SCHOOL FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ACADEMIC SUCCESS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS ATTENDING AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN VIRGINIA.

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ABSTRACT

The issues regarding the lack of academic progress of African American boys prompted Garibaldi (2007) to declare that the African American male continues to fall behind all racial groups, even his female counterpart, on educational performance measures or assessments and in graduation rates. Davis (2009) stated that the literature regarding the academic experiences of elementary aged African American boys in an urban school setting is rather sparse. With the knowledge that the African American male is falling behind his female counterpart, what can we do to ensure that we begin to look at the factors that contribute to the success of those finding academic success, especially those at the elementary level?

This qualitative study used an exploratory study approach to explore the school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys in urban elementary schools. The researcher employed two face-to-face interviews with each of the 11 fifth grade African American boys identified as academically successful. Data collection included a review of students' archival, academic, and attendance records to establish a framework of each child's overall academic performance beyond the sample summative Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments administered in grades three, four, and five at the elementary level. The results of this study indicated that the success of African American boys in an urban elementary school is impacted by peer influence, teacher attitudes, environmental suitability within the school, and personal accountability of the participants themselves.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of the Problem

Researchers such as Harris and Marsh (2010), Solberg, Carlstrom, Howard and Jones (2007), and Ogbu and Simmons (1998), have investigated the underachievement of African American males in schools. In 2009, Hakim Rashid published an article in the *Journal of Negro Education entitled*, "From brilliant baby to child placed at risk: The perilous path of African American boys in early childhood education." Davis (2003) declared that the plight of African American boys in schools demands much more focus. Davis (2003) suggested we rethink why African American boys with similar demographic backgrounds and shared schooling environments have different academic outcomes. Authors such as Thomas (2008) believe there are school factors that are contributing to the academic success or failures of African American boys in schools (Rashid, 2009; Thomas, 2008; & Davis, 2003). This study documented some of the successful school practices and school factors contributing to African American boys' elementary school success.

Public Law PL 107-110 also known as No Child Left Behind (2001) proposed that every child can learn and schools are to be held accountable to ensure that learning occurs. Nevertheless the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) mandate combined with the documented difference in the achievement of African American boys in particular have influenced more research into the academic performance of African American males at almost all levels of their academic career. Jackson & Moore (2008) confirmed that since 2001, the African American male has resurfaced as a topic of interest in educational studies. Over the past decade, the underachievement of African American boys has been a major topic of discussion leading to the development of a deficit model to explain why African American boys as a group are underperforming academically. Researchers such as Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson (2011) have explored this deficit and its consequences. One major resulting theme of these studies has been labeled the prison pipeline. Wald & Losen (2003) wrote extensively about what they identified as a pipeline for African American boys, especially those in urban settings, where they seem to go on a direct trajectory from preschool to the penitentiary. Wald & Losen (2003) supported the view that based on the current United States census and the

number of people incarcerated, there is a disproportionate number of African American boys underperforming, dropping out of school, and being sent to prison.

The persistent underachievement of African American boys has become such a pronounced problem that African American boys continue to be a topic of interest (Jackson and Moore, 2008). An example of this ongoing interest is the Palmer, Davis, & Hilton (2009) study of African American males in Historically Black Colleges (HBC). They found that the African American male is not keeping pace with his female counterpart. Thus, this problem of the underperforming African American male, compounded by the national cry for public school accountability, has once again placed the African American male as a primary topic in the discussion of public education reform. Davis (2003) argued that there is irony in the fact that much of the attention highlighting and trying to understand the underachievement of African American boys actually hinders deeper understanding of why some African American males are more successful than others.

In this era of accountability, schools and states have been under pressure to improve student achievement. Educators in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the task of accountability took on additional role when the Commonwealth, attempted to address the growing number of schools failing to meet the NCLB Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). Consequently, the Commonwealth opted to accept a flexibility waiver to the NCLB in 2012 (Virginia Department of Education Information, 2013). According to Virginia Department of Education information (VDOE, 2013), Virginia took steps to replace the AYP benchmarks of NCLB with Annual Measure Objectives (AMOs). These AMOs are Virginia's criteria for assessing school divisions' performance toward reducing the gaps between low performing and high performing schools and among ethnic groups. This waiver replaced the AYP with AMO gap groups. The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) defined the three proficiency gap groups as follows:

Proficiency Gap Group one- Students with a disability, Limited English Proficiency (LEP), Students who are economically disadvantaged, regardless of race.

Proficiency Gap Group two- African American, not of Hispanic origin, including those also counted in gap group one.

Proficiency Gap Group three- Hispanic students, of one or more races, including those in gap group one.

Proficiency Gap Group two, which is Black students, has lower baseline AMO benchmark expectations in reading and mathematics than its White and Asian counterparts. The VDOE stated that they established the varied AMO baselines based on how students' in each of the sub groups performed on the 2011-2012 mathematics SOL assessment, and the 2010-2011 reading SOL assessment. According to the Virginia Standards Of Learning (SOL) gap group AMO, at least 51% of African American students must score proficient or above on the state mathematics SOL exam for a school to meet the AMO requirements for the 2013-2014 school year, 56% for the 2014-2015 school year, 62% for the 2015-2016 school year, and 67% for the 2016-2017 school year. Simultaneously, White students are expected to have a pass rate of at least 69% for the 2013-2014 school year, 70% for the 2014-2015 school year, 71% for the 2015-2016 school year, and 72% for the 2016-2017 school year. Hispanic students are expected to perform at 56% for the 2013-2014 school year, reaching a 69% for the 2016-2017 school year. Asian students are expected to perform at least 80% for the 2013-2014 school year (VDOE, 2013). The AMO benchmarks in reading show similar gaps in the performance expected outcomes. This difference in baseline expectation is a starting point that must eventually be overcome, with each sub group ultimately achieving a 100% pass rate on the state assessment. With this in mind, it is essential that educators acknowledge that there is an achievement gap and that they are aware of the theories about why this gap exists. It is equally essential that researchers explore the best practices that are contributing to the success of African American males. Davis (2003) believed that in order for us to overcome such gaps and obstacles, we must study the high achievers, as well as identify the effective teaching strategies, school structures, and student attitudes that are effective in producing desired outcomes.

According to NCLB, states receiving Title I funds must participate in the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) assessments (Ed. Gov, 2013). Therefore, public schools' performances on NAEP assessments appear to be the most accurate source of comparison at this time. According to NAEP, which was created by Congress in 1969 to regularly test national representative samples of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders, there have

been significant educational gains for all students since the organization began collecting data. NAEP (2009) reported that between 1950 and 2005, the graduation rate of individuals between the ages of 25 and 29 rose from 53 percent to 86 percent overall. This gain continued for all students through 2011 (NAEP, 2011).

Despite NCLB and its AYP requirements, the gap between African American and White students remains. Lee (2006) in a study tracking the achievement gap and the impact of NCLB, concluded that NCLB had helped in significantly narrowing the achievement gap. This same study found that racial and socioeconomic achievement gaps in the NAEP reading and mathematics achievement persist after NCLB. The racial and socioeconomic gaps have been the subject of numerous programs and research trying to answer the questions and find solutions. NAEP (2009) reported that although the growth in overall high school graduation from 1950 to 2005 is impressive, the percentage for White students improved from 56 percent to 93 percent, while African American students increased from 24 to 86 percent. This shows a seven percentage point gap in 2005, which has decreased by 32 percentage point since 1950. NAEP (2011) data show this achievement gap continues to be a concern for our nation. Additionally, in 2003 Thernstorm & Thernstorm reported that NAEP data show that African American twelfth graders score lower than White eighth graders in core contents such as reading, mathematics, United States history, and geography. According to the NAEP (2011), Fourth Grade Mathematics Assessment, student scores improved for all ethnic groups. However, for students in the 75th percentile group, 72% were White and only 5% were African Americans. On the other hand, of the students in the lower 25th percentile, 31% were White and 28% African American (NAEP 2011). So in the lower performing group, African American and White students are almost on par with only a three percentage point difference. The absence of a large gap in the lower performing tier of African American students shows that African American students are indeed achieving, but they are more often achieving at the proficient level instead of achieving at the higher performance level. In mathematics, there remains on average a 25 point gap between the scaled scores of African American and the scaled scores of White students, with White students scoring on average 249 scaled score and African Americans scoring on average 224 scaled score.

Lee (2006) concluded that although states' NCLB compliance assessments tend to show improvements and an overall decreased gap, it is important to look at how student performance on these assessments measure up to the NAEP, which is the only national comparison. An example of this continued achievement gap despite state reported decrease is displayed in the 2007 NAEP report. According to that report, the eighth grade disaggregated data examining the 75th percentile and the 25th percentile closely resembled data from the fourth grade assessments. However, the overall gap widened to 31 percentage points in eighth grade mathematics. Reading is similar to the fourth grade mathematics, with 71% of the students in the 75th percentile being White while only 7% were African Americans. Again this shows a noticeable gap when looking at more than overall achievement, but rather at the level and quality of that achievement. Of the students in the 25th percentile, 33% were White and 25% African Americans. Overall there is a 25 percentage point gap between the scaled scores of African American students and the scaled scores of White students on the fourth grade reading assessment (NAEP 2007). Therefore, it is important that we examine the performance of those African American students performing in the 25th percentile to learn what might account for their success.

According to NAEP (2007) only 12 % of the nations' fourth graders can read proficiently at the fourth grade level. Based on the composition of the group as a whole, African Americans are disproportionately represented among these fourth graders making up a very small portion of the 12% proficient readers. The NAEP report (2009) indicated that although scores have increased dramatically for both African American and White students, African American students fail to perform as well as their White counterparts. With a closer look at the elementary students' performance in the 2013 NAEP report, there is an increase in the performance of both White and Black students on fourth grade mathematics assessment. A gap still exists with White students showing a scale score of 250 and Blacks showing a scale score of 224 (NAEP, 2013). A similar pattern exists on the fourth grade reading assessment. According to the 2013 NAEP report, White fourth grade students are reporting a scale score of 232, while their Black counterparts were reporting a 206 scale score on the fourth grade reading assessment. Overall, a finding of the Civil Rights Project report of 2006 was that based on NAEP reports, NCLB did not have a significant impact on improving student

performance in reading and mathematics. According to this report, performance on NAEP assessments either remained flat or grew at a pace similar to growth experienced before NCLB.

Education Trust (2003) also asserted that 12% of African American fourth graders reach proficiency or advanced level in reading. This same report shows 61% of African American students perform below basic level on the eighth grade mathematics assessments, in comparison to only 21% of their White counterparts. They further stated that by the end of the twelfth grade, African American students' performance in mathematics and science was comparable to the eighth grade performance of their White peers. These numbers are compounded when examining the intra-racial gap between African American boys and African American females. According to a study by Dallmann-Jones (2002), there is a significant disparity between the achievement of African American boys and African American females. They found that African American boys are overly represented in the numbers of African American failures. This was supported by Perkins-Gough (2007), who noted that if the high stakes assessments are attached to sanctions and rewards being determined by the performance of minority students, then it is crucial that educators get it right regardless of barriers previously identified.

Overview of the Study

This study explored the perception of a purposeful sample of grade 5 elementary African American boys attending an urban elementary school in Southeastern Virginia, with regard to the school factors they believed contributed to their academic success. The sample included African American boys who exhibited academic success as defined by their success on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessments in grade 3 and 4, who have been in attendance at the same urban school for at least three years, and who were enrolled as a general education student not receiving special education services. The criteria guiding the selection of participants for the study was provided to the school division. Qualitative data was collected through two face to face interviews with each of the eleven participants to gain participant's personal perception of school factors each participant identified as directly contributing to their academic success.

Statement of Problem

According to Honora (2002), African American boys are more prone to academic failure than African American female counterpart and White students. This deficit model data around the academic progress of African American boys has led to the assumption that America's public schools are universally failing African American boys. However, Whiting (2006) cautioned that despite the negative picture being painted by the deficit model, some schools are fostering success with African Americans. This success contradicts the tendency to see African American boys as a group that is prone to produce underachievers. Carter (2008) calls our attention to the educational accomplishments of countless African Americans as proof that negates the theories depicting African American students as underperformers.

The disparity between African American males and White males continues to be a relevant and frequent topic of discussion. Carter (2008) argued that studies on the disparity in academic accomplishments of African Americans and Whites lack in-depth examination of how these specific factors impact African American students' individual identities and shape African American attitudes and beliefs about school. For instance in a 2007 study, Corprew & Cunningham, found that of 68 participating black students between the age of 13 and 18 with a median age of 15 found that 68% of them felt that their teachers wanted the best for them.

To combat the focus on explaining why African American boys are not performing, Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen, and Sellers (2009) recommended that we should not take the approach of seeing African American boys as a broken group, but rather see them as a group with unique assets and challenges to foster their academic success. It was further suggested that not all African American students are oppositional or disengaged from academics or respond similarly, the dominant culture (Neblett et al. 2009; Carter, 2008). This is in direct opposition to the over generalization of the plight and underperformance of African American boys. Some African American boys are experiencing academic success (Carter, 2008).

Grimmett (2010) stated that African American boys who are interested and engaged should not be seen as exceptional, but should be used as models or predictable outcome expectations for caregivers, educators, other helping professionals, and adults. Although in disproportionate numbers when compared to their overall school enrollment numbers, African American boys are meeting with academic success in all levels of compulsory and post compulsory education. In order to fully understand the academic resilience the African

American boy needs to be able to navigate an urban school, educators must make a shift from what is not working to focus on what is working (Foy, 2010; Grimmett, 2010). Since school personnel act as caregivers within the school environment and structure, this study sought to examine the school factors that positively impact the achievement of the African American boys attending urban elementary schools.

Significance of Study

Through documenting the first hand experiences of fifth grade African American boys in an urban elementary school, this study will assist school leaders with specific examples that can help guide the implementation of effective practices to foster increased academic success for African American boys in urban elementary schools. Recommended changes in practices and policies will help to eliminate the achievement gap between African American boys and others by increasing the number of high achieving African American boys as a group and to increase the number of African American boys performing beyond the basic proficient standard. This information will serve to assist school leaders in the disruption of the school to prison pipeline noted by Wald and Losen (2003). The study also argued that with more punitive school actions towards students of color and more laws enacted making it easier to try juveniles as adults, more and more African American are being held in secure detention facilities for nonviolent offenses. Research also noted that in 2000 although African American students made up 17 percent of the students population, they accounted for 34 percent of those suspended from school (Wald and Losen, 2003). To highlight the problem further, Wald and Losen (2003) concluded that while students of color made up one-third of the country's adolescent population, they accounted for two-third of the youths confined to detention and or correctional placement. It is this racial disparity in both the school and judicial system that encourages the connection of the two, hence the crafting of terms such as *prison track* and *school-to-prison pipeline.*

Cook-Sather (2006) pointed out that despite the importance of student outcomes in deciding educational reforms, practices and policies, very few opportunities exist for students' voices to be heard. Davis (2009) concluded that the perspective of African American elementary boys is sparsely represented in the current literature. Therefore, since the academic career is one of cumulative effort, identifying these factors early should impact positive change

at the elementary school level. According to Foy (2010), students in the fourth grade begin to withdraw interest in school related activities. Foy (2010) identified this phenomenon as the "Fourth grade syndrome failure."

