

Practices and Procedures that Influence African-American Males to  
Drop Out from Public School

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ABSTRACT

The African-American male national on-time graduation rate data are evidence that systemic changes must occur to address the academic failure they experience. A significant gap in achievement exists when compared to the on-time graduation rate of their White male peers. It is possible that some students do not graduate on-time due to retention that may occur after they have entered the ninth grade. The African-American male students in this study failed to graduate on-time because they did not persist to successfully complete their twelfth grade year; instead, they dropped out. While factors associated with societal issues and familial dynamics contribute to this problem, factors associated with public school practices and procedures are the focus of this study.

The educational records of 125 African-American male high school dropouts were analyzed to identify school factors that may explain why they did not persist to graduate. These students dropped out from an urban school division in Virginia during the 2009 and 2010 school years. A mixed methods approach was used to answer the research questions posed in this study. The conceptual framework, a road map for the study, proposes discipline sanctions, curriculum programming, instructional experiences and school relationships as factors for review.

Quantitative research methods were used to analyze longitudinal data and qualitative methods were used to analyze survey data on student perception of teacher relationships. Findings from the study will enable school principals, counselors and teachers to make informed instructional decisions that may prevent African-American males from dropping out of one urban school division in Virginia. While not generalizable to all school settings, strategies associated with discipline sanctions, curriculum programming, instructional experiences and school relationships are provided.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Not until two-dozen disciplinary hearings later did the school division hearing officer realize the common characteristics among the African-American male high school students whose cases were being reviewed. For about half of the students, she had been their elementary or middle school principal. She remembered each student demonstrated average academic ability and commendable citizenship during the time she had known them. A review of each student's cumulative educational record during the discipline hearings revealed patterns of truancy, suspensions, failing grades, and limited credits earned toward graduation. How was it that each African-American male student who previously demonstrated great potential was now facing reassignment to alternative education or possible expulsion? She wondered if there were warning signs that went unnoticed. Perhaps the school administrators, counselors or teachers could have done something to prevent the series of failures experienced by each student.

Each African-American male student demonstrated similar patterns of failure in school despite their differing levels of intellectual ability. A review of the student cumulative educational record often raised questions and revealed contradictions not easily understood. Why did the student earn a proficient or advanced score on the state standardized test and fail the class associated with the test? Why did the student maintain passing grades and satisfactory conduct during the semester he played sports? Why did the student attend school regularly and get to class on time during the sport season? Was it conceivable that the student chose to rise to his potential because something or someone influenced him to do so?

Many of the African-American male students expressed sentiments of despair and anger during the discipline hearings. Searching for the proverbial crack in the suit of armor, the hearing officer often tried to encourage the student by restating their academic potential and previous success. She hoped the hearing sanctions would not influence the student to continue along the path of dropping out of school.

The hearing officer would contact a number of support personnel after reassigning an African-American male student to the alternative school. Counseling and mentoring agencies along with the truancy coordinator and the alternative school principal were among those



contacted. Realizing the reassignment could further disconnect the student from school, she would attempt to develop a supportive network that would follow the student.

The reality is that societal norms and familial dynamics are factors beyond the reach of school policy. In the world of African-American youth culture, being suspended from school may be considered a badge of honor. Successful rap artist T.I. boasts in his song, "Still Ain't Forgave Myself", about not needing school, not doing homework and life on the street (T.I., 2001). Megastar Eminem, a high school dropout, raps about how the principal and school failed him while hip-hop saved him (Eminem, 2001). Such hip-hop and rap music icons saturate the minds of many African-American male students with sentiments contrary to conventional school expectations and mores. Prier and Beachum (2008) suggest that African-American males use the teachings of hip-hop and rap music to develop a sense of self-awareness.

Oftentimes, the values and behaviors expressed by hip-hop and rap artists replace the values that have been taught by parents, grandparents or in church (Oliver, 2006). Oliver's viewpoint gives meaning to the frustration and limited parental control exhibited by many of the guardians attending the discipline hearings. Households absent of male role models, single mothers and elderly grandparents are commonplace for African-American male youth. Nationally, 52% of African-American youth under the age of 18 were living in a single-parent household compared to 74% of White youth who lived in a two-parent household during 2008 (Pew Research Center, 2011). Madyun and Lee (2010) argue that African-American males who live in a single female-headed household do not fare well academically when compared to those living in a two-parent household. They claim the income of a single female-headed household limits the family to housing in impoverished neighborhoods.

