the eight principals cited the need to have tutorial programs as a necessary strategy for narrowing the achievement gap. According to the Educational Research Service (2001) that children from lower socioeconomic background need summer enrichment programs to keep their knowledge base sharp, if not, they are likely to fall academically behind over the summer in comparison to other students from affluent backgrounds, contributing to lower cumulative achievement over many years of schooling (Educational Research Service 2001). Therefore, summer enrichment should be a necessary component in any effort to narrow the achievement gap. Rothstein (2004) advocates a number of economically-centered reforms that the public sector should undertake, including structured, enriching

after school activities and summer programs that contribute to academic proficiency. Haycock (2002) finds that schools should offer extra academic help for students who need it and Haycock says that, presently, sufficient evidence now exist to prove that if children are taught at high levels, they can achieve at high levels, but it is also clear that some require increased amounts of instruction (Haycock, 2002).

All eight principals cited the need to have ongoing parental communication and involvement as a necessary strategy needed to narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males. Wynn (2007) states that on a regular basis parents must inquire about school, the application of something learned in school, and what their sons are planning to do with their lives after school. Bridgeland, DiIulio, and Morison (2006) note that 71% of young people surveyed felt that one of the keys to keep students from dropping out of school was improved communication between the school and parents and increased parental involvement (Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006). In fact, most of literature researched spoke to some form of parent communication as a necessary strategy that should be utilized when trying to narrow the achievement gap.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Based on the findings of the literature review and research study, the researcher offers the following recommendations for policy and practice:

1. *Early intervention at elementary and middle grade levels.* African-American male graduation rates are often affected by what happens in elementary and middle school. Balfanz (as cited in Finkell, 2010) states that “middle schools are a key part of the equation, in fact, 50 % of potential dropouts can be

identified by sixth grade and by ninth grade one can identify 75% of future dropouts” Balfanz (as cited in Finkell, 2010, p. 30).

2. *High quality teachers and higher quality educational resources.* Jim Freeman (as cited in Finkell, 2010), project director of Advancement Project’s Ending the Schoolhouse To Jailhouse Track project, state the that “achievement gaps will persist as long as there is an opportunity gap that prevents students and high poverty areas from receiving equal education” (Freeman, 2010, as cited in Finkell, 2010, p. 29).
3. *Smaller learning communities in the form of charter schools.* Charter schools typically have smaller populations; staff can offer more personalized education, can regulate and enforce more strict dress codes, have longer school days, and can offer more after-school programs. Finkell (2010) states that “among the organizations often cited by educational experts as displaying best practices in lifting up poor and minority children is the Harlem Children’s Zone in New York, which runs two charter schools and after-school programming that provides the kind of wraparound services that Birmingham, Alabama superintendent Craig Witherspoon mentions as necessary and key components in narrowing the African-American male achievement gap” (Finkell, 2010, p. 33). The Harlem Children’s Zone has instituted educational reform strategies such as increasing the length of the school day and school year, instituting on- site after-school homework and tutorial help, providing social work and healthcare assistance (Finkell, 2010). The Harlem Children’s Zone currently has a 90% graduation rate and that 90% enrolled in college and

Marty Lipp, spokesman for the Harlem Children Zone's, said that "the schools are too new to have NAPE data but suspension and expulsion rates are negligible and most students in the charter schools in after school programs are Black and Latinos" (Lipp, 2010, as cited in Finkell, 2010, p. 33).

4. *Integrated connections with social service and community supports.* This should also include programs that offer college and workplace mentorship and real-world experiences so that African-American males are prepared for real-world expectations (McKinsey & Company, 2009).
5. *Continued state accountability to ensure progress in improving student achievement* (Jackson, 2010).

Recommendations for Further Study

Based on the findings of the literature review and research study, the researcher offers the following recommendations for further study:

1. Replicate this study of the high school African-American male achievement gap in other large urban districts, such as the Detroit Public School System, the Newark, New Jersey Public System, or the Fort Bend, Indiana Public School System, and expand the study to focus on African-American students at the middle and elementary school levels.
2. Further explore the common themes that resulted from the analysis of findings in this study to learn more about how each of the reported strategies was designed, implemented, and assessed.
3. Continued comparisons of the education retention rates of K-12 African-American males with their Caucasian male counterparts.