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative study is to identify school factors contributing to the academic success of African American boys in an urban elementary school. Recent research provides a grim outlook regarding the academic success of African American boys (Solberg, Charlsrom, & Jones, 2007). The achievement gap between African Americans and Whites in particular has been researched and studied by many scholars and experts, such as Kunjufu and Ogbu, all seeking to identify factors contributing to the gap. Some deficit model researchers such as Kunjufu and Ogbu have painted a more specific picture of the concerns regarding the underperformance of African American boys. According to Lewin (2006) fewer than half of the African American boys who start high school actually reach completion. Coard, Foy-Watson, Zimmer, & Wallace (2007) believed that studying the successes of the African American youth is just as important as studying the failures. Researchers such as Harris & Graves (2010) believe that the documentation of the negative outcome of African American boys in reading is plentiful, and some attention must be placed on what works. Therefore, in an effort to increase the number of African American boys reaching completion it is necessary to identify the factors that do contribute to the success African American boys in general. Garibaldi (2007) and Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson (2011) concluded, even within the ethnic group there is an achievement gap between the African American male and the African American female. Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson (2011) in a quantitative study of 96 African American high school students in Houston, Texas, found that there is some disparity in regards to the academic performance of African American males and females. Garibaldi (2007) concluded from a study in New Orleans that African American males are falling behind their female counterparts on educational performance measures, including graduation rates from high school, college acceptance, and graduation from college.

Justification for the Study

This study can contribute to the research on African America males in urban elementary school settings. The data collected can provide researchers with a better understanding of the school factors that can contribute to the success of a population documented as being at risk.

Qualitative Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were

1. What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for their achievement at an urban elementary schools?

2. What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for hindering further achievement at an urban elementary schools?

Conceptual Framework

The intent of the study was to identify school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys. Current research indicates that there are multiple factors contributing to the success of African American males. This study, however, focused solely on school factors that fall within the influence of school administrators.
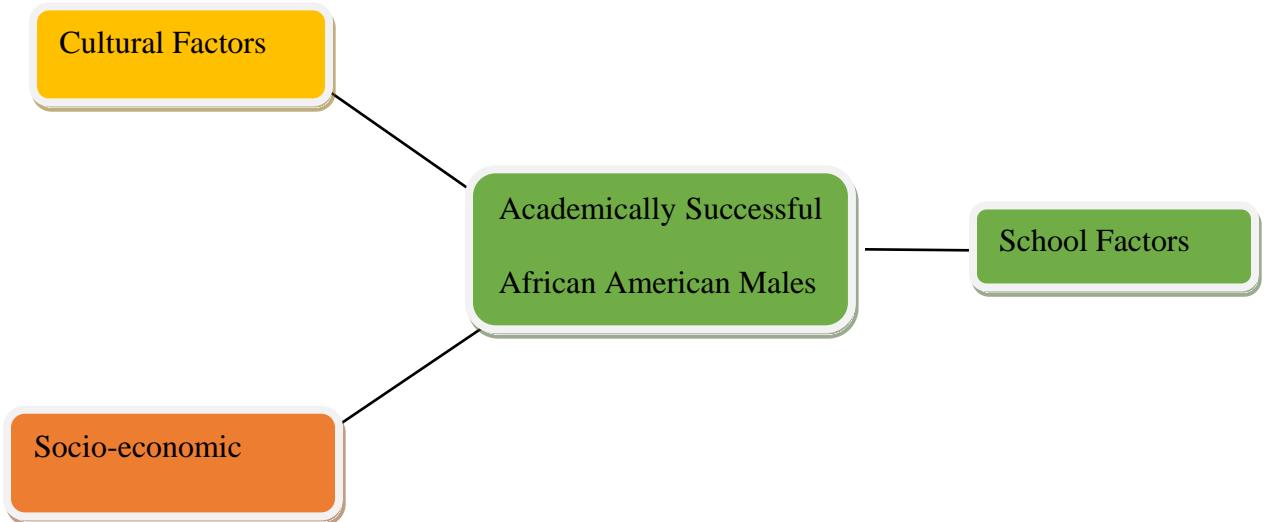
Figure 1. A model to describe the factors impacting academic success.

Definition of Terms

Annual Measure of Objective (AMO) - The AMO represents the percentage of students in each subgroup that must pass the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests in reading and mathematics in order to make acceptable progress over a six-year period. All schools must meet them to remain fully accredited.

Standards of Learning (SOLs). The standards of learning are established minimum learning expectations for students attending Virginia Public Schools. These expectations represent what students should know by the end of each grade level in all content areas. At the elementary level, students demonstrate proficiency on these assessments in grades 3, 4 and 5 (Virginia Department of Education, 2013).

African American- The 2010 United States Census defines African American as a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.

Limitations

The findings from this study were limited to the sample from which the data were collected. Within the scope of the study, the age of the participants was perceived to be a study limitation. Davis (2009) identified participants' memory distortion as a limitation due to the

need to rely on the ability of participants to accurately recall. This research found that to be a valid concern, especially with participants who attended multiple schools before enrolling in the research site. Another limitation to this study was the size of the sample. This prevents generalization of the findings.

De-limitation

The study involved collection of qualitative data from eleven African American 5th grade boys in an urban elementary school in South Eastern Virginia. The researcher explored the perceptions of the eleven participants about school factors they believed contributed to their academic success. Therefore, the researcher chose not to interview parents or teachers, and only included interview questions specific to school and their perceptions of these factors in school. The role of the researcher within the school division allowed for a quick connection with participants.

Organization of the Study

In this chapter, the researcher presented an introduction to the literature and concepts around factors that might influence the academic success of African American males in general but specifically African American boys. The purpose was identified and school factors that contribute or impact the academic success of African American males were explored. Chapter 2 highlights a review of relevant literature related to school factors such as cohesion, safety, and other factors that might impact school success. Chapter 3 includes details of the methodology used to conduct this study. Chapter 4 includes the collected data in student profile charts including, qualitative data from participants' interview responses to ten research questions. Chapter 5 contains the findings of this qualitative study through participants' responses to the research questions, along with implications and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

Search Process

In order to locate current and relevant literature and research on African American boys and the factors that contribute to their academic success, key words and terms were identified for the search. They included *Black boys, African American boys, academic achievement, and factors impacting academic achievement of African American boys in urban schools*. The Summon search engines available at the Virginia Tech library were utilized for the search. To refine the range and quality of articles and sources, sub-questions were used. Another valuable source was the references cited in those articles read addressing the points of the sub-questions.

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceptions of African American elementary school boys regarding school factors that contributed to their academic achievement. Grimmett & Paisley (2008) argue that African American boys attending an ethnically and culturally diverse elementary school with positive educational expectations and with the faculty and resources to meet their needs tend to achieve academic success. However, there is limited research available to support those findings. Furthermore, the findings from this study provided limited detail regarding specific factors and best practices that are effective in promoting the academic success of African American boys. In an effort to further identify these positive educational expectations and other factors, this study sought answers to questions regarding school factors that contribute to the academic accomplishments of African American boys attending urban elementary schools. For the purpose of this study, academic success was defined as meeting the benchmarks for state assessments. Davis (2009) conducted a qualitative study of ten elementary African American male students and pointed to the sparse literature on the academic achievement of elementary aged African American boys in urban school setting. Case in point, studies such as Foy (2010) and Corprew & Cunningham (2007) tend to focus on African American males in the secondary or post-secondary settings. While the issue of underachievement tends to manifest itself in the secondary or post-secondary settings, several earlier factors contribute to the causes. Davis (2009) also indicated that

African American boys in urban school settings were usually challenged with school issues such as overcrowding, violence, insufficient resources, and under-credentialed teachers, as some of the factors contributing to lack of academic success. While there is evidence that these factors can have detrimental effects on the achievement success of African American males, it is unclear how elementary aged African American males perceive the role of these school characteristics in relation to their academic achievements.

This section discusses relevant and current literature highlighting the school factors contributing to the academic success of African American boys in urban elementary schools. As previously stated, for the purpose of this study, academic success is defined as meeting the minimum benchmarks on Virginia summative assessments, the SOL. Davis (2009) conducted a qualitative exploratory study of ten randomly selected African American fifth grade boys attending an elementary school in Queens, New York. The sample of study participants was a convenient sample since Davis was the building administrator and was familiar with the students and their accomplishments. This familiarity, Davis believed, added to the validity of the responses since a rapport was already established with the interviewer. Davis (2009) used focus groups and individual interviews to collect qualitative data on the following questions:

1. What are the perspectives of African American male students regarding factors responsible for their achievement at an urban elementary school?
2. What are the perspectives of African American male students regarding the factors responsible for hindering their achievement at an urban elementary school?

Although the study's findings cannot be widely generalized because of the limited number of subjects and the limited variation in the subjects' socioeconomic background and experiences outside of the school's attendance zone, the findings suggested that factors promoting the academic success of African American boys can be compacted into five distinct themes. Davis identified these themes as school policies and school practices, teacher attitudes, family and community, peer influences and psychosocial variables.

Accordingly, within the scope of this study, each of Davis's themes falling under the direct or peripheral control of the school will be discussed. This literature review will explore school practices, school structure and school policies, teacher attitudes, peer influences, and the

psychosocial social variable of self-perception as factors that positively impact the academic achievement of African American boys attending urban elementary schools (Davis, 2009).

Policies, Practices and School Culture

Davis' (2009) study of ten Queens, New York, fifth grade students' academic performance defined school policies as any established guidelines regarding issues pertaining to the school environment with expediency and prudence. Davis also defined school practices as habitual actions or a prescribed process that supports the school policies. In considering the academic success of African American boys, especially in an urban setting, we must closely examine the role of the school (Davis, 2009).

Stewart (2007) asserted that the culture of the school either work to foster and support a student's academic progress or hinder it. In a 2007 quantitative-longitudinal study of a national sample of 1,238 African American tenth grade students from 546 high schools, Stewart concluded that academic achievement among students is influenced not only by the student's social standing or the student's immediate surroundings, but is heavily influenced by the school environment. To reach this conclusion Stewart conducted a regression analysis examining individual level variables and school structure as predictors of students' grade point average (GPA). This influence happens when the school directly contributes to the development of competencies that increases the likelihood of academic success.

According to Stewart (2007) both school attachment and school commitment have a positive .15 correlation with students' GPA. The study also indicated a positive .14 correlation between GPA and their academic achievement. However, school social problems and school size both had a negative impact on students' GPA at -.06 and -.05 respectively. There was a .05 correlation between the proportion of non-White enrolled students and participants' academic achievement, and parent-child discussion. Participants' positive peer interaction and participants' achievement had a .06 correlation. All these factors had significant impact on students' GPA with a p value of .05. The overall conclusion from this study was that there is a substantial association between individual predictors and students' academic achievement. The regression analysis also showed that school structural factors had relatively small effects on students' achievement when compared to individual level student characteristics.

Support was also found for a relationship between school cohesion and academic achievement. Stewart (2007) highlighted the concepts of school cohesion, school commitment, positive peer association, school safety, and school attachment. Exploration of these concepts showed that all have a significant impact on the academic achievement of African American boys in particular.

Cohesion. Stewart (2007) defined school cohesion as a construct that measures the extent to which there is trust, shared expectations, and positive interactions among students, teachers, and school leaders. When children attended a school that is supportive and inviting, those students tend to do better academically. Ligon-Polk (2010), in a qualitative purposeful sampling of seven Texas middle school teachers, concluded that African American boys need support at and from all levels, such as role models and a school that provides direction and academic and emotional support. Ligon-Polk (2010) acknowledged that because only teachers who agreed to participate in the study were interviewed, this could have adversely affected the sample composition. Participants were selected because they were math or science teachers for at least three years in a Texas public middle school and at least 50% of their students were of low socioeconomic status and at least 14% were African American students. Despite the identified limitations, this study investigated the beliefs and actions of non-minority teachers and the academic success of African American boys. Ligon-Polk (2010) sought answers to the following questions:

1. What beliefs influence teachers to address the academic achievement of African American males?
2. What do effective teachers do differently for African American males?
3. What are the barriers in teaching African American males?
4. What is the most important factor in achieving success with African American males?
5. What role, if any, does the principal play in the decision to address the achievement gap?

Through in-depth phenomenological interviews, observations, and artifacts review, Ligon-Polk (2010) concluded that African American boys succeed in environments where teachers ensure that the African American boys' basic needs are being met, teachers establish a

climate of high expectation with the understanding that all children can learn, teachers provide authentic learning experiences, and teachers develop relationships with the students. According to this study all the identified factors have a positive impact on the attitudes and academic achievement of African American male students.

Commitment. Stewart (2007) defined school commitment as the amount of effort a student puts into school. From the previous Ligon-Polk (2010) study, forming relationships and providing authentic learning experiences influence both student attitudes and achievement. Each participant stressed the importance of forming relationships between themselves and their African American male students (Ligon-Polk, 2010).

School Attachment. Stewart (2007) defined school attachment as how involved a student is in the school. Classroom success of African American students is directly correlated to how students perceive the degree to which their teachers like them (Smith, 2012; Stewart, 2007). Smith (2012) found positive peer groups, goal setting, time management, and class attendance to be factors positively impacting students' academic achievements. Smith's qualitative study utilized interviews to examine factors that contributed to academic success of seven African American male student athletes from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants were all graduates from a four-year California state institution of higher learning between 1996 and 2004. All participants were between the ages of 29 and 36, had attended a university on an athletic scholarship and had competed in intercollegiate sports. The limited number of participants, their similar geographic and socioeconomic background, and their perceived limited historical and political context limit the generalization of the findings. The ages of the participants at the time of the study initially did not appear to hold any relevance to the current review, six of the seven participants in Smith's study identified their school attachment as beginning as early as in the fourth grade. Participants stated that, at that time, academics and extracurricular activities began to take on a different level of importance for them. Some attachment happened for some participants through extracurricular activities, teacher relationships, and male role models. Participants also credited their academic success to school services such as tutoring, study hall, and counseling (Smith, 2012).