Nationally, only 47% of African-American male students received diplomas with their 2005 cohort (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). A significant racial achievement gap exists as 74% of their White male peers graduated from the same national cohort (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Three years later, the gap expanded as the 2008 cohort graduation rate for African-American males remained at 47% while the graduation rate of White males increased to 78% (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).

Factors associated with societal issues and familial dynamics contribute to the African-American male dropout problem (Noguera, 2003b; Oliver, 2006; Prier & Beachum, 2008). Additionally, some African-American male students fail to graduate because their educational

needs are not addressed. Balfanz and Legters (2006) suggest institutional practices contribute to the disproportionate dropout rate of African-American male public school students. The dropout rate among 16 through 24-year-old African-American males ranged from nearly six percentage points higher in 2005 to four percentage points higher in 2008 than their White male peers (U.S. Census Bureau). While the dropout rate for African-American males has declined to approximately 9% in 2008, it remains higher than the dropout rate for all males combined (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine school practices and procedures that influence African-American males to drop out of one school division in Virginia. Researchers have identified exclusionary discipline sanctions, retention in grade, limited access to advanced coursework, and the lack of positive student to teacher relationships as risk factors for dropping out of school (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Neild & Farley-Ripple, 2008; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002). While suspending a student may temporarily address the disruption to the classroom environment, it increases the student's level of disengagement from the taught curriculum (Wright Edelman, 2009). Suspending or removing a student from the classroom environment can create gaps in student learning which may result in negative academic and educational outcomes (Mendez & Knoff, 2003). Moreover, a relationship exists between African-American male student academic performance, teacher quality and positive student to teacher relationships (Neild & Farley-Ripple, 2008; Woodland, 2008).

### Significance of the Study

The existing African-American male high school dropout reality is a national problem that results in decreased tax revenue, increased crime-related expenditures, and human services costs. Students who failed to graduate with the Class of 2008 will cost the nation nearly \$319 billion in lost income over the course of their lifetimes (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). Although factors associated with societal issues and familial dynamics contribute to this problem, factors associated with public school practices and procedures were analyzed. The results of this study will provide educators with an increased awareness of school practices and

procedures that influence African-American males to drop out of one urban school division in Virginia.

Educators may make informed instructional decisions when given longitudinal data, specific to practices and procedures that influence African-American males to drop out of school. Using the findings of this study, elementary, middle and high school educators may implement strategies specific to African-American male student needs. School counselors may use the findings of this study to guide and assist African-American male students with coursework selection and college planning. Additionally, school counselors may gain an increased awareness of the need to assist teachers who may struggle with developing positive relationships with African-American male students. Educators, parents and community leaders may facilitate data-driven conversations regarding the relationship that exists between school practices and procedures and the African-American male dropout rate.

### Research Questions

To gather information regarding the disproportionate dropout rate of African-American males when compared to their peers, the following research questions were explored:

1. How do public school practices and procedures related to discipline sanctions, curriculum planning, instructional experiences and student relationships with adults in their school influence African-American males to drop out of one school division in Virginia?
2. Do African-American male elementary, middle, and high school level students, perceive the value of adults in their school in similar or different ways?
3. What are the primary reasons why African-American male students dropped out of one public school division in Virginia prior to graduation?

### Search for Relevant Literature

To accomplish a review of relevant literature, online database searches were conducted using Education Research Complete from EBSCOhost, Sage Full-Text Collections, ERIC, Google Scholar, and in some cases, consultation with the Virginia Tech online librarian. Sources cited within the literature obtained from the initial search were also used and found to be a helpful resource for historical information. Given the wealth of information regarding African-American male achievement or lack thereof, the researcher limited the search terms for a

complete analysis of achievement associated with suspension, expulsion, teacher attitudes and dropout. Peer reviewed journals were limited to the past five years as a means to obtain reputable and current data reported.