4. Study what impact, if any, charter schools have had on the academic achievement of the K-12 African-American males.

Final Thoughts

No longer is it surprising to know that in American education, African-American children score lower on standardized test, have lower high school graduation rates, and suffer more disciplinary consequences than any other ethnic group. Two recent reports, one from the Counsel of the Great City Schools and one from the American Institute for Research, reveal that the achievement gaps are still large between African-American and white students (Finkell, 2010). Jackson (2010) says that “it is indeed a harsh reality that most states and too many districts do not provide the necessary, targeted resources or supports to enable all students’ educational success” (p. 3). When the U.S. educational system fails to educate African-American males, it doesn’t just affect the African-American subgroup, it affects all aspects of American society.

A 2009 report released by McKinsey & Company entitled *The Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America’s Schools* revealed:

- If the U.S. had closed the achievement gap between its educational achievement levels and those of more successfully performing nations such as Finland and Korea, the U.S. GDP in 2008 could have been \$1 trillion higher, this account for 9 to 16% of overall U.S. GDP;
- If the U.S. had closed the achievement gap between African American and Hispanic student performance and Caucasian student performance had been equally narrowed, the U.S. 2008 GDP would have been between \$310 billion and \$525 billion higher, or 2 to 4% of U.S. GDP (the

significant consequences of this impact will increase in the years to come as the U.S. demographics change and African Americans and Hispanics become a greater proportion of the population and labor force);

- If U.S. had closed the gap between low-income students and the all other groups had been equally narrowed, the U.S. GDP in 2008 would have been \$400 billion to \$670 billion higher, or 3 to 5% of the U.S. GDP; and
- If the achievement gap between America's low-performing states and the rest of the states had been also narrowed, the U.S. GDP in 2008 would have been \$425 billion to \$700 billion higher, or 3 to 5% of the U.S. GDP (McKinsey & Company, 2009, p. 81).

Understanding the importance for America to become globally competitive, and understanding that global competitiveness will only occur with an increase in students who have college degrees, President Barack Obama has set a national goal for the United States to become a global leader in college degree attainment by the year 2020 (Jackson, 2010). In *Yes We Can, The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education and Black Males* (Jackson, 2010) starkly illustrates that “only 47% of Black males graduate from high school—far short of the trajectory and post-secondary credentials needed for our nation to be globally competitive by 2020” (Jackson 2010, p. 3). Jackson further states that the disparities in education that exist have more to do with the unequal distribution of resources and racial policies that are implement in communities that have majority African-American male populations, that the African-American male abilities is no different than any other social group (Jackson, 2010). African-American males are more likely to wind up in prison and than to attend college (Balfanz, as cited in Finkell, 2010;

Jackson, 2010). Strict attention must be given to the current educational state of the Black male in order to stop this continual downward spiral. “Research shows that, from one generation to the next, equitable access to high-performing public educational systems can break down the barriers to success and change the future trajectory of historically disadvantaged students” (Canada, as cited in Jackson, 2010, p. 4). Jackson (2010) states that “providing all students a fair opportunity to learn is critical for the goals of universal educational reform, consistent academic progress, increased participation in democratic society, and global leadership in a knowledge-based economy” (p. 3). Jackson further states that “we cannot, as a nation, achieve those goals while Black male students continue to be concentrated in schools and classrooms where there are few opportunities for them to excel” (p. 3).

The reasons for the Black- White achievement gap are complicated and are not always easily understood. Some researchers place the achievement gap into two distinct categories: (1) factors relative to students’ income, cultural environment, and family conditions, and (2) factors relative to the schools that students attend (Jencks, 1998; Rothstein, 2004; Yeung & Conley, 2008). Some of the more common solutions examined by this researcher were curriculum reform at the state and local levels, improved teacher training, updated facilities and resources, better understanding of cultural needs, more mentoring and outreach programs, and more parental involvement. The researcher’s objective was to provide educators, legislators, and community activists with data that might further aid the effort to close the achievement and increase the academic performance of the African-American males. The researcher further hopes that the results

of the study might be used to guide policy and practice in working with schools that might be underperforming due to their significant African-American male populations.