Foy (2010) suggested that educators must ensure that students are connected to their learning. Educators should also allow students the opportunity to get involved in extra-curricular activities, since these tend to help them develop traits to persevere through difficult

times. Foy (2010) conducted a mixed method study seeking answers to the question: What current models are available to help improve the academic achievement of African American males? Participants for the study were 98 students between the ninth and twelfth grade at the High Hopes Accelerated High School in Southern California. Data were collected using questionnaires, focus group interviews, and descriptive statistics.

Safety. Safety, as defined by the participants in the Ligon-Polk (2010) study, is the way in which teachers made students feel that, the teachers, care about them. The Ligon-Polk (2010) study of seven middle schools in Texas similarly concluded that African American boys thrive in environments where the teachers ensure that students' basic needs are being met. Foy (2010) also identified safety as an important concern for African American boys in urban schools. This safety sometimes comes in the form of their perception of the teacher's attitudes and efforts to support students' academic pursuit. Teachers establishing a nonthreatening learning environment, motivating students, and understanding students' perception of fairness have also been proven to have positive influence on the academic achievement of African American boys (Ligon-Polk, 2010).

Positive Peer Association. What researchers have failed to study in depth is the future expectation and resiliency of African American students in high school and the impact of peer relationships on those expectations. Davis' (2009) study showed that African American boys identified peer influence as one of the most significant factors in their academic accomplishment.

In a case study of eight African American adolescent boys between the ages of 14 and 18 from a pre-established mentoring group, Hayes (2011) found that six of the eight participants who were academically successful had, at one point or another, been involved in some form of extracurricular activity and had, at one point or another, actively encouraged others to participate. Although the sample size was small and the study would have benefited from a much larger population sample, the findings suggest positive peer interaction and association positively impact participants' academic performance. To reach a conclusion, Hayes collected data through questionnaires, focus group interviews, and individual interviews. Participants were selected from the mentorship program because of their high academic achievement. Convenience sampling and participants' self-reporting of academic standing presented limitations of this study.

School leadership that promotes success. Kimmons (2012) conducted a case study of Franklin Elementary school. According to assessment data Franklin is identified as a school successfully educating African American children. Kimmons collected data through the use of a survey and interviews. One of the theme Kimmons (2012) identified was that African American students needed to be provided with high expectations, reinforce the high expectations, and provide opportunities for students to meet the expectations. According to Kimmons (2012), this means that all students be provided with the right tools and opportunities to achieve at a high level.

Teacher attitudes and practices that promote success. Public Law PL 107-110 or NCLB (2001) proposed that every child can learn and that schools would be held accountable for that learning, which would be measured by a state approved and sponsored exam. In exploring the school factors that positively impact the academic achievement of African American boys, the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of the teacher cannot be overstated.

Grimmett (2010), in an article describing Brothers in Excellence, a conceptual model, looked at the career development of African American boys, concluded that African American boys have strong adaptive relationships with adults and peers. Therefore, adults must believe and be of the understanding that all children can achieve educational success.

Kirby & DiPaola in a (2011) study of academic optimism and community engagement in urban schools, explored the question of the relationship among academic optimism, community engagement, and student achievement in elementary schools across an urban school district in Virginia. Kirby & DiPaola (2011) conducted a quantitative multiple regression, correlation, and factor analysis study of 35 elementary schools across an urban school district in Virginia. The researchers concluded that students were more likely to achieve at higher levels in schools where the faculty was optimistic that students could succeed regardless of low socioeconomic status.

Ligon-Polk (2010) found that when teachers established relationships with African American boys, it allowed them to provide authentic and quality learning opportunities. Also teachers who acted on their belief that all children could learn created safe environments reflecting high expectations. Goe, Bell, and Little (2008), in a study around approaches to evaluating teacher effectiveness, identified and highlighted the teacher as an important variable in the complex instructional process taking place in schools. This statement from Goe, Bell,

and Little (2008) echoed an earlier finding that identified the teacher's role as important, but also declared that the role of the teacher is one of the most complex issues when examining the achievement gap.

To further emphasize the importance of the role of teachers in the academic achievement of African American boys, Thomas (2008) in a study of 104 freshmen at a Historically Black University (HBU) in the South, implied that a culturally responsive teacher was vital in combating the underrepresentation of academically successful African American students. This quantitative exploratory study of factors that relate to academic success among high achieving African American males used the student academic success scale (SASS) survey. The 104 freshmen at HBU were all labeled as bright or gifted students.

Their responses on the survey sought answers to the following questions:

1. What are high achieving university freshmen African American males' perceptions of their academic success in high school?
2. What is the relationship among self-efficacy, resiliency, and leadership with high achieving freshmen African American males?
3. Are there differences in the perception of academic success between freshmen African American and a comparison group of upper classmen?

Thomas's (2008) study concluded that culturally responsive teachers are pertinent to overcoming the underrepresentation and underachievement of African American students because they understood cultural differences, the unique needs of students, and established classroom strategies to address the students' unique needs.

The previously mentioned Davis (2009) study proposed that teacher attitudes, such as teacher caring, can educationally motivate students to do well. Allain (2011) confirmed this belief that the teacher's role is paramount in the academic success of students in general, but particularly with African American boys. In Allain's 2011 study of African American high school students in grades ten through twelve, the participants stated that teachers and mentors had the greatest influence on their attitudes about school, second only to the influence of their families. In this qualitative phenomenological study, Allain selected twelve African American students from two high schools in a flagship school division. A sampling of two students from

each grade level from both schools was selected. Each student had a GPA of 3.0 or greater. In the Allain (2011) study, the participants referred to relationships they had with the teacher beyond the classroom as an important influence in their academic success. Participants saw their experiences with their elementary school teachers as a foundation based on the nurturing role of the adults, the expectations of the adults, and their desire to please the teacher. This relationship can be evident in teacher attitudes and their perception about their students' ability to succeed. Kirby and DiPaola (2011), in their previously mentioned study of 35 elementary schools across a district in Virginia, put forward that in schools where the faculty was optimistic about the possibility that their students could succeed in spite of their low socioeconomic status, those students were more likely to achieve at a higher academic level than others. The nurturing nature of the teacher has residual benefits in motivating African American boys to seek academic success.

The Smith 2012 study found, through the voices of the study participants, that the classroom success of African American students was directly correlated to how these students perceived the degree to which the teacher liked or disliked them. Participants also pointed to a similar impact on African American boys' academic performance caused by a relationship with male role models. African American boys value teachers who are caring and who have high expectations for them. Therefore, African American boys tend to thrive at a school focusing on high achievement, providing strong social support, engaging parents, and supporting positive peer groups (Foy, 2010).

Self-perception and Racial Perception

In exploring the school factors contributing to the academic success of African American boys in urban elementary school, how these individuals see themselves as being "Black" and their ability to achieve academic success were topics that were explored. The Thomas 2008 study concluded that, as researchers seek to find solutions to the issues around student achievement, it is important for the students to give their perceptions of themselves, since they know themselves best. In a qualitative study of 20 African American high school students between the ages of 15 and 17 in an urban setting, Carter (2008) concluded that having a feeling about one's racial group and sense of connectedness can be instrumental in supporting African American students' academic achievement. Carter cautioned that although

many urban youth aspire to be successful, connectedness does not assure academic success. In exploring the deficit theories and why African American boys fail to succeed, Carter (2008) believed that despite the generalization of theories such as the cool pose theory, used to describe the tendency for African Americans students to choose being viewed by peers as cool over seeking academic success, it is completely plausible that African American students who succeed academically do so because they have a positive racial identity and critical awareness of racism. These African American students then use this knowledge to develop adaptive strategies for success in school. Major & Billson (1992) defines "cool pose" a defense mechanism employed by African American males in particular to counter act the damage to pride, shattered confidence, absence of stability and any other low sense of inner control that comes from living on the edge of a society where African Americans are considered a minority.

Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2011) also recognized that how African American boys understand their racial identity impacts their academic performance. In a quantitative study using multiple regressions, Cokley, McClain, Jones, & Johnson (2011) selected 96 African American high school students in Houston, Texas, as subjects. Of the 96 students, there were 44 males and 55 females. The study looked at academic dis-identification, racial identity, and academic achievement among African American adolescents. Data showed female participants had higher GPAs than their male counterparts there however, was no significant difference in academic self-concept, devaluing academic success or racial identity. The data did, however, show academic dis-identification among the African American males. Cokley, McClain, Jones, and Johnson (2011) suggest a longitudinal study to include the freshmen who were excluded from the study. The findings from this study would suggest that how African American students see and understand their racial identity may be an important focus of interventions. This same theme is echoed in Carter (2008), confirming that having a positive feeling about one's racial group and cohesion to that group (how one is connected to that group) can be instrumental in academic achievement.

Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen, and Sellers (2009) acknowledged that racial socialization is a strength of African American students, especially since it tends to promote resilience in children. The Neblett, Chavous, Nguyen, and Sellers 2009 quantitative study collected data through the use of a self-reporting survey, which the researchers identified as a limitation of

the study. Data was collected from 144 African American adolescent males from grades seven through eleven. The researchers concluded that racial socialization practices have the potential to improve educational outcomes for African American boys. Allain (2011), also identified racial socialization as a strength where participants cited their ethnicity as a strength and a major influencing factor in their academic success and desire to give back.

African American Boys and Academic Success

Stinson (2011), in an article citing his earlier 2004 study, highlighted his participants' responses to Fordham's theory, showing again that due to the diversity of racial identity and experience, it is difficult to generalize Fordham's Raceless Persona Theory. Some of the study participants seemed to suggest that where they went to school influenced their racial sensitivity or lack thereof. According to Fordham's Raceless Persona Theory, African American boys who are academically successful are often conflicted about their racial identity and often reject it on their way to becoming successful. The Stinson 2004 study is a retrospective storytelling and analysis of the schooling experiences of four academically successful young African American men within the context of their secondary mathematics education. Participants were exposed to manuscripts regarding the educational experiences and theories of African American students. Participants were then asked to reflect on each work. Data were collected through written artifacts and four interviews conducted with the participants. From this collection of data Stinson argued that from the stories of his participants, it was possible for him to see some times when they could apply Fordham's and Ogbu's theories of "acting White." However, since their lives were not overly simplified, more complex, and with different experiences, apply the theory to all aspect of their success was impossible.

Researchers Oysterman, Ager, and Grant (1995) conducted four studies exploring a socially contextualized model of African American identity, possible selves and school persistence and achievement. Study one included a sample group of 105 college students consisting of 44 African Americans. Study two had a sample group of 146 seventh and eighth grade African American students from an inner city Detroit middle school where 83% of the student body qualified for free or reduced lunch. Study three used a sample group of 55 students from study two. The fourth samples were taken from a middle school involving students not previously interviewed and 55 eighth graders. Oysterman, Ager, and Grant (1995)

concluded that a positive identity schema built by African American boys included the following components: seeing oneself as a member of a racial group, being aware of stereotypes and limitations to one's social, economic and political outcome, and developing a perspective of self as a race or group member.

Cunningham, Corprew III, & Becker (2009), in their study of 129 African American high school students in a southern city, examined the impact of high future expectations in African American students. The study results suggested that the relationship between high expectations and academic achievement might be bidirectional, where they influence each other. Students who do well academically tend to have higher future expectations and students who have higher future expectations tend to perform better academically.

Summary

In a quantitative longitudinal study of 1,300 African American children in kindergarten through grade five, Harris & Graves (2010) asserted that there is abundance in the documentation of the underachievement of African American boys. Therefore, as the Foy (2010) study of 98 high school students suggests, we must shift from a focus on what is not working to exploring what is working.

The Stewart et.al (2007) study established themes of school cohesion, school commitment, positive peer associations, school safety, and school attachment as factors that positively contribute to the academic accomplishments of African American boys. These themes can be demonstrated in extra-curricular activities, teacher teaching styles, teacher expectations, and a culturally and ethnically aware school culture.

Researchers such as Case and Katz (1991) suggested that the various factors that influence the academic achievement of African American boys could be classified as individual factors, parental factors, and school factors. Katz described individual factors as socioeconomic status, self-esteem and identity issues. Katz also described school factors as including culturally responsive instruction, high expectation, teacher qualification and effectiveness and overall funding.

According to Irving and Hudley (2008), early detection of students with cultural identity and cultural mistrust can help educators understand who is at risk and help to identify policies and practices to support these students' development and academic progress.

Detection begins as early as the preschool years. Rashid (2009) concluded that the success of the African American male is framed in the educational environment in which he is immersed. Therefore, it is incumbent upon educators to create an environment that is conducive to the success African American males.

Chapter 3
Methodology

Introduction

   This chapter outlines the research design and methods utilized throughout the study. It begins with a summary of the research purpose and focus. This chapter also identifies rationale for the research design, the role of the researcher, the selection of the participants, the instrument used, and the data collection procedures.

Research Design/Methodology

   To gain insight of African American boys in regards to school factors contributing to their academic success, a qualitative design was utilized. Merriam (2009) identified qualitative research as a means for researchers to identify and interpret individual experiences and insights. Qualitative research is not about the determination of cause and effect, predicting or describing a trend or attribute. Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as a way for researchers to explore and gain further understanding of the meaning that participants view as problem or issue.

Research Questions

  This study on the school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys in urban elementary schools sought to answer the following research question: Which school policies, school practices and school cultures promote academic success for African American boys in urban elementary schools?

1. What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for their achievement at an urban elementary school?
2. What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for hindering further achievement at an urban elementary school?

Site and Sample Selection

Creswell (2009) identified questions, procedures, and data collection in the participants setting as vital pieces of qualitative study. The site of the study is a pre-kindergarten through grade 5 elementary school in Southeastern, Virginia. The student registration in the primary grades is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Student Registration.

Grade level	# of Classes	Number of students per grade level
Pre-Kindergarten (4)	3	53
Kindergarten	5	89
First	5	84
Second	6	109
Third	5	98
Fourth	5	98
Fifth	4	91

All special education students were fully integrated into the general education setting with support from special education teachers and special education teaching assistants. The ethnic demographics of the enrolled students attending this urban elementary school are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Current Student Enrollment Per Student Group

Enrollment and subgroup	Number of Students	Percent
Male	324	52.10
Female	298	47.90
Two or More ethnicities	40	6.4
Hispanic	80	12.86
Asian	30	4.8
White	69	11.09
American Indian	6	0.96
African American	394	63.85
Pacific Islander/Hawaiian	3	0.04
Students with Disabilities	44	6.99
Limited English Proficient	13	2.06
Free or Reduced Lunch	388	61.68
Total Enrollment	622	

The direct teaching staff was comprised of 33 general education classroom teachers, five special education teachers and supporting paraprofessionals. All general education teachers met or exceeded Commonwealth of Virginia's minimum licensure requirements with 23 holding at least a master's degree, and 19 holding at least a bachelor's degree. The teaching experience ranged from two teachers in their first year of teaching to three teachers serving at least 25 years of teaching. The teaching staff included four males and 34 females. Teachers' ethnicity showed a racially diverse teaching staff. These data are displayed in Table 3.