Search terms included, but were not limited to, African-American male achievement, Black male achievement coupled with public education, suspension and expulsion rates, dropout and dropout rate, retention, culture, cultural disconnect, teacher perceptions, attendance, male involvement, school structure, Advanced Placement, gifted and literacy instruction. As with the search terms previously listed, various names of researchers in the field were also searched using EBSCOhost and Google Scholar. These names included, but were not limited to, Noguera, Ladson-Billings, Losen, Singleton, Winters, Ogbu, Balfanz and Swanson. These researchers are among those whose work supports minority and African-American male student achievement. To obtain current facts and figures of the achievement data, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), United States Census Bureau, College Board, United States and Virginia Department of Education websites were searched as well.

### Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the terms listed below are used as defined:

*Achievement* is earning proficiency levels as measured by state and national reading and math assessments, which include the Commonwealth of Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) assessment, and the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The Virginia SOLs are rigorous academic standards that describe the commonwealth's expectations for student learning and achievement in grades K-12. The SOL assessment is the criterion-referenced accountability tool used to measure student achievement in the core instructional areas that must be passed at the high school level to earn a high school diploma (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.). The NAEP is a national standardized assessment in various subject areas to include mathematics and reading in grades 4, 8 and 12.

*Adequate Yearly Progress* (AYP) is a part of the No Child Left Behind Act (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115, Stat. 1425) that mandates the minimum level of student subgroup improvement that schools and school divisions must achieve each school year. These subgroups are all students, five ethnic groups (American Indian, Asian, African-American,

Hispanic and White), English Language Learners (ELL), Economically Disadvantaged, and Students with Disabilities (SWD).

*Advanced Placement (AP) class* is a college-level course taught by highly qualified teachers who meet the required state licensure criteria. Students may be awarded college credit when they successfully pass the related exam developed by the College Entrance Examination Board ([www.collegeboard.com](http://www.collegeboard.com)).

*African-American Male* is a student having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.) attending a public high school in the Commonwealth of Virginia or otherwise in the United States in grades nine through twelve with commensurate ages no older than 20 years old.

*African-American Youth Culture* as described by Noguera (2003b) is likened to popular culture, which is dynamic and fluid. It is defined by the symbols associated with African-American speech, dress, music and styles established in trends shared by America's youth.

*Drop Out* is exiting or quitting public school before meeting the criteria for graduation within four years of entering ninth grade for the first time.

*Disproportionality* exists in the areas of special education identification, placement, and/or discipline when the percentage of students from the group in such programs is greater than their percentage in the school population as a whole (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

*Expulsion* is a disciplinary action imposed by a school board whereby a student is not permitted to attend school within the school division and is ineligible for readmission for at least 365 calendar days after the date of the discipline action (Code of Virginia, 22.1-276.01).

*Highly Qualified Teacher* is one who is fully licensed by the state, has at least a bachelor's degree and has demonstrated competency in each subject taught as required by NCLB.

*No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115, Stat. 1425) funds public schools to close the achievement gap for all students. NCLB mandates performance indicators for mathematics and reading achievement that is disaggregated for nine subgroups. These subgroups are all students, five ethnic groups (American Indian,

Asian, African-American, Hispanic and White), English Language Learners (ELL), Economically Disadvantaged, and Students with Disabilities (SWD).

*On-Time Graduation Rate* for the nation and Commonwealth of Virginia indicates the percentage of students who entered ninth-grade for the first time together and were scheduled to graduate four years later (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

*Overrepresentation* is a condition in which a racial/ethnic group is represented by a higher percentage in the special education population than in the overall population (Virginia Department of Education, n.d.).

*Promoting Power* is a measure developed by Johns Hopkins University (2008) that is used to compare high school graduation rates. It is calculated by comparing the number of students enrolled in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade to the number enrolled in 12<sup>th</sup> grade three years later. Schools with 60% or fewer seniors than freshman four years earlier will have an unacceptable graduation rate by state and national standards.

*Retention* occurs when a student repeats a grade level for not obtaining the academic requirements as set by a school district (Jimerson, Pletcher & Graydon, 2006).

*Social Promotion* occurs when a student is promoted to the next grade level without satisfying academic requirements in their current grade (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

*Status Dropout Rate* indicates the percentage of 16 through 24 year olds who are not enrolled in high school and who lack a high school credential. High school credentials include high school diplomas and equivalent credentials, such as a General Educational Development (GED) certificate. This rate excludes persons in prisons, persons in the military and other persons not living in households (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.).