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APPENDIX A

Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

TO: _____

FROM: Darren L. Henderson

DATE: Month, Day, Year

SUBJECT: Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study

I would like your permission to conduct a research study at _____ High School as part of my doctoral dissertation at Pepperdine University. I am researching high schools that have successfully narrowed the achievement gap over the past three years and _____ High School of _____ County has been identified as such.

The purposes of this study are to examine the perceptions of school administrators of high schools in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, Georgia that have successfully closed the achievement gap for high school African-American males as to: (a) why the achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States; (b) what successful strategies do they credit for closing the achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and: (c) what additional strategies might they consider to curb the achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools.

The study will focus on principals' perceptions regarding specific strategies that have contributed to/ or that could be implemented in an effort to consistently narrow the African-American achievement gap. Once key practices are identified, the themes will provide recommendations for other schools striving to narrow the African-American academic achievement gap an increase graduation rates for African-American males. Your district's participation in the study will contribute to knowledge and practices surrounding sustaining academic achievement growth in high schools that have enrollments of 10, 000 or more African-American males.

If the school's principal agrees to participate, the principal will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview regarding the school's practices that contributed to sustained achievement growth.

The interview will take place in person at the convenience of the site principal. I will tape record the interviews and transcribe the notes to ensure accuracy. Participant's identities will remain confidential and the interview notes and recordings will not be shared with others. The interview notes will be examined for common themes and used to identify principals' perceptions of practices that contribute to sustainable growth.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participants who decide to participate are free to withdraw their consent or discontinue participation at any time. A copy of the informed consent and the interview protocol are attached for your information..

Please sign and return your approval by Month Day, 2010. If you are unable to respond by that date, please send this approval as soon as possible.

Please return one copy of this signed form to:

Darren L. Henderson

XXXXXXXXXX

XXXXXXXXXX

You may also email the signed form to XXXXXXXXXXXX. If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at XXXXXXXXXXXX or email XXXXXXXXXXXX. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, you may also contact the researcher's supervisor Dr. Linda Purrington at XXXXXXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXXXX.

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

Respectfully,

Darren L. Henderson

Attachments:

Copy of Superintendent or Designee Permission to Conduct Study;

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities;

Principal Interview Protocol and Questions

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

School District

Superintendent or Designee Signature

Please Print Superintendent or Designee's Name

Date

APPENDIX B

Cover Letter for Principal Informed Consent

TO:

FROM: Darren L. Henderson

DATE:

SUBJECT: Research Request

I am researching high schools in _____ County that have shown significant progress in increasing graduation rates and in narrowing the African-American achievement gap for the past three years as part of my doctoral dissertation at Pepperdine University.

The purposes of this study are to examine the perceptions of school administrators of high schools in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, Georgia that have successfully closed the achievement gap for high school African-American males as to: (a) why the achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States; (b) what successful strategies do they credit for closing the achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and: (c) what additional strategies might they consider to curb the achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools.

Your school's participation in the study will contribute to knowledge and practices surrounding sustaining successes in narrowing the African-American achievement gap districts with large enrollments of African-American males.

If you agree to participate, you or your designee will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute personal interview regarding the school's practices that contributed to sustained achievement growth. The interview will take place over the phone and scheduled at your convenience. I will tape record the interviews and transcribe the notes to ensure accuracy. Participant's identities will remain confidential and the interview notes and recordings will not be shared with others. The interview notes will be examined for common themes and used to identify principals' perceptions of practices that contribute to sustainable successful strategies needed to narrow the African-American achievement gap.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate you are free to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time. A copy of the informed consent and the interview protocol are attached for your review.

I will contact you in the next week to answer any questions you may have and to schedule an interview time.

You will be asked to return one copy of the signed consent form prior to the in-person interview to:

Darren L. Henderson
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX

You may also email the signed form to XXXXXXXXXXXX. If you have any questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me at XXXXXXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXXXX. If you have any additional questions or concerns regarding this study, you may also contact the researcher's supervisor Dr. Linda Purrington at XXXXXXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXXXX.

Respectfully,

Darren L. Henderson

Attachments:

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities;
Principal Interview Protocol and Questions.

APPENDIX C

Request to Participate Phone Call Protocol

I will follow the following steps to answer the following questions when contacting a principal to schedule an interview.