Table 3

Classroom Teacher Demographics

Race/Ethnicity	Male	Female
African American	1 (2.63%)	11 (28.94%)
White	3(7.89%)	20 (52.65%)
Other (Asian/Hispanic)	0	3 (7.89%)

Using a purposeful sampling of African American boys, all eleven participants of this study were enrolled in the same urban elementary school in southeastern Virginia. According to Creswell (2009), purposefully selecting the site and participants allows the researcher to understand the problem and/or research questions. To further seek the perspective of African American boys regarding the school factors that contribute to their academic success, the following criteria were used for selection.

Academically successful African American male student was defined as an African American male student currently enrolled in grade 5 who has passed the state assessments, the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL), in reading and mathematics in grades 3 and 4.

Reading and mathematics were identified because they are the two core areas most frequently mentioned in reference to student achievement. Reading and mathematics are also the two primary areas that the NAEP includes in its reporting categories.

Research participants were limited to 5th grade African American boys who have had at least two opportunities to take the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) in reading and mathematics. This multiyear testing experience and academic record would give them a more detailed perspective of their academic success. In addition, research participation was also limited to the African American boys who had completed at least three consecutive and uninterrupted academic years at the identified school, so as to provide rich data and their broader perspective associated with the identified school culture. Davis (2009) identified the

age of the participants in her study as a limitation. Davis suggested that because the participants in the study were ten years old, this limited their ability to recall specific examples and details around some factors that might be relevant to the study. Thomas (2008) suggested that it is important that students give their own perceptions since they know themselves best. Due to the design of this study, limitations similar those in Davis (2009) are present because the students were required to share their perceptive on school policies, practices, and culture that contributed to their individual academic success.

Applying the primary criteria of 5th grade African American boys who had been enrolled in the school for a minimum of three years, 36 African American boys were identified. Additionally, applying the second criteria for academically successful African American boys, 11 African American boys were identified. Finally, applying the third criteria requiring that students be identified as general education student the same 11 boys were identified. Ultimately, final participation was determined by parents' and students' willingness to participate in the study as outlined in the letter to parents and as indicated by signature (see Appendix C and D). All of the 11 identified students and their parents indicated a willingness to participate.   Participants were coded and identified as AB1- AB11. Tables 4 through 14 provide an individual profile of each study participant.

Data Collection Procedure

To gain further insight into the school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys in urban elementary schools, two face-to-face individual interviews were conducted with each of the individual 11 participants. After gaining appropriate approval from school administrators, parents, and participants, two semi-structured interviews were conducted along with a thorough review of students' academic and demographic documents, such as attendance records and academic records. Each participant was able to member check individual interview by reviewing the transcript. This helped to ensure that each transcript accurately documented each participant's responses to each of the research questions.

The instrument that was used for this study was a 10-item instrument acquired from Davis (2009), who gave permission to use her interview questions (see Appendix F). Davis conducted a similar study in a suburb of New York City. Davis (2009) used a focus group and individual interviews to explore and validate the integrity of the questions utilized within her

study. However, since this study is only exploring school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys in urban schools questions 5 and 6 were eliminated from the interview instrument (see Appendix F). The revised 10-question instrument provided each participant's perspective on which school policies, practices and culture promote academic success for African American boys in urban elementary schools. Merriam (2009) speaks to the importance of asking good questions as a means to collecting meaningful data. With this in mind, two face-to-face interviews were conducted using 10 of 12 questions used by Davis (2009).

Data Gathering Procedure

To gain more insight into the school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys in urban elementary schools, this researcher gained prior Institutional Review Board (IRB) training (see Appendix A) and approval (see Appendix B), parents' consent form (see Appendix C), participants' approval (see Appendix D), and division approval (see Appendix G).

The first interview session was introductory. The researcher explained the study, explained the data collection process, further established rapport with each participant, and had participants verbally respond to interview questions 1 through 5. During the second interview participants were able to member check transcribed responses for interview questions 1 through 5. According to Crow, Edward, & Rosalind (2013), a semi-structured interview allows the researcher to have a predetermined list of questions but, still have flexibility to ask probing questions or clarify depending on the participant's level of understanding. With this in mind, interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format to acquire a rich source of data. Secondly, the interview setting was an environment that was deemed familiar to the participants. Crow, Edward, & Rosalind (2013) suggested that observing the participants in a familiar environment provides information relevant to the study, but might not be acquired through the interview itself. To capture the spirit of each interview, an electronic voice recording was used. These recordings along with transcriptions and other identifying documents were secured in a locked device accessible only by the researcher. Merriam (2009) highlighted voice recordings as the most common way to ensure that everything said by the participants is recorded and available for later analysis. Merriam (2009) also pointed out that

field notes are a way for the interviewer to record his or her reaction to something said by the participant or to capture nonverbal language or environment factors that might have a bearing on the interviews themselves.

In an effort to maintain the integrity of each participant's story and data, all participants were given two separate opportunities to member check their responses by reading their transcribed responses. To maintain the confidentiality of each participant each boy was individually assigned a code of African American Boy (AB) and a randomly assigned number between one and eleven. An individually coded file was created for each participant. All data gathered for and from this study were maintained in a secured location, with access limited to the researcher.

Data Analysis

Merriam (2009) identified data analysis as the process of making sense of the data by consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what the participants said and what the researcher saw and read. In this process of making meaning, the researcher transcribed participant's responses to all 10 questions and reviewed each participant's individual academic and attendance record. At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher determined what themes or commonalities were present in participants' perception of the school's practices, school policies, and school culture as factors that contribute to their academic success. Merriam (2009) suggested that the establishment of themes begins with coding of the data presented in the interview to allow for classification and construction of emerging categories or themes. The researcher followed the Merriam (2009) suggestion of constructing categories, sorting these categories further, and then naming the categories.

The semi-structured interviews of all eleven participants were transcribed from audio recordings. The researcher analyzed the data to explore themes, patterns, and categories. Each participant's interview was organized as part of a data set, and identified with a code of AB and a corresponding number from 1 through 11. The researcher used a binder to organize interview data, student profile sheet of participant's school history, including school attended, grades earned at each level, scores on standardized assessments, a transcription of recorded interviews, and participation permission signed by the parent and the participant.

Merriam (2009) described qualitative data analysis as primarily inductive and comparative (p.175). Merriam (2009) stated that the process of data analysis begins by identifying segments in data that are responsive to the specific research questions. The researcher created a spreadsheet that categorized and documented the individual response of each participant to each of the 10 primary interview questions asked. The researcher then examined the data to identify similarities among participants' responses and insight.

To contribute to the validity and reliability of the data, a triangulation of data was conducted as prescribed by Merriam (2009). In that effort the triangulation was accomplished through transcription of participants' audio recorded interviews, review of each participant's academic and attendance school records, and member checking from each participant at each of the two part interview conducted.

The researcher maintained data collected through the two-part interviews of each of the eleven African American fifth graders and student profile sheets, summarizing each participant's academic and attendance record.

Summary

Davis (2003) suggested that African American boys in schools demand more focus, but cautioned that much of the current attention hinders our understanding of why some African American boys actually achieve. Harris and Graves (2010) also suggested that the documentation of the negative outcomes related to the achievement of African American boys is plentiful in the current literature. Therefore, this study sought to add to the current body of literature by seeking answers to which specific school policies, practices, and culture promote academic success for African American boys in urban elementary schools. In doing so, the study examined the perspectives of African American boys regarding how these factors impact their academic success. The researcher conducted two face-to-face interviews with each of the 11 participants identified as academically successful. Data also included review of participants' academic records.

Chapter 4
Presentation and Analysis of Data

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys in an urban elementary school in southeastern Virginia. The researcher interviewed eleven fifth grade African American boys identified as academically successful based on their performance on the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL). These African American boys all met or exceeded the minimum benchmark score of four hundred on the SOL in grades three and four. The eleven fifth grade African American boys all resided within the attendance zone of their school of attendance, in an urban school division in Southeastern Virginia. All eleven African American fifth graders had been in attendance at the same school for at least three consecutive years and were enrolled as general education students.

The setting for this study was an urban elementary school with an enrollment of 622 students enrolled in grades Pre-kindergarten through the fifth grade. At the time of the study 52% of the student enrollment were males, and 63% were African Americans.

Research Questions

The research into the impact of school factors that contribute to the success of African American boys in an urban elementary school was based on two overarching questions:

1. What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for their achievement at an urban elementary school?
2. What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for hindering further achievement at an urban elementary school?

Although the results cannot be generalized, it was the intention that with a focus on these two questions specifically around school factors within the influence of the school, the results would be able to influence implementation of strategies, practices, policies, and

behaviors that would positively impact the learning of all students, especially African American boys, in similar settings.

Participant description

The eleven participants provided an academically diverse sample. Five of the eleven participants are identified as gifted students, one student received speech and language services prior to his matriculation to the third grade. Eight of the eleven students attended at least one other school prior to enrolling in the research site. The following tables (Tables 4-14) provide final grades for each year of enrollment in the division associated with the study, SOL performance for grades 3 and 4, absences, gifted classification, and disciplinary record, of each participant.

Participant AB1 began his elementary enrollment in a Pre-Kindergarten 4 program attending another elementary school in the same urban school division through the second quarter of his first grade year. He enrolled at the research site and remained there through the time of the study. He was identified as a gifted student, with no disciplinary record.

Table 4

African American Boy One (AB1)

AB1 Gifted	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted/SOL
First	A	A	A	A	A	0	Cogat Composite-missing Stamine-missing Percentile-missing
Second	A	A	A	B-	A	7	
Third	B+	A-	A-	B	B+	10	3rd Grade Reading SOL-538 3rd Grade Math SOL-546
Fourth	B+	A-	A	C+	A-	1	4th Grade Reading SOL-439 4th Grade Math SOL-521

Participant AB2 began his elementary enrollment in a Pre-Kindergarten program in another state. He transferred as a kindergartener to another school in the current school division. He then transferred to the research site at the beginning of his first grade year and remained there through the time of the study. He was identified gifted in the first grade and has no disciplinary record.

Table 5

African American Boy Two (AB2)

AB2 (Gifted)	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted/SOL
First	A	A	A	B	A	1	Cogat Composite-112 Stamine-7 Percentile-77
Second	A	A	A	A-	A	1	
Third	A-	A-	A	B+	A-	1	3rd grade Reading SOL-462 3rd Grade Math SOL-546
Fourth	A-	A-	A-	A-	A-	0	4th Grade Reading SOL-461 4th Grade Math SOL-552

Participant AB3 began his elementary attendance in kindergarten. He remained enrolled in the research site through the fifth grade. He was identified as gifted in the first grade. He had no disciplinary record.

Table 6

African American Boy Three (AB3)

AB3 (Gifted)	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted/SOL
First	A	A	A	B	A	1	Cogat composite 114 Stamine-7 PR.81
Second	A	B	A	B	A	2	
Third	B	B	A-	B	B+	0	3rd Grade Reading SOL-517 3rd Grade Math SOL-484
Fourth	B	B	A	B	A-	0	4th Grade Reading SOL-439 4th grade Math SOL-467

Participant AB4 began his elementary enrollment in kindergarten and attended the research site location through the fifth grade. He is not identified as gifted but expressed interest in being like three of his friends who are identified gifted. Participant AB4's record indicated he received eleven days of out of school suspensions and eleven days of in school suspensions.

Table 7

African American Boy Four (AB4)

AB4	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted/SOL
First	B	B	A-	B-	A-	5	Cogat Composite-100 Stamine-5 Percentile-50
Second	B-	B	A	C+	A-	2	
Third	B-	C+	B-	C+	B-	7	3rd Grade Reading SOL-408 3rd Grade Math SOL-428
Fourth	C+	B	B	C+	B-	12	4th Grade Reading SOL-420 4th Grade Math SOL-426

Participant AB5 began attendance at current school in the 3rd grade. Participant attended 3 additional schools from Kindergarten through first grade. Participant attended 2 different schools in the same division during his 1st grade year He was retained in the 1st grade with failing grades of E in all content, 18 absences, and 51 tardy. He was not identified gifted and had no disciplinary record.

Table 8

African American Boy Five (AB5)

AB5	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted/SOL
First	B	A	A	A	A	4	Cogat Composite-100 Stamine-5 Percentile-50
Second	A-	A-	A-	B-	A	8	
Third	B	B	B+	B	B+	4	3r Grade Reading SOL-486 3rd Grade Math SOL-484
Fourth	B-	B	B	C	B-	8	4th Grade Reading SOL-439 4th Grade Math SOL-467

Participant AB6 began his elementary enrollment in kindergarten of the research site. He was identified with a peanut allergy and asthma. This required the school to maintain a chronic health care plan for his conditions. He was not identified gifted and had no disciplinary record.

Table 9

African American Boy Six (AB6)

AB6	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted /SOL
First	A	A	A	B	A	0	Cogat Composite-95 Stamine-4 Percentile-38
Second	B-	B	B	B	A-	0	
Third	C+	B	B-	A-	A-	9	3rd Grade Reading SOL-452 3rd Grade Math SOL-458
Fourth	B	B	A	B	B+	5	4th Grade Reading SOL-412 4th Grade Math SOL-467

Participant AB7 began his elementary enrollment in Pre-Kindergarten through the second grade in the school division associated with the study. He however, began his enrollment at the site of the study in his third grade year. Participant AB7 is identified as a student with a chronic health care plan to treat his asthma while in school. Participant is identified as a gifted student with no disciplinary record.

Table 10

African American Boy Seven (AB7)

AB7 (Gifted)	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted /SOL
First	A	A	A	A	A	0	Cogat Composite-115 Stamine-7 Percentile-83
Second	A	A-	A	A-	A	3	
Third	B+	B+	B+	B+	A	6	3rd Grade Reading SOL-600 3rd Grade Math SOL-519
Fourth	B+	B-	A-	B	B+	2	4th Grade Reading SOL-505 4th Grade Math SOL-460

Participant AB8 began his enrollment in the Pre-Kindergarten program in another school in the division associated with the study. The participant enrolled in the study site in the second grade. The participant attended four schools from his initial enrollment through his 5th grade year. Participant received speech and language services until 2012, at which point he was found no longer eligible for special education services. He has no disciplinary record.