*Suspension* is the exclusion from school and school activities because of a conduct infraction. Short-term suspensions are removals up to 10 school days. Long-term suspensions are removals of more than 10 but less than 365 school days (Code of Virginia 22.1-276.01).

*Truant* is a student who has accumulated an unacceptable number of absences in a school year as determined by the state. In Virginia, the law does not define a truant specifically but does define

a child who is habitually and without justification absent from school as a "child in need of supervision" (Virginia Department of Education, 2005).

### Conceptual Framework

This study examines school practices and procedures that influence African-American males to drop out of public education. The conceptual framework shown in Figure 1 is a depiction of four components associated with public school practices and procedures. These components are (a) discipline sanctions, (b) curriculum programming, (c) instructional experiences and, (d) school relationships. In the related literature, each component is portrayed as a procedure or practice area associated with the African-American male dropout problem. A dotted line is used to connect the contributing factors associated with each component of public school practices and procedures. Consequently, the contributing factors identified as suspension, expulsion, advanced coursework, retention in grade, and teacher support are believed to influence African-American males to drop out of public school.

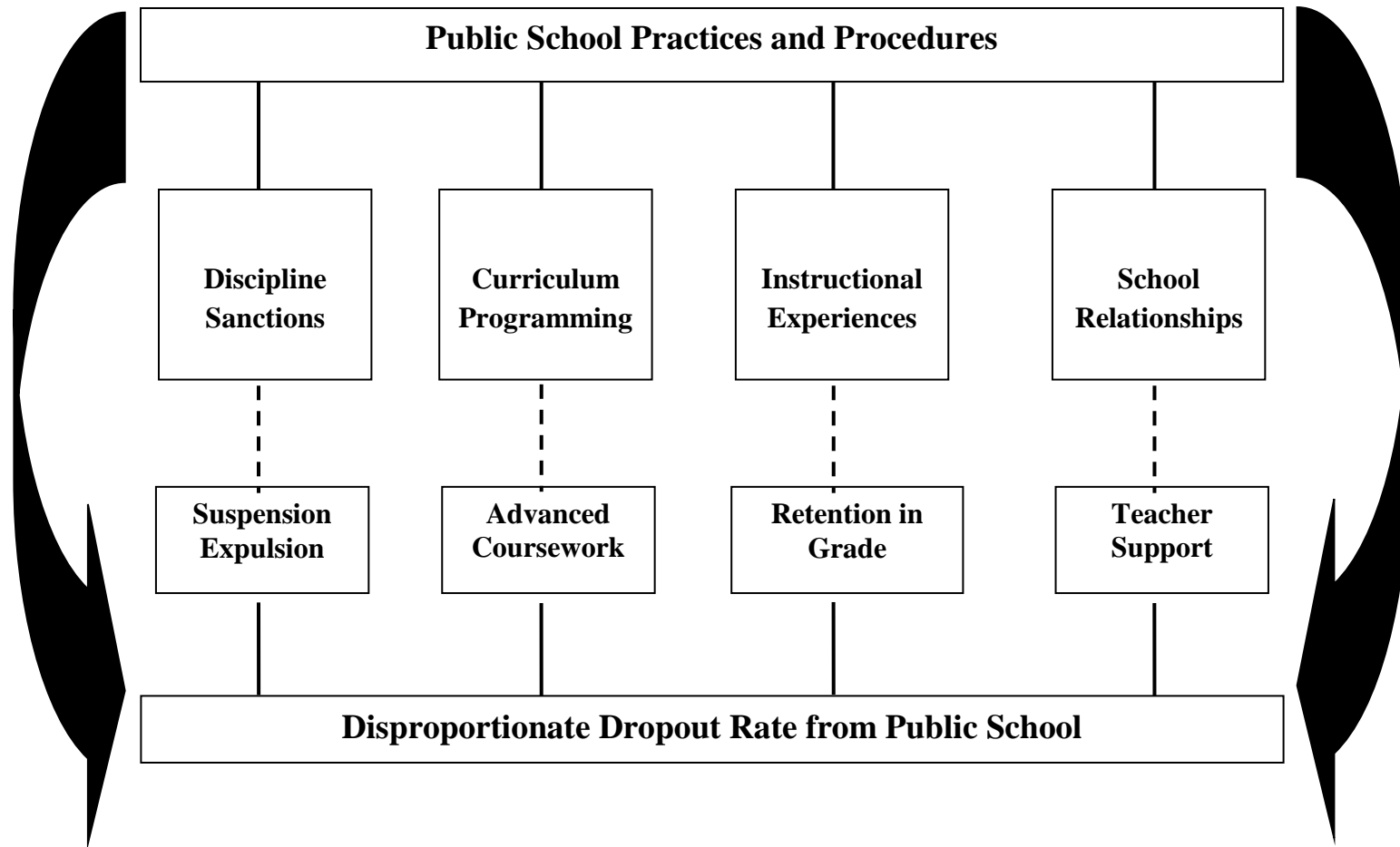
Each component and contributing factor outlined in Figure 1 is used as the conceptual framework for the Chapter II review of related literature.