1. Review why their school was selected and the purpose of the study.
2. Information regarding the interview procedures found in the informed consent.
3. Answer any questions they have.
4. Ask to schedule an interview.
5. Ask participants to sign and return the informed consent prior to the interview.

APPENDIX D

Informed Consent for Participation in Research Activities

Participant: _____

Principal Investigator: Darren L. Henderson

Title of Project: Examining The Perceptions Of Gwinnett And Cobb County Georgia

Principals To Determine The Strategies Needed To Improve Performance And

Graduation Rates For African – American Males In Metropolitan U.S. Schools

1. I, _____, agree to participate in the dissertation research study conducted by doctoral student Darren L. Henderson, from the Educational Leadership and Policy Program at Pepperdine University. I understand that I may contact Mr. Darren Henderson's dissertation chair person Dr. Linda Purrington at 310-258-2568 or linda.purrington@pepperdine.edu if I have any questions or concerns regarding the study.
2. The purposes of this study are to examine the perceptions of school administrators of high schools in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, Georgia that have successfully closed the achievement gap for high school African American males as to: (a) why the achievement gap continues to occur in other metropolitan high schools in the United States; (b) what successful strategies do they credit for closing the achievement gap of African-American males at their respective schools; and: (c) what additional strategies might they consider to curb the achievement gap for African-American males at their respective schools.
3. I understand that my participation will involve one 45-60 minute interview regarding school wide practices that sustain academic achievement growth.
4. My participation in the study will be from the date listed above to August 30, 2011. The interview shall be conducted in person and tape recorded in order to ensure the accuracy of the interview notes. The researcher will convert the audio files to written text and will use the interview content to identify principal's perceptions of practices that contribute to sustainability of achievement growth.
5. I understand that the possible benefits to my self or society from the research are increased knowledge about practices surrounding sustaining academic achievement growth and the necessity to increase graduation rates for the African-American males' subgroup in metropolitan American high schools. I understand that I may not benefit at all from my participation.

6. I understand that the researcher will work with me to ensure there is minimal risk, discomfort, and inconvenience, identifying and addressing any concerns I may have. I understand that harm to human subjects is not limited to physical injury, and that there are certain risks and discomforts that might be associated with research. These risks include: psychological, social, economic, and legal risks. Physical risks may be fatigue. Psychological risks may include boredom, embarrassment, and anxiety. I believe the risks of this study are minimized and are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits of the study. I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question, and to discontinue participation at any time.
7. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to participate and or withdraw my consent and discontinue participation in the project or any activity at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I also understand that the researcher may find it necessary to end my participation in this study.
8. I understand that the investigator(s) will take all reasonable measures to protect the confidentiality of my records and my identity will not be revealed in any publication that may result from this project. The confidentiality of my records will be maintained in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. Under Georgia law, there are exceptions to confidentiality, including suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused, or if an individual discloses an intent to harm him/herself or others.
9. If the findings of the study are published or presented to a professional audience, no personally identifying information will be released. I understand that the interviews will be tape recorded only with my permission prior to each interview. The raw data gathered will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and transcribed interviews will be stored in locked file cabinets to which only the investigator will have access. The possibility exists that the data may be used in future research. If this is the case, the data will be used without any personally identifying information so that I cannot be identified, and the use of the data will be supervised by the investigator listed above. The raw data will be maintained in a secure manner for three years at which time the raw data will be destroyed. I do not anticipate the need to share un-coded data with others, and would do so only with your permission.
10. I understand that the investigator is willing to answer any inquiries I may have concerning the research herein described. I understand that I may contact Darren L. Henderson at XXXXXXXXXXXX or XXXXXXXXXXXX, if I have other questions or concerns about this research. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact Dr. Linda Purrington, Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology, 6100 Center Dr. 5th Floor, Los Angeles CA, 90045. If I have questions about my rights as a research

participant, I may contact Dr. Yuying Tsong, chairperson of the Pepperdine University Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB) at XXXXXXXXXXXX.

11. I will be informed of any significant new findings developed during the course of my participation in this research which may have a bearing on my willingness to continue in the study.
12. I understand I will not receive any compensation, financial or otherwise, for participating in this study.
13. I understand to my satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have received a copy of this informed consent form which I have read and understand.

I hereby consent to participate in the research described above.