Table 11

African American Boy Eight (AB8)

AB8	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted /SOL
First	B	A	A	B	A	1	Cogat Composite-84 Stamine-4 Percentile-25
Second	C+	B	B-	B-	B+	10	
Third	C	C	C	C	C+	11	3rd Grade Reading SOL-400 3rd Grade Math SOL-412
Fourth	B-	B-	B-	C	C	5	4th Grade Reading SOL-430 4th Grade Math SOL-437

Participant AB9 began his enrollment in the kindergarten program of the division associated with the study. He attended two additional schools between his kindergarten and second grade years. He enrolled in the site of the study during his third grade year. Participant has a severe peanut allergy and unpredictable migraines. He has no disciplinary record.

Table 12

African American Boy Nine (AB9)

AB9	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted /SOL
First	A	A	A	A-	A	9	Cogat Composite-100 Stamine-5 Percentile-50
Second	A-	A-	A-	B-	A	8	
Third	B	B	B+	B	B+	4	3rd Grade Reading SOL-486 3rd Grade Math SOL-484
Fourth	B-	B	B	C	B-	8	4th Grade Reading SOL-439 4th Grade Math SOL-467

Participant AB10 began his enrollment in the Head Start federal program before enrolling in the Pre-kindergarten program of the division associated with the study. He attended kindergarten through the second grade in another school in the same division. He transferred to the site of the study during the third grade year. Participant AB10 was identified as gifted in the first grade. He has no disciplinary record.

Table 13

African American Boy Ten (AB10)

AB10 (Gifted)	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted/SOL
First	A	A	A	B	B	9	Cogat Composite-109 Stamine-6 Percentile-71
Second	B-	A-	B	C	B-	5	
Third	C+	C+	C+	C+	B-	3	3rd Grade Reading SOL-433 3rd Grade Math SOL-437
Fourth	C	C+	B	C	C+	3	4th Grade Reading SOL-450 4th Grade Math SOL-415

Participant AB11 began school as a first grader in a private charter school in another state. Participant then transferred to another school within the district associated with the study. He remained enrolled in that school through second grade. Participant enrolled in the site of the study during the third grade year. He was assessed for gifted in the 4th grade, but was not identified as such. He has no disciplinary record.

Table 14

African American Boy Eleven (AB11)

AB11	Reading	Math	Science	Writing	History	Absences	Gifted/SOL
Second	A	B	A-	A	A	5	
Third	B+	C+	B-	B+	B	7	3rd Grade Reading SOL-486 3rd Grade Math SOL-437 4th Grade Cogat composite 96 Stamine-4 PR-40
Fourth	B+	B-	A-	B	B+	2	4th Grade Reading SOL-488 4th Grade Math SOL-482

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for their achievement at an urban elementary school?

Question 1: What do you think it means to be a successful student at this school?

Participants saw success as either mostly good grades or in some way indirectly connected to earning good grades. Even the participants who responded that it required more than good grades to be considered successful later mentioned their good grades as part of their marker to determine if they are doing well. Nine out of the eleven participants identified good grades on tests ranging from their teacher made assessments to the state assessments as a factor in being considered successful. Overall, participant responses identified academic success as a collection several variables, to include good grades, hard work and good behavior, which they described as not disrupting instruction to prevent the teacher from teaching and other students from learning, or feeding into people who are engaging in disruptive behaviors.

Participant AB1 identified specifically that he saw the work that goes behind the grades as the thing that determines his success. AB1 stated, "I think it means to work hard and understand what you are doing so you can get through your work. Me, myself, I like hard work (AB1 *l*1-3)." Participant AB2 saw both the good grades and the good behaviors as areas that should be considered when deciding if someone is successful. He saw good grades as an offshoot of and results of good behaviors and hard work which he simplified as paying attention. Participant AB2 also agreed that academic success was tied to more than just good grades. He believe that to be successful you have to:

> To have good grades, you are good, you pay attention a lot, your behavior is off the charts, in a good way! Like if you find a dollar you give it to the principal to make sure it gets back to the right owner (AB2 *l* 1-2).

Participant AB6 saw the perseverance in spite of the challenges as a measure of success. In reference to his reported incidents of bullying and ongoing matters requiring the support of his school counselor he shared

> You have to be strong, you got to be smart, you can't give up, you've have to try your best no matter what people say. If people say you are dumb or something like that you have to forget what they say, you got to keep going, and you've got to try your best (AB6 *l* 1-4).

Participant AB7 highlighted in his own words that the only way he or others could be identified as not being successful was if they refused to try. His response was inclusive of all the factors mentioned by other participants. AB7 stated, "To work hard and try to do your best on every test, work hard and succeed, not being disrespectful, being responsible, respectful, and just trying your best, because nothing beats a failure but a try (AB7 *l* 1)." Participant AB8 suggested that success was not just about the grades but later connected success to habits or behaviors that influence grades on assessments, "When people are fooling around don't feed into them. Try to ignore them and listen to what the teacher is saying and if he says it twice you should write it down (AB8 *l* 2-3)." Although participant AB9 saw good grades as a requirement to be considered successful, he also saw the civic responsibility of being a good role model as an important component of being a successful student. Participant AB9

responded in his description of someone who is successful, "A student who have good grades, good behaviors, and they are good role models for the younger kids (AB9 *l* 1)."

Participants' response to this questions showed that they are identifying school success as either good grades or behavior they identify as not interrupting instruction, or a combination of the two demonstrated consistently.

Table 15 demonstrates participants' response to interview question number 1, identifying what they think it means to be a successful student at their school.

Table 15

What Do You Think It Means To Be A Successful Student At This School?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Good Grades		x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x
Working Hard	x	x	x			x	x	x			
Good Behavior		x			x		x	x	x		

Question 2: Do you think that you are a successful student? Why or Why not?

All participants saw themselves as successful students, however, only seven of the eleven participants associating their success specifically with getting good grades. Collectively, participants identified themselves as being successful because of good grades, being nice to people, working hard regardless of the outcome, and staying out of trouble. Participant AB11 saw his positive behavior as a sign that he was a successful student. AB11 stated, "If you misbehave, it holds you back, and I know how to act (AB11 *l 9)*." Participant AB11 also viewed his growing confidence as a sign of his success. Participant AB1 pointed to his work ethics and perseverance as signs of his success. AB11 responded, "I might have trouble with it but I always work through it (AB11 *l* 5)." Participant AB6 also pointed to his persistence as a sign of his success:

I might make a few mistakes here and there but I never give up. Like my teacher, she says if you don't pass then you get to do it over again, and when I hear that statement I think I can pass it but just have to keep trying and doing my best(AB6 *l* 8) .

In addition to his ability to persevere, participant AB7 identified what he thinks is a natural attribute, "I work hard and at least try cause even if I fail a test I keep trying and practicing so I can get a better grade on it because I am gifted and I'm just smart (AB7 *l*5)." Participant AB2 pointed to his citizenship attribute as an indication that he considers himself a successful student. AB2 stated, "I am really one of the nicest person you will ever meet. If you lose anything I will try to give it back to you. I have good grades, and I try to help people a lot (AB2 *l*6)." Participant AB3 pointed to some more tangible evidence that he believes show that he is successful, hinting that others such as his principal and teachers believe him to be successful. He shared, "I won a writing contest along with two other students from another school and earlier this year I got to show some immigrants visitors around the school (AB3 *l*9)." Participant AB5 pointed to his continued success in meeting the school and division promotion standards as his evidence of his success. AB5 shared this, " Yes, because I have been in this school for three years and I succeeded all three years and moved on to the next grade and I get good report cards (AB5 *l*6)." Participant AB11 pointed out that his success could be seen in his good grades, his behavior and the fact that he had been in the school where he feels comfortable and is fitting in.

I get good grades, I know how to act. It's not really bad. It's not going bad for me at this school. I got good grades, I know how to fit in well and it's just lots of success for me. I'm fitting in and this makes me comfortable and all my peers make me feel good (AB11 *l*5).

Participants' responses to this interview question revealed a mixture of indicators with regard to the students' perception of success. However, responses suggested that students viewed success as demonstrated in their good grades, ability to meet the promotion standards, and the demonstration of acceptable behaviors like perseverance and good citizenship.

Table 16 identifies participants' responses to interview question number 2, regarding why they identified themselves as successful students.

Table 16

Do You Think That You Are a Successful Student? Why or Why Not?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Good Grades	x	x	x		x			x		x	x
Being a nice person		x	x	x							
Working Hard	x		x			x	x	x			
Good behavior									x		x

Question 3: What things at this school help you to be successful?

Nine of the eleven participants identified the teacher as the biggest factor in their success. The responses included examples of teachers differentiating instruction to meet participants' specific needs, providing needed emotional support in the form of building confidence and providing coping strategies in cases of bullying or other stressors, being caring almost like a family member, being strict when necessary, but trustworthy, and being approachable so that participants did not feel intimidated, and being motivated. Participants also identified friends and peer groups as a motivation factor for achievement, and environmental print such as informational bulletin boards and other displayed work, serving as a source of inspiration and reinforcement of what they are learning, have learned or need to learn. Participant AB7 identified his motivation, "Most of my friends are gifted students and I want to be gifted too (AB7 *l*12)." Participant AB7 also stated, "there are lots of really smart kids in this school and I try to be the best and the smartest and the best so I can succeed really higher than even the smartest kids in class (AB7 *l*12)." Participant AB8 identified the environmental print from his school as a motivation for doing well.

> Looking at the stuff on the walls as we walk down the hall, like when people do their work and then put it on the wall, when I look at it, it kinda teaches me a little bit of things (AB8 *l*15).

Participant AB1 referenced the environmental stimulation in the school as a motivating factor for him. He also viewed the hallway displays from his art teacher as encouragement that he could become an artist.

> Well since I like drawing I like going to art and it helps me draw better and when I am in class, I like math more than anything else so math helps me get better so I can get a scholarship because I am trying to get a scholarship into college so I can get my degree and be an animator (AB1 *l*9).

Participant AB1 stated, "Like my art teachers, she draws stuff on the windows and pillars so it inspires me to draw better (AB1 *l*15)." Participant AB2 uses the many bulletin boards and samples of student work to reinforce things he is learning and or learn about new things. In reference to the teachers' influence, participant AB2 states about his teacher, "If you don't understand it the way she says it she will say it another way so you can understand (AB2 *l*11)." Participant AB3 stated, "My teachers push me to do more and to do better and they always think we should do our best (AB3 *l*14)." Participant AB9 consistently identified his teacher as a key factor in his academic success.

> My teacher gives me everything I need to be successful …like... instead of waiting for the school to give us the protractors, she went out and bought them herself so we were already ahead and we knew all the angles (AB9 *l*16).

Participant AB6 stated, "Ms.…..my counselor helps me clear my brain of the terrible things people say about me so I can use my brain again (AB6 *l*13)." Some students identified the teacher's stance on discipline as a factor in their success. AB9 stated, "Any teacher in here, you could be running down the hallway or something and they quickly give you some discipline and tell you to stop doing this or doing that (AB9 *l*12)" Although the teacher was identified as the most influential factor within the school that helps the participants become more successful, the roles the teachers play varied from one participant to another. Some participants relied on the teachers' academic support, while some relied on the teachers' sense of discipline and order, while yet another group relied on the teacher going beyond the minimum expectations to make learning interesting and relevant.

Table 17 identifies participants' responses to interview question number 3, regarding things they identified as contributing to their success.

Table 17

What Things at This School Help You to Be Successful?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Teacher	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x		x
Peers							x	x		x	
Environment								x			x

Question 6: How do you feel when students are identified as successful based on a test?

Eight of the eleven participants said they were happy for people who received good grades. However, seven of the eleven stated that it took more or would take more than just one good grade to show success. According to their responses they felt that the effort that goes into getting the good grade should be more consistent than just one occasion. One participant stated, "You will have to keep that going (AB11 *l*35)" Participant AB1 was consistent in his idea that success was not just about a grade on a test. He stated," I think people shouldn't be called successful just because they are doing good on a test….they might do bad things, like write on the walls, talk in class , and stuff, and that would make them unsuccessful (AB1 *l*26)." Although participant AB4's response was slightly different from Participant AB1's, they seem to share the same idea that the passing grade was not enough to declare someone as successful. In highlighting his point that it takes more than good grades to be identified as successful, participant AB4 shared a personal experience.

> I don't think that's enough to say that. If they are like failing in their test, I don't think it's enough to say that person is failing. The same thing happened to my sister on the DRA test. If you don't speed through it you will run out of time and she likes to speed through it and got a bad grade (AB4 *l*39-40). What if that person is getting bad grades because they learn different and are not asking for the help they really need?

Participant AB5 believes that the effort was to be commended regardless of the outcome, "I feel kinda great for them because test can be kinda hard and difficult at some point but if you work hard enough you can get through it right (AB5 *l*22-23)" Participant AB6 agreed that although he would celebrate for the person, it was not simply about the great on a test that makes someone successful. He stated, "I feel great, but it's not all about the test. The test is just asking you about stuff that you know, but the thing is how hard did you try on your test (AB6 *l38-39)*?" Overall the participants agreed that although the grade is to be celebrated, it is not enough to say the person is successful. In order to really see the person as successful they agreed that they would have to consider the work the person put forth and the consistency of that work. Table 18 identifies participants' responses to interview question 6, regarding how they feel when other students are identified as successful based on a test.

Table 18

How Do You Feel When Students Are Identified As Successful Based on a test?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Happy for them		x			x	x	x		x	x	
Takes more than a grade	x			x		x	x		x	x	x

Question 7: Which people in your school would you say help you to be a successful student?

Participants overwhelmingly identified the teacher as the person who helped them the most to be successful. In addition seven of the eleven participants identified their friends, peers, classmates or siblings as having the greatest positive effect on their success. Participant AB8 in response to the question stated, "My two friends…..when the teacher tells us to study we get a piece of paper and we act like we are the teacher and they have to raise their hand….that's how we study (AB8 *l*45)." Participant AB10 credits his friends' intervention in his behaviors as reasons for being identified as a person who contributed to his success. He pointed out that, "My friend…. he helps me when I get mad and he pushes me away and talks to me (AB10 *l*37)." Participant AB1 credited his teacher with helping him become more successful. He stated, "He is strict, but it helps me learn more than I did in earlier grades (AB1

*l*34).” Participant AB2 credits his friends, teachers, and principal as influencing his success. According to him, “My friends will help me understand it if I don't, my teacher she will, if my friends can't help, then the principal will motivate me (AB2 *l*29-31).” Participants AB3, AB4, and AB5 gave everyone in the school credit for their success, and gave examples of receiving support and assistance from peers, teachers, and others, such as the custodians in the building. Participant AB4 stated in reference to the support he receives from the principals and the teachers: “It's the things they tell me that I interpret another way, for example they tell me I am not supposed to do it that way, and in my mind I am saying that in just a different phrase (AB4 *l*45-47).” Participant AB11 credits his younger brother as something about the school that contributes to his success.