### Organization of the Study

The report of the study is divided into five chapters. Chapter I, Introduction, includes these subheadings: the purpose of the study, significance of the study, research questions, search for relevant literature, definitions, conceptual framework and concludes with the organization of the study. Chapter II, Review of Literature, is organized based upon each component and contributing factor of the conceptual framework and ends with conclusions and implications. Subheadings included in this chapter are discipline sanctions, suspension/expulsion, curriculum programming, coursework, instructional experiences, retention, school relationships and teacher. Chapter III, Methodology, includes a description of subjects and location, delimitations and limitations, and data collected and analysis. A description of data collected and how the data were analyzed is included for each research question. Chapter IV, Analysis of Data, begins with an introduction followed by the problem and purpose revisited, and application of the research questions. An analysis of each research question is discussed and associated tables are included. Chapter V, Summary, Implications and Recommendations, includes a brief summary,

implications and recommendations for practitioners organized by each component of the conceptual framework, and concludes with recommendations for further research.





*Figure 1.* Practices and procedures that influence African-American males to drop out from public school (Jones, 2011).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The disproportionate dropout rate of African-American male public school students suggests that there may be institutional practices that contribute to this phenomenon (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Neild & Farley-Ripple, 2008; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002). Exclusionary discipline practices, access to advanced curricular offerings, retention in grade, and student to teacher relationships are among the key concepts that were analyzed. Each component and contributing factor outlined in Figure 1 is further reviewed in subsequent headings.

#### Discipline Sanctions

A number of research studies have demonstrated that African-American males are represented in exclusionary discipline sanctions at much higher rates than other student groups (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Noguera, 2003a; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002). Noguera (2003a) asserts that African-American males are among the most overrepresented group of students to be suspended, expelled or removed from the classroom as a form of discipline. A study on racial and gender disproportionality in school punishment found African-American males to have experienced significantly higher rates of discipline referrals, suspensions and expulsions when compared to White males (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002). Findings from the Mendez and Knoff study (2003) revealed that while African-American males accounted for 12% of the K-12 student population, they were twice as likely to be suspended as any other gender or race group combined. The percentage of African-American males was double that of White males suspended and triple that of White males expelled nationally in 2003 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

Although held responsible for maintaining a safe environment, school administrators must understand that exclusionary discipline sanctions create long-term devastating effects. According to Townsend (2000), teachers of a European-American background may perceive African-American males as threatening or dangerous which results in an overreaction to a simple act of insubordination. Oftentimes, this overreaction may result in the student becoming confrontational, further demonstrating violations of the school disciplinary code of conduct.

Students who get into trouble frequently may feel marginalized and lose the motivation to conform to school norms (Noguera, 2003a). Rausch and Skiba (2004) suggested that the loss of instructional time resulting from suspension negatively affects achievement in general and particularly for African-American males. The Children's Defense Fund Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign identifies suspension and expulsion as major risk factors for students to drop out of school. Students who are suspended or expelled are more likely than their peers to drop out of school altogether (Wright Edelman, 2009).