Participant's Signature

Date

Witness

Date

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

Principal Investigator

Date

APPENDIX E

Principal Interview Protocol and Questions

I will review the following information prior to our interview

You have been chosen for this study because this high school has demonstrated a consistent increase of graduation rates for its African-American male population over the past three years.

I will be conducting research regarding your perception of practices that may contribute to successful strategies used to increase graduation rates and consistently narrow the achievement gap for African-American males in large metropolitan area school districts.

I will be conducting one 45-60 minute interview with you. I will record notes of our conversation during the interview and the interview will be tape recorded with your permission.

I will not be excessive in demands and will be sensitive to your needs. I will attempt to be the least disruptive as possible.

The findings will be published and shared with the educational community.

I assure you of confidentiality that names will not be used in the manuscript, and individual identities will be disguised through coding of data. No one will have access to the transcriptions, recordings, and field notes except me.

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with the researcher or your school or district.

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty.

Original documents and recordings of interviews will be safeguarded and not shared with others. They will be stored for three years, after which they will be destroyed.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Interview Questions

The purposes of this study are to examine the perceptions of school administrators of high schools in Gwinnett and Cobb Counties, Georgia that have successfully closed the achievement gap for high school African-American males. During this interview I would like you to think about the specific practices implemented at your school that helped narrow the achievement gap and increase graduation rates for African-American males.

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

1. How long have you been employed or directly involved in the field of education and in your district
2. How long have you been a principal or administrator in your current district who has direct knowledge concerning strategies that were implemented to improve graduation rates or narrow the African-American achievement gap?
3. What percent of the students at your current high school are African-American males?
4. To what degree has your graduation rate increased for African-American male students at your high school over the recent 2 or 3 year period and beyond?

Core interview questions:

1. What specific programs or strategies, instructional or otherwise, have been instituted at your school in an effort to narrow the African-American achievement gap and to increase graduation rates for African-American males i.e. climate? Prompts: What programs or strategies have been most successful and why? What programs or strategies have been least successful and why? What role might school administrators and teachers play in the process?
2. What might be some further extracurricular or community-based strategies undertaken by teachers, administrators, and or districts that can be used to narrow the African-American achievement gap? Prompts: What are your thoughts about connecting children with adults and peers as part of an extended mentoring and nurturing community? How might students be helped to cope with social forces to help them behave in ways that enable learning?
3. Based upon your overall experience in managing a school that has consistently narrowed the achievement gap and increased the graduation rates of African-American males for the past three years, what might be some further strategies undertaken by middle and elementary schools? Prompt: if yes, where and what were the results of any of these strategies?
4. What programs have been instituted by the state, that you are aware of, that are specific to narrowing the African-American achievement gap and

increasing graduation rates for African-American males? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

5. How might the federal government assist school districts with populations of over 10,000 or more African-American male enrollment in narrowing the achievement gap? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?
6. What are your perceptions of increasing federal funds in an effort to increase educational funding for programs that are directly designed to close the African-American achievement gap, i.e. health clinics located directly inside schools that provide free dental care and or prenatal clinics in urban areas as well as after-school summer tutorial programs, summer enrichment programs that include trips to museums, and or parenting classes that teach parents how to assist their children or children with homework? Prompts: Are you aware of any efforts of this type currently underway? If so, where, and what are the results?

APPENDIX F

Suggested Practices for Reducing the Academic Achievement Gap

Table F1

Suggested Practices for Closing the Academic Achievement Gap in Public High Schools in Metropolitan Areas

Author/ Study	Theme 1: Use of family resources, including income, in ways that strengthen capacity for successful parenting	Theme 2: The avoidance of isolating children into racial groups in schools that serve only students similar to themselves.	Theme 3: The use of mentors, coaches and other school liaisons as effective mentors and community role models for African-American males.	Theme 4: The use of federal, state, and local taxes to create programs and curriculum that close the income gap.
Balfanz & Legters, 2004			Increased personalization and student outreach	High standards, intensive instructional programs: improved teacher quality, professional development, and teacher support. Engaging school programs, and strengthened connections between high schools and colleges.
Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Balfanz, 2009	Endorsed increasing parental outreach		More parental and mentor involvement	Creating Alternative Learning Creating state reforms to reduce the dropout rate Environments, smaller classes and schools, more hands-on learning that connects the classroom to real-world experiences, stronger early warning systems

(table continues)