> My brother he is younger than me so I know he looks up to me…. and I don't want to let him down (AB11 *l*37-38). He also stated that his teachers who are like family are also responsible for his success, “They understand me, they understand us a lot, and they are like family... they know what we struggle in, what our weakness is, what we feel powerful in.

Table 19 identifies participants' responses to interview question number 7, regarding the people in their school who help them to become a successful student.

Table 19

Which People in Your School Would You Say Help You to be a Successful Student?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Teacher	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Peers		x	x	x	x			x		x	
Principals		x		x	x				x	x	
Family											x

Question 8: What one person would you say helps you the most?

Nine of the eleven participants identified their teacher as the one person who helps them the most. Participant AB1 sees his teacher as influencing both his academic and behavior needs, “My teacher... he teaches me discipline and if I get lower than my average then he will

help me to work back up to my average (AB1 *l*37-38)." This influence clearly requires his teacher to form a relationship and have some knowledge of his overall performance. One participant described his teacher's attributes as being caring, funny, kind and always being there for him or other students as reasons why he identified her as the person who helps him the most. Participant AB4 identified his friend as the one person who, "He helps me the most, more than the teachers in this school (AB4 *l*48-49)." Participant AB7 shared how his teacher makes a difference by her approach to differentiation of the support he perceives.

> Even if you didn't get it she will put it in another way and teach it different ways based on how you think….in math if you are good in art and drawing like doing fractions she will teach how to draw fractions instead of doing the math, you will still be doing the math but you are still doing it in a way you feel comfortable with (AB7 *l40-44)*.

Based on the participants' responses to this question, they see the teachers and their peers as the people most directly helping them or the people they see as helping them the most. Participants do recognize the contributions of others such as the principal, the custodians and others. Table 20 identifies participants' responses to interview question number 8, regarding the one person in their school who help them to become a successful student.

Table 20

What One Person Would You Say Helps You the Most?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Teacher	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	
Peers				x						x	x

Research Question 2: What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for hindering further achievement at an urban elementary school?

Question 4: What things at this school help to make you unsuccessful?

Ten of the participants interviewed identified the inappropriate and disruptive behaviors of other students as a major reason for them not being more successful than they already see themselves. The behavior they shared fell into both those that indirectly disrupt instruction and

those that completely prevented instruction from happening, requiring interventions from the principal or assistant principal. Other disruptive and inappropriate behaviors they described included those such as bullying, which indirectly affects instruction by serving as a barrier to the participant's ability to focus. Participant AB8 even identified his interactions with the lunch monitor as a barrier to his success. He describes how these interactions follow him throughout the day and, "sometimes even have me thinking about them before I gets to the cafeteria (AB8 *l*27-28*).*" These behaviors towards the participants or their peers directly or indirectly impact the emotional readiness of the participants to get the best out of the school experience. Participant AB1 responded that "some students in the school, they do things to take me out of my inspiration (AB1 *l*19-20)." According to participant AB2, "Things would be good but for people who try to disrupt….and people who break rule number 5 (I will not stop the teacher from teaching and other students from learning) (AB2 *l*15-17)." Participant AB4, who based on previous responses struggles with wanting to be considered cool and someone who fits in, cited his friends as a reason for not being as successful as he believes he could be.

> My friends, well most of them, not all of them. They have a side of me that is ok, I'm a cool person, I go with the flow, and the other side of me that says no do this, study, stay on track (AB4 *l*18-19).

Participant AB5 was firm in his response and attributed much of his inability to focus more on the inappropriate behaviors of peers in his class and others throughout the school. In response to the question he stated, "Mostly students that are loud and disrupt the class as they walk down the hallway (AB5 *l*13-16)." Participant AB6 consistently referenced being bullied by others and needing the assistance of the counselor to overcome the hurt of these interactions.

> The thing that makes me unsuccessful is being bullied; I am trying to be friends with people….but I don't like that kind of group to try and get along with so I try and avoid them but sometimes that is not easy to do (AB6 *l*18-24).

Participant AB7 responded, "There are those kids that are really good and then there are those that are really bad and that's the reason why I am not getting the highest grades that I want to because those kids are disrupting and being bad (AB7 *l*19-22)." He stated that if he

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could change it he would "just have everyone be good because there wouldn't be any bad kids and I could just focus on what I am doing (AB7 *l*24-26)." He also stated that although this was something that prevented him from being more successful, it was only a few children who were disruptive enough to prevent instruction from happening or to prevent him and others from truly focusing.

Table 21 identifies participants' responses to interview question number four, regarding the things in their school that help to make them unsuccessful.

Table 21

What Things at This School Help to Make You Unsuccessful?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Disruptive behavior	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Personal choices			x	x				x	x	x	

Question 5: Why do you believe some boys at this school get good grades while others do not?

Ten participants, in regards to the boys who are not getting good grades or those not meeting the same criteria for selection in the study, see the other boys' behavior as the reason for a lack of success on the part of those boys. According to ten of the participants, the other boys just don't use what the teachers teach them, or they don't want to study or pay attention. The participants see the other boys as being personally responsible for their own lack of success. Participant AB1 believes that "some kids in the school, they do bad things that kinda take away their feeling of studying. They wanna just go home and play or something (AB1 *l*24-25)." Participant AB2 believed that the difference between the two groups of boys was directly related to the amount of effort each group contributed to school. He stated, "Some people try their best and won't give up, but other people just lack and don't pay attention like the other people would (AB2 *l*18-20)." Participant AB3 believes that some of his peers who fail to get good grades are not taking advantage and are otherwise distracted.

Because some of the boys that pay attention are the ones who get good grades and the others who play around during lessons or when we are studying before we take a big test they play around and that's why they fail (AB3 *l*25-27).

Participant AB4 shared that he believes the boys who get good grades are actually applying themselves and surrounding themselves with peers of like mind.

Because from my perspective maybe because they are with a good crowd. They are with a crowd who don't slack off on their work and actually like to focus and be prepared like taking the way the teacher or your parents or adult explains it to you (AB4 *l*24-27).

Participant AB5 agreed that, "Some, they don't focus and like to play around a lot and don't listen to the teacher (AB5 *l*17-18)." Participant AB6 shared that there is a difference in the behavior, expectations, and effort of boys in each group, not just their ability. Participant AB6 argued that students who do not get good grades is their own responsibility.

I would say the boys who get good grades are trying their hardest and the people who are failing, they do know this stuff but they don't want to listen and things like that…..they've got to put their brain to work. Nobody is going to jump in their brain and tell it to work... They have to do it themselves (AB6 *l*25-27).

Participant AB7 also shared, "Because they just not focused on what they should be doing; they don't have any goal in life (AB7 *l*26-27*)*." Participant AB8 also suggested that effort was the dividing line between the two groups.

Because they pay attention, and even if they are day dreaming they are day dreaming about math and stuff, … the others are too worried about what they are going to do when they get home, thinking about going to resource and looking up stuff on the internet whenever the teacher lets you use the computer (AB8 *l*29-31).

Participant AB9 referenced the hard work that the teachers put into making sure that it was understood that these students could not blame the teachers completely for their lack of progress.

They don't get good grades or be successful because the teacher is putting out

everything they need to be successful but they just not using it…. They come in and

procrastinate… they don't respect the stuff people are doing for them (AB9 *l*33-34).

Participant AB10 suggested a simple difference, "The ones who get good grades study

a lot (AB10 *l*23)." Participant AB11 was firm in his response that the effort that people put in

is reflected in their grades.

Some people at this school get good grades because they work for it, because they try

hard they study every night and other people they are smart, everybody is smart, but

sometimes they just don't use, sometimes you just don't show how smart you are.

They just lay back... you have to work hard for it (AB11 *l*23-24).

Table 22 identifies participants' responses to interview question number 5, regarding why they

believed some boys at their school received good grades while others do not.

Table 22

Why Do You Believe Some Boys at This School Get Good Grades While Others Do Not?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Personal responsibility	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Peer Influence	x		x	x					x	x	
Naturally Smart							x				x

Question 9: If you could change one thing in your life that would help you become a more

successful student, what would that one thing be?

Six of the eleven participants, when asked to share one thing they would change to

become a more successful student, identified making the school less distracting. The

participants pointed out that if they could separate the "good kids from the bad kids" or do

something to reduce the distraction in the classroom and hallways, they would be able to

concentrate more and do better on tests. Participant AB1 suggested, "Make the school less

talkative, if the school is more quiet around my classroom then I can concentrate more on my work and I can get better grades (AB1 *l*39-40)."   Participant AB2 believes the schedule of classes and the lunch time his class was assigned served as a barrier. He stated, "I would say our lunch time, it's at 11, after we do two lessons its lunch time and I am not even hungry then (AB2 *l*40-41)." Participant AB5 suggested that there was something not working with the number of students assigned to a teacher and posed a suggestion.

> I would change the way people would learn. Like the surroundings and how people are like loud and disruptive in class. We would have more teachers and more ways that you can help students concentrate… more eyes in the classroom, if there are lots of students and a little teacher the teacher can only see so much, especially if they are in the back of the class (AB5 *l*36-43).

Participant AB6 gave a stern suggestion, although he recognized some inherent flaws with the idea. He suggested, "Organize the students so the bad people get sent off to another teacher that actually knows how to handle bad people and put the good people in one class so we can study in peace (AB6 *l*47-48)." Participant AB7 echoed the concerns of the ten other participants.

> Probably the class I am in. My class is pretty bad because of a few students and they are just really bad students. Sometimes we don't even get through the lesson…the good kids don't deserve to be punished for the things the bad kids do, so they should be divided (AB7 *l*48-50).

Participant AB9 was one of two participants who look at other factors, such as their own behaviors. He did however share some of the beliefs of the other participants. When asked this question he stated, "My attitude and pride. I hate being wrong, I hate being told I am wrong. Now I am starting to change how I see it and now if I get it wrong I see what mistakes I made (AB9 *l*55-58)." Participant AB10 saw his time taken when he was being the instrument of bullying as something that he would change. He reluctantly shared, "Stop messing with other people and pay attention in class… Messing with other people cause me not to pay attention (AB10 *l*46-48)." Participant AB11 shared a mixture of how he would like to change

his own behavior while focusing on some of the same arguments presented by the other participants.

> Like sometimes my parents spoil me they get me a whole lot of things…. I get distracted by that stuff and not do what I am supposed to do at school. At school everyone would get along at this school. Because this school is not really the place where a lot of students get along and I don't like it (AB11 *l*56-64).

Participant AB4 stated, "I would lose a little bit of my ego when my teacher ask me if I need help my ego takes over and I say no, I'm good. If I lower my ego I would ask for help when I need it (AB4 *l*52-54)." Table 23 identifies participants' responses to interview question number nine regarding one thing in their life they would change to help them become a more successful student.

Table 23

If You Could Change One Thing in Your Life That Would Help You Become a More Successful Student, What Would That One Thing Be?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Disruptive behavior	x	x			x	x	x				x
Change personal behavior			x	x				x	x	x	

Question 10: What would you say is the most important thing to do to be a successful student at this school?

Nine of the participants believe that in order to be more successful in their current school setting students need to "give it your all, pay attention, study, and believe that you already are successful and most importantly, listen to the teacher (AB6 *l*53-54)." Participant AB1 suggested that it is important to "...give yourself challenges, have someone else with you to give you that challenge (AB1 *l*44-45)." Participant AB7 also suggested that, "As long as you are trying you will get better and learn (AB7 *l*63-64)." It is important to note that of the eleven participants, all believed that it was within themselves and others to do their best.

Although they later identified school factors that somehow hinder further success on their part, they all took some personal part of the responsibility for what they could do to become more successful at this particular school. Table 24 identifies participants' responses to interview question number ten, regarding what they believed is the most important thing to do in order to become a successful student at the school.

Table 24

What Would You Say is The Most Important Thing to do to Be a Successful Student at This School?

Student response	AB1	AB2	AB3	AB4	AB5	AB6	AB7	AB8	AB9	AB10	AB11
Work Hard	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x			x
Pay Attention			x	x	x				x	x	x
Behave				x					x		

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the results of the interview of the eleven fifth grade African American boys meeting the criteria of academically successful for the purpose of this study. From the interview transcriptions the following themes emerged from the study: (1) peer influence; (2) teacher attitude; (3) environmental suitability and (4) personal responsibility.

Peer influence was primarily reflected in their responses to questions 3 and 4, but was also intertwined in their responses to other questions, such as participant AB2's response to question 7 about which people at the school help him become more successful. The influence of peers was seen as possibly having both a positive and a negative influence on how well the participants did. Participant AB6 spoke specifically and consistently about conflicts he had with some peers who he classified as bullies. According to him these bullies treat him like a nerd even when he tried to be friends with them. This had a negative influence on his success because he needed continuous support from both his home and the school through conferences with his school counselor, in order to, as he described, "Get the hurtful things out of my head (AB6 *l*10)." Participant AB4 shared, "My friends sometimes encourage me to be cool and be

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off task (AB4 *l*18-19)." He, however, clarified that this was something he struggled with and had to divide himself to about sixty percent being good and doing things like studying and paying attention, and forty percent being cool. Participant AB9 added to this argument when he shared in his response to question 4 that it was hard and distracting for him to be good and successful when everyone around him was being bad. The positive influence of peers was more consistently cited, with eight of the elven participants pointing to specific instances and example of how their friends or peers influenced them positively. Participant AB1, when asked about what students at the school could do to become more successful, he declared that a student would need to, "Study and work hard, challenge yourself and have others around to challenge you (AB1 *l*44-45)." Participant AB10 shared that one of the things that motivates him is the fact that some of his friends are identified as gifted students and he wanted to be identified as gifted so he studied hard and did some of the things they do. Participant AB1 gave examples of how his art teacher inspires him in his goals of being an animator by displaying her work throughout the building. Participant AB3 shared, "Teachers push me to do more and do better, and they push us to do our best (AB3 *l*13-15)." Participant AB6 shared that his counselor, who is classified as a teacher, helps him with problems so he can keep doing his best.