### *Suspension/Expulsion.*

Skiba, et al. (2002) analyzed the mean rates of occurrence for office referrals and suspensions using a two factor analysis of covariance. The two factors were race (Black and White) and gender controlling for socioeconomic status. Differences in the rates for office referrals and suspension from school were significant for the interaction of the two variables. African-American males were referred to the office and suspended at higher rates than White males, African-American females and White females. Additionally, no change resulted when lunch status was added as a covariate. Further analysis of the disproportionate office referral and suspension rates between African-American males and White males revealed no significant differences in the mean number of days suspended. Specifically, African-American males and White males were suspended a similar number of days for similar infractions. Such findings suggest the need to equip teachers with strategies to manage African-American male student misbehavior effectively. An awareness of how student behavior is defined, by both teacher and student culture, can provide a foundation for remedying discipline trends among African-American males (Monroe, 2006).

In an attempt to improve the discipline patterns and academic performance of African-American males attending a Midwestern urban school district, a study using a sample of 3,586 African-American male students in grades kindergarten through grade 12 was conducted (Bonner, Butler, Joubert & Lewis, 2010). The research team collected student data from the school division's student information database. African-American males accounted for approximately 11% of the total population and nearly 37% of all males cited for disciplinary action. Bonner et al. (2010) developed a formula, the relative risk ratio (RRR), to determine the degree of overrepresentation in documented behavior occurrences and sanctions for African-

American males in relation to White males. Unlike the Skiba et al. (2002) study, statistically significant findings indicated that African-American males experienced harsher sanctions when compared to other groups analyzed in Bonner et al. (2010) study. Nearly 45% of African-American males were sanctioned to a three-day out-of-school suspension penalty and in-school suspension for acts of disobedience. For the same acts of disobedience, 18% of White males received less punitive sanctions of restricted recess and in-school suspension (Bonner et al., 2010). Consequently, African-American males were being suspended at higher rates than their peers which resulted in higher rates of absence and missed instruction.

Suspension from the classroom for one period, one day or one week contributes to the number of days a student is absent from the classroom. Passing classes at the high school level is often linked to and contingent upon class attendance. Therefore, the suspended student is penalized academically in school districts where clock hours lost from excessive absences cannot be recovered. An examination of student absenteeism and their scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) mathematics assessment established a relationship between the two. Students with fewer absences were more likely to score at or above Basic on the NAEP mathematics assessment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). The risk of dropping out of school increases with poor attendance due to out-of-school suspension and in-school suspension for African-American male students (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Neild & Farley-Ripple, 2008). Consequently, exclusionary discipline practices remove the student from the classroom, which creates gaps in instruction that negatively influence achievement outcomes.

In a two-year study of schools across the Commonwealth of Virginia, The Virginia Commission for Youth indicated school attendance policies might dictate that students can pass a class only if they do not exceed a certain number of unexcused absences (Virginia Commission on Youth, 2008). Multiple absences due to suspensions can result in automatic failure of the missed class under such attendance policies. Students demonstrating poor academic performance and disruptive behaviors in the classroom may experience social disincentives to stay in school (DeSocio, VanCura, Nelson, Hewitt, Kitzman, & Cole, 2007). The DeSocio et al. (2007) study involving a control group of 37 urban high school students who were truant and failing multiple classes found teachers encouraged school absenteeism. Among the findings, teachers and students commonly echoed, “Why are you still coming to class when you have no

chance of passing?” However, DeSocio et al. (2007) did not delineate whether or not such statements resulted from policy or teacher personal sentiment or both.

The NCES reports rates of suspension and expulsion as measures for student persistence in school. Differences in suspension and expulsion rates exist among African-American males and their peers. In 2007, the percentage of African-American males in grades six through twelve who had been suspended was double the percentage of White males who had been suspended. Specifically, the 2007 Parent and Family Involvement in Education Survey revealed 50% of African-American males versus 21% of White males experienced suspension from school. Rates of expulsion were significantly higher for African-American males in grades six through twelve when compared to any other peer group. An approximate 3% of all male and female students in grades six through twelve had been expelled with 17% of the total being African-American male (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

### Curriculum Programming

In its 2008 report, the Alliance for Excellent Education suggested that African-American male students are nationally underrepresented in Advanced Placement classes, which are rigorous high school courses that may count as college credit. Similarly, the Office for Civil Rights 2006 biennial projection for African-American male enrollment in Advanced Placement math and science classes was significantly lower than that of any other male ethnic group (U.S. Department of Education). Most recently, the College Board (2010) reported that African-American students continue to be significantly underrepresented in Advanced Placement programs across the nation.