Author/ Study	Theme 1: Use of family resources, including income, in ways that strengthen capacity for successful parenting	Theme 2: The avoidance of isolating children into racial groups in schools that serve only students similar to themselves.	Theme 3: The use of mentors, coaches and other school liaisons as effective mentors and community role models for African- American males.	Theme 4: The use of federal, state, and local taxes to create programs and curriculum that close the income gap.
Bridgeland, DiIulio, & Morison, 2006	Improve the communication between parents and schools		Ensure that students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school	<p>Improve teacher curriculum to make instruction more relevant for students</p> <p>Improve instruction, and access to supports, for struggling students.</p> <p>Build a school climate that fosters academics</p>
Edmonds, 1979				<p>A principal who was a strong instructional leader</p> <p>An atmosphere that is orderly without being rigid or pretentious.</p> <p>A climate of high expectations in which no children are permitted to fall below minimal levels</p>
Educational Research Service, 2001		Having high expectations for all students		<p>Cultural congruence in instruction (when teachers can find ways to structure their curricula so they tap into their minority students' stores of knowledge, their achievement may improve dramatically).</p> <p>Teaching strategies that promote meaningful participation</p> <p>Higher teacher quality</p> <p>Summer enrichment programs</p>

(table continues)

Author/ Study	Theme 1: Use of family resources, including income, in ways that strengthen capacity for successful parenting	Theme 2: The avoidance of isolating children into racial groups in schools that serve only students similar to themselves.	Theme 3: The use of mentors, coaches and other school liaisons as effective mentors and community role models for African- American males.	Theme 4: The use of federal, state, and local taxes to create programs and curriculum that close the income gap.
Ferguson, 2002	Provide more educational resources and learning experiences because of student differences in advantages due to their family background		Because students value and respond to encouragement, teachers need to provide it routinely	Schools should identify and respond to specific skill and knowledge deficit problems of particular groups.
Haycock, 2001				Increasing Federal tax dollars to create practice programs to train teachers. Clear and public standards for what students should learn at benchmark grade levels A challenging curriculum aligned with standards Extra academic help for students who need it
Jencks & Phillips, 1998	Improve students living conditions. Persistent poverty are more likely than other students to suffer from many conditions that impede their learning			
Kunjufu, 2005		Create gender based classes for African- American boys to increase self esteem		

(table continues)

Author/ Study	Theme 1: Use of family resources, including income, in ways that strengthen capacity for successful parenting	Theme 2: The avoidance of isolating children into racial groups in schools that serve only students similar to themselves.	Theme 3: The use of mentors, coaches and other school liaisons as effective mentors and community role models for African- American males.	Theme 4: The use of federal, state, and local taxes to create programs and curriculum that close the income gap.
Ogbu, 2003	Provide academically successful role models from multicultural environments'. Parents also need to be helped in working with teachers to monitor and effectively enhance their children's academic progress	Improved students self esteem may lead to greater efforts to learn		Provide supplementary education programs using the resources of for-profit and non-profit community-based organizations to create a parallel educational system;
Rothstein, 2004	Community based programs that teach parents how to be effective role models. School community clinics Early Childhood Education After school programs			Increasing Federal tax dollars to create social programs that promote health and wellness in schools. Subsidized housing for lower class families with high mobility rates.
Thernstrom & Thernstrom, 2003				Improve students living conditions. Persistent poverty are more likely than other students to suffer from many conditions that impede their learning
Wynn, 2007	Parents must be actively involved in the academic, social, spiritual, and physical development		Improved communications between parents and schools	
Yeung & Conley, 2008				Improve students living conditions. Persistent poverty are more likely than other students to suffer from many conditions that impede their learning

APPENDIX G

Thank You Letter

To: XXXXXXXXXXXX
From: Darren L. Henderson
Date: TBD
Subject: Thank You Letter

Dear XXXXXXXXX,

Thank you for your participation in my doctoral study on examining successful strategies needed to narrow the achievement gap and increasing graduation rates for African-American males. The analysis of the principal interviews is designed to identify several significant themes regarding sustainability that you may be interested in and upon completion of the research; I will be more than willing to share my findings and conclusions.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this research study. It was a pleasure meeting you and hearing your perspective on improving student achievement.

Sincerely,

Darren L Henderson