Teachers were credited for participants' success, with nine of the eleven identifying teachers as the thing about the school that help them be successful. Teacher attitude was seen as important in the participants' success. Participant AB7 in his response to question 8 shared that his teacher differentiated to make sure they understood based on how they think as students. AB8 also shared that his teacher was willing to adjust their grades when they redo an assignment to make corrections. This teacher attitude went beyond the academic support participants received. Participant AB11 enthusiastically shared his response to question seven that his teacher made him feel very comfortable because she was strict when she needed to be. He identified her as, "The right kind of teacher because she is funny but when it is time to work, it's time to work (AB11 *l*43-44)." He further shared that his teacher knew who to keep them away from, know what they struggle with, their weaknesses and what they are powerful with. Participant AB9 discussed throughout his responses to several questions how his teacher went above and beyond to support their learning, emotional needs, and discipline. He shared how she consistently refused to wait on the school to supply materials they needed for the

classroom, and instead took her own money to buy things like protractors to provide them with hands on experiences.

Environmental suitability refers to how conducive the environment is to learning. Seven of the eleven boys interviewed, when asked question nine about something they would change to help them become more successful, all spoke extensively about how the environment hindered their ability and drive to be even more successful. Six of the participants spoke repeatedly about how other students interrupted instruction by either their behaviors in the classroom or as they traversed the hallway. Four of the eleven boys gave suggestions about how to solve the problem. Participant AB7 stated that sometimes the teacher is not even able to get through the lesson without disruptions. They suggested that in order to make the school environment more suitable for learning teachers would have to separate the students to remove the "bad kids" so that the "good kids" can learn without disruption.

Personal responsibility was identified as a factor in academic success by all eleven participants. When responding to question five, all eleven participants indicated that one reason why some boys did not get good grades while others got good grades was because those with the bad grades did not apply themselves. Participant AB9 shared his insight in response to question five, "They are just not using what the teacher is putting out. They come in and procrastinate, play and joke. Some of them don't even care and have no respect for the stuff people are doing for them (AB9 *l*33-34)."

Chapter 5 will provide findings, summary, and conclusions drawn from the data, as well as recommendation for any future studies.

Chapter 5

Findings, Summary, and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to identify school factors that contributed to the academic success of eleven African American elementary boys attending an urban elementary school in Virginia. Through the documented responses to ten interview questions from all eleven participants six themes were identified as factors contributing to the success of all eleven African American boys.   A qualitative research design centered on two overarching questions was used to identify these factors.

Research Question 1: What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for their achievement at an urban elementary school?

Research Question 2: What are the perspectives of African American boys regarding the school policies, school practices, and school culture responsible for hindering further achievement at an urban elementary school?

Summary of Findings

After review and analysis of the data from the interviews conducted for the study, four themes and associated findings emerged. The findings will be shared in the following section.

Finding 1: The success of African American boys in urban elementary schools is impacted by peer influence. Participants shared both positive and negative interactions and expectations of their peers as impacting their ability to focus on instruction or appropriate behaviors. Participant AB4 is an example of the struggles students encounter as they try to strike a balance between "being cool" and "being good." He shared, "My friends encourage me to be cool and off track (AB4 *l*18-19)," which he stated consumed about forty percent of his time at school. The other sixty percent of his time he is "being good" and studying, paying attention and associating himself with others who share that same goal. Participant AB7 spoke about how the gifted teacher and "lots of really smart kinds in the school (AB7 *l*12-13)" motivate him to work harder. From their examples and stories, it is evident that peer influence is one factor contributing to their success, while also putting some barriers on the extent of that

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academic success. Six of the eleven participants identified relationships with peers and peer accomplishments as factors they believe help them to become more successful in school. In response to question three asking what things at the school help you to be successful, participant AB7 replied that the teachers and some of his academically successful peers motivate him to do better.

> The teachers and also the students, because there are lots of really smart kids in this school and I try to be the best and the smartest and the best so I can succeed really higher than even the smartest kinds in class (AB7 *l*12-14).

Ligon-Polk (2010) highlighted a trend of the need of African American boys to be part of the group. In this quest to be part of the group, one of the teachers in Ligon-Polk's (2010) participant group referenced his experience of African American boys not working if their buddies did not work. This male teacher described what he saw as a magnetic force pulling kids into a mindset of being cool (Ligon-Polk, 2010).

Finding 2: The success of African American boys in urban elementary schools is impacted by teacher attitude and relationship. All eleven participants identified the role and attitude of the teacher as critical in their success. Participants shared examples of their teachers doing things such as purchasing materials and incentives from their own funds to ensure they had them ready for the lessons. Participant AB9 shared, "My teacher does not make excuses, she goes out and buys or get what we need so she can teach us (AB9 *l*19-21)." Participant AB5 described his teacher as, "serious but you can ask her anything. She is caring, funny, always there for you (AB5 *l*31-32)." While the principals and other members of the school staff were recognized as contributing to the environmental suitability, the teacher was consistently identified as having a major role. Participant AB10, who identified himself a reforming bully and trouble maker, shared the role his teacher plays in keeping him focused. He shared that messing with people caused him to not pay attention, and when he does get in trouble, his teacher calls his father. This experience and the shared experiences of the other participants placed the teacher as a critical factor in their success. The participants in this study believe that the teachers they currently have do like them.

Ligon-Polk (2010) concluded that African American boys succeed in environments where teachers ensure that their basic needs are being met, where teachers establish a climate of high expectations with the understanding that all children can learn and where the teacher develops relationship with them. Smith (2012) and Stewart (2007) found that the academic success of African American students in general is directly connected to the degree they believe the teacher likes them.

Finding 3: The success of African American boys in urban elementary schools is impacted by disruption and distraction within the school. In this study all eleven participants throughout their responses to the ten research questions shared how some aspect of the school's environment impacted their learning. Seven of the eleven participants spoke specifically of how the noise factor in the school and "bad kids" disruptions caused disruptions that interfered with the participants' ability to focus and earn better grades on assessments and projects. In response to question four asking what things at the school make you unsuccessful, participant AB7 repeated his observation that disruptive behaviors do prevent him from achieving the level of academic success he believes he is capable of.

> So just like the first one there are those kids that are really good and then there are those that are really bad and that the reason why I am not getting the highest grades that I want because those kids are disrupting and being bad, but, there is only a few (AB7 *l*19-23).

Stewart (2007) concluded that academic achievement of students is heavily influenced by the school environment. Similarly, Davis (2009) asserts that in considering the academic achievement of African American boys in an urban setting we must closely examine the role of the school. This according to Kimmons (2012) must also be reflected in establishing high expectations and support for students in general.

Finding 4: The success of African American boys in urban elementary schools is impacted by personal responsibility. All eleven participants, when asked why some boys were able to get good grades while others did not, spoke specifically about habits they and other successful students demonstrated that were not seen in others. In their response to question number ten regarding the things that a student could do to become successful, all

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eleven participants spoke about the efforts they put in as the key to their success. Some participants recommended that students surround themselves with others like themselves who like a challenge and who would challenge them. Participant AB9 shared, "Listen and follow direction. Don't come in here and act up and show out. If you put your mind to it you can do it (AB9 *l*59-60)." Stewart (2007) identified commitment, which he defined as the amount of effort a student put into school, as a contributing factor to their success.

Finding 5: The Success of African American boys in urban elementary schools is impacted by their hard work and effort. Ten of the eleven participants identified hard work as the most important thing to become a successful student at their current school. In their responses to questions 1, 6 and 10 participants gave examples of how working hard makes them successful. Participant AB6 shared how some students are trying their hardest and are getting good grades and that some students keep going even if they get bad grades. This is in alignment with finding 6. Stewart (2007) identified commitment, which he defined as the amount of effort a student put into school, as a contributing factor to their success.

Finding 6: The success of African American boys in urban elementary schools cannot be measured by grades alone. In response to question 6, ten of the eleven participants highlighted the effort put into being successful rather than the grades themselves. AB1 shared that some students do make bad grades but are good students in school. AB7 also shared, "Even if it's low passing grade I feel good for them. You can even fail a test and still be a successful students." Participant AB9, shared that he believes that a successful student is one who, gets good grades, demonstrates good behavior, and serves as a role model for the younger children.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications for educational leaders such as elementary school principals, school division administrators, and local school boards in similar settings as they seek to improve the quality of the educational experience for all students. The findings of this study become even more urgent especially as it pertains to the academic success of African American boys in particular. The following implications are suggestions based on the topics addressed by the responses of the eleven participants.

Implication 1: Educational leaders in urban elementary schools should work to identify ways to build and support positive peer groups. According to a participant in the Ligon-Polk 2007 study, some of the failures experienced by the African American boys he reported on was tied to those individuals allowing the group to dictate their academic participation, especially when the group's mindset it to be cool. This being cool meant not excelling academically or participating in academically productive behaviors. This has some important implication for the educational leaders in elementary schools. In order to overcome this barrier leaders and teachers will need to implement specific programs and incentives to change the mindset of the African American boys as a group to one in which academic success is seen as the norm and where the meaning of being cool reflects academic success.

Implication 2: Educational Leaders in urban elementary school should work to support teachers in implementing effective classroom management and quality instruction. At a time when more and more school divisions are experiencing a shortage of teachers and are being forced to find more and more creative ways to attract candidates to the classroom, this presents an additional concern based on the finding that teachers attitude and readiness are factors that contribute to the success of African American boys. For those present in the classroom, especially for those within their first one to five years of teaching, classroom management is identified as an area of continued concerns. This added factor warrants a much deeper look at how classes are composed, how discipline matters are managed, how students are assigned, and how students who identify themselves as "good kids" are supported.

Implication 3: Educational leaders should have deep conversations about class compositions and management of disruptive students. The eleven African American boys in the study referenced how the constant disruption and interruptions to their instructional environment hinder even further academic success. All eleven participants discussed how the environmental suitability presents a barrier to their day to day accomplishments. Seven of the participants referenced specifically how these disruptions were distracting from their ability to stay focused and often so severe that it prevents the teachers from teaching. Three of the participants gave suggestions about how to impact changes to these disruption. Participants AB6 and AB5 suggested that students identified as "bad kids" be separated from the "good

kids" so that the good kids can learn. School leaders should look at alternatives to how students are grouped for their instructional classes, and extensively look at ways to accommodate the needs of the "good kids" while still meeting the needs of the "bad kid." Newman, Myers, Newman, Lohman, and Smith (2000), argued that the ability to control behavior makes a difference. This holds true for both participants and the school administrators.

Implication 4: Educational leaders in urban elementary schools should work to identify ways to build and promote intrinsic motivation in African American boys in order to support their academic success. As all eleven participants indicated in finding 4, they believe that the boys in their school have to take some personal responsibility for their success or failure. This adds to Stewart (2007) definition of commitment. This information challenges school leaders with motivating African American boys to put more effort in their academics success.

Implication 5: Educational leaders in urban elementary schools should work to identify ways to support the hard work and effort of African American boys. As stated by the participants the effort or hard work they and others put into studying, working, and making the right choices should be considered just as much as the grades they receive. This information challenges school leaders to recognize the work that is put into assignments and test rather than just recognizing the grades themselves. This would mean a shift from number and letter grades to a more holistic system that would recognize the areas students are doing well with while identifying the areas they continue to need support with.

Implication 6: Educational leaders in urban elementary schools should work to identify alternative ways to recognize students as successful. As participants stated in the study, it is possible to get bad grades and be a good or successful student. Participants AB9 shared how his own sister based on just good grades would be considered unsuccessful based on her grades on the Diagnostic Reading Assessment (DRA), but by all other measures she is successful. AB11 also shared that he believes that because someone gets good grades does not mean that they are smart. This would mean that school leaders must look at nontraditional grading as a way to identify and recognize successful African American boys. This might

require a shift from traditional letter and number grades and place more focus on the progress students make towards what we expect them to learn.

Recommendation for Future Research

The results of this study may have implications for future research. This section will detail suggestions for future research on the topic of School Factors that Contribute to the Academic Success of African American Boys in Urban Elementary Schools.

1. Future research should include the qualitative perspective of the classroom teachers of African American boys meeting the three criteria similar to those established in this study. This would give a more comprehensive view to include what teachers and administrators perceive as the school factors that contribute to the success of African American boys in urban elementary schools.

2. Future quantitative research using the same three criteria as described in this study, from a wider cross section of participants on a division level would provide more data to allow for wider generalization. This would address some geographical, community, and socioeconomic factors while providing a wider range of experiences. A quantitative study would also provide some statistical analysis to draw correlation between these perceptions and level of student academic success.

Conclusion

In exploring the school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American boys in an urban elementary school there are several factors impacting that success. Peer influence and peer interaction have the potential to be a positive or negative influence with similar impact on students' academic progress. The data showed that when participants associated themselves with others sharing similar positive beliefs, they identified that as one factor contributing to their success. Participants identified specific times and ways their peers have motivated them, challenged them, supported them, and deterred them from negative behaviors.

The role of the teacher was far reaching and according to the data, attributed much of the academic success the participants experienced. Participants saw the teacher as the person

in the school that helped them the most through providing discipline and structure, motivating them, and differentiating instruction and support based on what their strengths are. Some participants also shared that their relationship with the teacher allowed them to have a certain level of comfort so they could ask for help when they needed to, could take risks knowing that they would be provided support and additional opportunities to show improvement, and could allow the teacher to learn more about them as students in order to provide instruction and support specific to their strengths and weaknesses.

Environmental suitability or the degree to which the school environment impacted participants' ability to learn and become more successful was identified by the participants as a major factor contributing to their academic success. Participants spoke extensively about the impact the constant distractions such as classroom disruptive behaviors, hallway noise and distractions, bullying behaviors from both their peers and staff members had. Participant AB8 mentioned that even his interaction with the cafeteria monitor was a factor that hindered even more academic success because he begins to think about those interactions before his lunch time, which is early in the day. Further, thoughts about his interactions with the cafeteria monitor continue to occupy his attention long after lunch. However, the positive impacts of the environmental suitability allowed the participants to feel comfortable enough to demonstrate appropriate practices such as studying openly, changing their behavior from being a disruption themselves to being an advocate for others, and taking responsibility for their own actions. Participant AB1 spoke of the environmental print around his school as a motivator for him to try even harder to reach his career goal of become an animator. He referenced the many bulletin boards throughout the building as a source of information where he can learn new things or just review some things he might have learned in earlier grades.

All eleven participants believed that they also play a major part in their success, by taking responsibility for their actions with such behaviors as, demonstrating appropriate behaviors, studying, paying attention during instruction, and accepting the challenge of working hard. Participant AB7 shared that he believed that some of his African American peers see being African American as a disadvantage, but he sees it as an opportunity to work even harder.

Overall, participants did not see success as just a collection of good grades and passing test scores. Nine participants highlighted other reasons or criteria that should be used to determine if someone is successful. Participant AB1 believes, "It takes more than grades to say they are successful. Some make bad grades but are good in school." Participant AB4 believes, "It's not enough to use grades to say they are failing or not. Some learn different."

Personal Reflection

This study was an eye opening experience for me. As an elementary school administrator, I went into this study with some assumptions that later were challenged by the participants. At first, based on the selection criteria, I was surprised to find how many potential participants were eliminated once the requirement of three years consistent enrollment was applied. As I spoke to participants, I was surprised to hear how articulate they were about their own struggles such as trying to fit in, deal with bullies, and change their behaviors from inappropriate to those of a "good kid." As an administrator who believes that all students should be afforded the same opportunities for learning, and that teachers should be held responsible for management of their class, I was challenged by something the participants all wanted answers about. Participants' desire to "have the bad kids moved so the good kids can learn," is forcing me to reevaluate how I structure classes, to what extent I hold teachers accountable for inappropriate behaviors in their classes, and what structures and policies I have in place to limit the impact of these "bad kids."

Speaking to the participants also offered an insight into their goals and dreams. So often, elementary students are unable to articulate their dreams or have a plan of how to accomplish these goals. However, these eleven boys are clear about the role they believe education will play in a good future. Even the participants who were uncertain about what career paths they were going to take had a clear idea of how a good education, even at the elementary level, would allow them to attend a good university and "get a good job!"

Most importantly the findings and experience of working with the students and informally speaking to their teachers, parents, peers, and administrators, have sharpened my resolve to maintain the high expectations I have for those students in my charge. As Kimmons (2012) found, these students do need me to have expectations for them but require me to

provide them with the tools and opportunities to help them reach them. This personalized expectation will require me to get to know my students to identify what each boy needs.

Finally, as I formed a relationship with some of the participants and their families, I began to wonder how their future school placement would measure up in providing them some of the factors they identified as helping to make them more successful. Will they find the teachers there just as caring and supportive as those at their current setting? Will they be able to surround themselves with peers who share similar work habit, goals, aspiration, and background? Will the find an environment with little distraction and conducive to their learning? Will they continue to be self-motivated as they matriculate through their secondary journey?

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    males. *Journal of Secondary Gifted Education, 17*(4), 222-229

Appendix A
IRB Training Certificate

Certificate of Completion

This certifies that

Rohan Cumberbatch-Smith

Has completed

Training in Human Subjects Protection

On the following topics:

Historical Basis for Regulating Human Subjects Research

The Belmont Report

Federal and Virginia Tech Regulatory Entities, Policies and Procedures

on

June 26, 2012

David Moore, IRB Chair

Appendix B
Virginia Tech IRB Approval Letter
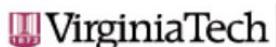
VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
email irb@vt.edu
website http://www.irb.vt.edu

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 9, 2015

TO: Ted S Price, Rohan Cumberbatch-Smith

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires April 25, 2018)

PROTOCOL TITLE: What School Factors Contribute to the Academic Success of African American Boys Attending Urban Elementary Schools?

IRB NUMBER: 14-1216

Effective February 9, 2015, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7
Protocol Approval Date: February 9, 2015
Protocol Expiration Date: February 8, 2016
Continuing Review Due Date*: January 25, 2016

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Parental Consent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants
In Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: What School Factors Contribute to the Academic Success of African American Boys Attending Urban Elementary Schools?

Investigator(s): Rohan Cumberbatch-Smith rsmith50@nps.k12.va.us/757-553-0018

Name E-mail / Phone number

Dr. Ted Price pted7@vt.edu

Name E-mail / Phone number

I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of this study is to examine school factors contributing to the success of African American boys in an urban elementary school setting. There are studies examining reasons why African American boys as a group underperform. However, there is little information about why so many of them continue to perform at high academic levels. This study will use audio recorded interviews to collect information from 5th grade African American boys detailing their ideas of success and what school factors such as the culture, rules, procedures etc. contributed to their success. To participate each African American boy must have been enrolled at the current school for at least three years, be currently enrolled in the 5th grade, and must have passed the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) in grades 3 and 4. Any and all findings will be used in the completion of a doctoral dissertation through Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech).

II. Procedures

Should you agree to your child's participation in this study your son will participate in two face to face audio recorded interviews with the investigator. Both interviews will be conducted at your son's school. The entire focus of the study is your son's school experiences, therefore no data will be collected about home, family, economic status, or religious preference. During the two interviews your son will be asked to respond to a total of 10 questions, all targeting responses around the school factors. During the first interview he will be asked 5 of the 10 questions. The second face to face interview will be conducted four weeks after the first. During the second interview he will engage in fact check with investigator to ensure I have accurately documented his responses. Your son will then respond to the remaining 5 questions and fact check those responses.

1. What do you think it means to be a successful student at this school?

2. Do you think that you are a successful student? Why or Why not?

3. What things at this school help you to be successful?

4. What things at this school make you unsuccessful at this school?

5. Why do you believe that some boys at this school get good grades while some do not?

6. How do you feel when students are identified as successful based upon a test?

7. Which people in your school would you say help you to be a successful student?

8. What one person at school would you say helps you the most?

9. If you could change one thing in your life that would help you to become a more successful student, what would that one thing be?

10. What would you say is the most important thing to do to be a successful student at this school?

Should you agree to your son's participation the investigator will need to access his school academic records as part of the documentation of his academic success and continuous enrollment. All information collected and used during this study will be secured in a locked device accessible only by the investigator and his VT advisor. No personal or identifiable information will be published.

III. Risks

There are no risks as a result of your son's participation in this process. His participation will not influence his grades or standing at the school. No personal or identifiable information will be published.

IV. Benefits

No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage your son to participate. However, the information gathered from this study will hopefully assist educators in more successfully meeting the needs of African American boys in urban elementary schools.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

At no time will the researchers release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than individuals working on the project without your written consent. The Virginia Tech (VT) Institutional Review Board (IRB) may view the study's data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for the oversight of the protection of human subjects involved in research. Any and all identifiable data and information will be stored separately, and securely from the coded data that will be published in the study. For example your son will be identified with a code which will allow the investigator to publish the findings without releasing his real name and information. All this information will only be accessible by investigator and VT advisor.

VI. Compensation

For your son's participation he will receive a $25 gift card at the completion of the second interview.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

It is important for you to know that you and your son are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw your son before the completion of the second interview he will not be eligible to receive the compensation. Your son is free not to answer any questions that he choose or respond to what is being asked of him without penalty. Please note that there may be circumstances under which the investigator may determine that he should not continue as a subject.

Should you and your son withdraw or otherwise discontinue participation. Your decision to end his participation will not influence his grades or standing at the school. No personal or identifiable information will be published.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you or your son have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your son's rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

IX. Subject's Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for my son to participate:

_____ Date_____

Subject signature

_____

Subject printed name

(Note: each subject must be provided a copy of this form. In addition, the IRB office may stamp its approval on the consent document(s) you submit and return the stamped version to you for use in consenting subjects; therefore, ensure each consent document you submit is ready to be read and signed by subjects.)

Minor Assent Form

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
Informed Consent for Participants
In Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: What School Factors Contribute to the Academic Success of African American Boys Attending Urban Elementary Schools?

Investigator(s): Rohan Cumberbatch-Smith rsmith50@nps.k12.va.us/757-553-0018
Name E-mail / Phone number

Dr. Ted Price pted7@vt.edu
Name E-mail / Phone number

I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of this study is to find out what it is about this urban elementary school that helps some African American boys become success. This study will use audio recorded interviews to collect information from 5th grade African American boys detailing their ideas of success and what the school does to help them become success. To be a part of the study each African American boy must have been enrolled at the current school for at least three years, be currently enrolled in the 5th grade, and must have passed the SOLs in grades 3 and 4.

II. Procedures

Should you agree to be a part of this study you will take part in two face to face audio recorded interviews with me. Both interviews will be done at your school. The focus of the study is your school experiences, and no data will be collected about your life outside the school. During the two interviews you will be asked 10 questions, all about your experiences at the school. During the first interview you will be asked 5 of the 10 questions. The second face to face interview will be done four weeks after the first. During the second interview I will review the information you shared in the first interview to make sure I have accurately documented your responses. You will then respond to the remaining 5 questions and review those responses.

1. What do you think it means to be a successful student at this school?
2. Do you think that you are a successful student? Why or Why not?
3. What things at this school help you to be successful?
4. What things at this school make you unsuccessful at this school?
5. Why do you believe that some boys at this school get good grades while some do not?
6. How do you feel when students are identified as successful based upon a test?
7. Which people in your school would you say help you to be a successful student?
8. What one person at school would you say helps you the most?
9. If you could change one thing in your life that would help you to become a more successful student, what would that one thing be?
10. What would you say is the most important thing to do to be a successful student at this school?

If you agree to be a part of the study I will need to review your school academic records as part of the documentation of your academic success and enrollment.

III. Risks

There are no risks to you if you decide to be a part of this study. Your participation will not affect your grades or standing at the school. No personal information will be published.

IV. Benefits

No promise has been made to encourage you to participate. However, the information from this study will hopefully assist schools in more successfully teaching African American boys in urban elementary schools.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

At no time will I release any of your personal information to anyone other than individuals working with me on the project without your written consent. You will be identified with a code which will allow me to publish the findings without releasing your real name and information. All this information will only be accessible by me and my VT advisor.

VI. Compensation

For your participation you will receive a $25 gift card at the completion of the second interview. If you withdraw before the end of the second interview you will not receive the $25 gift card.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are free not to answer any question you choose without penalty. Please note that there may be circumstances under which I may determine that you should not continue as a part of the study.

VIII. Questions or Concerns

Should you or your parents have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the investigators whose contact information at the top of this document.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or your rights as part of the study, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at moored@vt.edu or (540) 231-4991.

IX. Subject's Assent

I have read the Assent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby give my voluntary assent:

_____ Date_____

Subject signature

_____

Subject printed name

Appendix E

Electronic Permission from Dr. Davis to use interview questions

From: "Hawkins Davis Alicia (29Q132)"
AHawkinsDavis@schools.nyc.gov Wednesday - December 18, 2013 2:41 PM
To: "Rohan Cumberbatch-Smith'" rsmith50@nps.k12.va.us

Subject: RE: Your research

That would be fine. Lots of luck to you. Please let me know when you're published!
Dr. Alicia N. Davis
Principal, PS 132Q
(718) 528-5734, Ph
(718)723-6931, Fax

From: Rohan Cumberbatch-Smith [mailto:rsmith50@nps.k12.va.us]
Sent: Wednesday, December 11, 2013 6:05 PM
To: Hawkins Davis Alicia (29Q132)
Subject: Your research

Dr. Davis

I am an elementary school principal at Granby Elementary School in Norfolk, Virginia, pursuing a doctorate in Education Administration through Virginia Tech. Currently I am planning a study to explore the school factors contributing to the academic achievement of African American boys in an urban elementary school. After carefully going through a mountain of literature I came across your study and immediately saw the similarities with my ideas. I am interesting in using the questions you used for your person to person and focus groups interview. Should this be a possibility I will forward a more formal request asking your permission. Just to share a bit of my background which might help to highlight my interest in this topic. I am originally from Jamaica, WI. I migrated to the United States in 1984 and attended Prospect Heights High School in Brooklyn, NY. After HS I joined the United States Army before returning home to enroll in college. I attended Queens-Borough Community college and later City College of New York, where I complete a BS in Elementary education. While pursuing this degree I worked as a paraprofessional at the Summit School in Queens. I later accepted a position at PS 56 (Lewis H. Latimer Elementary School) in Bedford Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. There I taught the 2nd grade for 3 years, while completing a MS in

Special Education at Brooklyn College. In 2001 I relocated to Norfolk, Virginia (an urban school division) where I taught an inclusion 3r grade class for 2 years. In 2003 I voluntarily transferred to another school within the same city to teach the 5th grade for 2 years. In 2005 I completed my administrative endorsement and accepted a position as an assistant principal still in Norfolk. I served 5 years at that location before being transferred to another elementary school in a more impoverished region of the division. There I served as assistant principal for 2 years. I am currently in my 2nd year as principal of Granby Elementary. In all these public school settings I worked very hard to engage students in the school culture by organizing and running chess clubs, male mentor ship clubs, journalism club, and a civic action club. Through all of these interactions with my students I became more exposed to the gap that existed between the achievement of African American males and others. In an attempt to better understand the issues I found myself reading but quickly realized that there was an abundance of literature around why they were not achieving but very little about what practices, structures, and environments allowed them to succeed. Naturally as I pursue my doctorate this topic which has been near and dear to me became my topic of interest. I have completed all my course work and am now focusing on the completion of my dissertation. I thank you for your time and look forward to hearing from you.

Person-to-Person Interview Questions Davis (2009)

1. What do you think it means to be a successful student at this school?

2. Do you think that you are a successful student? Why or Why not?

3. What things at this school help you to be successful?

4. What things at this school make you unsuccessful at this school?

5. What things outside of school help you to be successful? (omitted)

6. What things outside of school make you unsuccessful? (omitted5)

7. Why do you believe that some boys at this school get good grades while some do not?

8. How do you feel when students are identified as successful based upon a test?

9. Which people in your school would you say help you to be a successful student?

10. What one person would you say helps you the most?

11. If you could change one thing in your life that would help you to become a more successful student, what would that one thing be?

12. What would you say is the most important thing to do to be a successful student at this school?

Appendix G

Norfolk Public Schools Approval

Norfolk Public Schools
The cornerstone of a proudly diverse community

Department of Assessment, Research & Accountability

March 3, 2015

Mr. Rohan Cumberbatch-Smith
Doctoral candidate
Virginia Tech University

Dear Mr. Cumberbatch-Smith,

Approval, with stipulations below and attached email, is granted to conduct qualitative research about urban elementary school factors that contribute to educational success for African American male students.

*Stipulations:
- NPS cannot guarantee participation in the study.
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval by the university is required before research may begin.
- Voluntary participation allows any participant to decide individually whether to participate or withdraw at any time, without question or consequence.
- All participants and schools will remain anonymous in data collection, and reporting results. Identification of any individual or school name is prohibited.
- Approval does not constitute commitment of resources or the endorsement of the study or its findings by the school district or the School Board.
- Data collected and results will not become part of any principal, teacher, school, student or district record. All research records must be locked in a secured location.

- The researcher will email a PDF copy of the final dissertation for the school district, and report any changes or problems while conducting the study, to Dr. Bailey.

We look forward to your findings and contribution to instructional practice, program services, and achievement for *ALL* students.

Sincerely,

Karren P. Bailey

Karren P. Bailey, Ed.D.
Executive Director
Assessment, Research & Accountability
Office: 757-628-3850
email: kbailey1@npsk12.com