Harris (1995) suggests that principals, counselors and teachers must work collaboratively with parents to develop a culture of high academic expectations for African-American male students. Specifically, the organization is defined by practices and procedures that are individualized and focused on post high school plans for African-American male students. Two findings from the Harris study germane to curriculum programming for African-American male students were: (1) Counselors should hand schedule certain students and monitor academic progress, and (2) Principals, counselors and teachers should communicate an expectation that advanced classes are required with limited opportunities to opt-out for lower level classes.

### *Coursework.*

The College Board encourages educators to identify programs of rigor for middle school, high school freshman and sophomore students so that they may be better prepared for advanced coursework. While the College Board does not report data disaggregated by gender and ethnicity combined, it reported an equity gap within the nation's public high school Class of 2009. Of all Class of 2009 students who took an Advanced Placement exam at any point in high school, only 8.2% were African-American while 59.4% were White. During this time, African-American students represented 14.5% and White students represented 61.6% of the public school graduating class. Moreover, traditionally underrepresented students currently demonstrate significantly lower performances on Advanced Placement examinations (2010). As suggested by the Schott Foundation, the College Board asserts that teachers are not delivering adequate instruction to traditionally underserved students for the rigors of advanced coursework.

Compared to other states, Virginia was commended for experiencing the largest five-year increase in the percentage of the student population to receive at least one passing score of three or higher on an Advanced Placement exam during high school. The College Board (2010) also reported that an equity and excellence gap exists among African-American students who successfully take Advanced Placement exams in Virginia. African-American students accounted for 24.4% of the Virginia 2009 graduating class and 11.8% of the Advanced Placement examinee population. Only 6.5% of African-American students taking an Advanced Placement exam achieved a passing score of three or higher. Conversely, White students accounted for 61.0% of the Virginia 2009 graduating class and 62.6% of the Advanced Placement examinee population. A passing score of three or higher was achieved by 67.1% of White students taking an Advanced Placement exam in Virginia.

The College Board statistics regarding Advanced Placement enrollment and progress may be evidence of the limited literature available on gifted African-American males. Whiting (2009) suggests that national reports of the current state of African-American males undermine rather than support the opportunity to achieve in academic settings. Perhaps such a report is the 2007 Children's Defense Fund Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign that reports African-American students to be overrepresented in special education programs and underperforming on national assessments. Described as a national disaster, the Campaign reported that an African-

American male born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime. Influenced by such facts and stereotypes, teachers engage in deficit thinking which limits their ability and willingness to consider African-American males for advanced coursework (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). The related literature that exists often focuses on the African-American male student and his self-perception surrounding academic ability and limited achievement (Rascoe & Atwater, 2005; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005; Whiting, 2009).

Tyson et al. (2005) utilized data from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to examine the underrepresentation of African-American students in Advanced Placement, honors, gifted and talented classes throughout the state. To determine the level of underrepresentation, a Disparity Index representing the percentage of African-American students enrolled in the school compared to the percentage of African-American students enrolled in advanced classes was created for each school. Also reviewed were the criteria for course enrollment, the processes for identification and the availability of advanced curricula offerings. Using the Disparity Index data, a subsample of schools were selected based upon over and under representation of minorities in advanced course offerings. Of the six high schools reviewed, a general pattern of underrepresentation of African-American students enrolled in advanced curricula offerings surfaced.

Sampling of the informants for interviews was conducted to mirror the student population enrolled in advanced curricula offerings. The interviews were standardized for time and informants were asked the same questions with the choice to opt-out of being taped and transcribed. The standard set of questions was developed to facilitate the assessment of the “acting White burden” (Tyson et al., 2005, p. 588). A computer-based and manual approach was utilized to conduct an objective analysis of the data. The results were divided to address (a) the achievement orientation of African-American students based upon course selection, (b) the nature of African-American adolescents’ peer culture with regard to academic striving and achievement, (c) similarities and differences between African-American and White adolescent peer cultures related to achievement (Tyson et al., 2005).

The African-American male high school student sample reflected the belief that taking advanced coursework improved college and career options (Tyson et al., 2005). With the exception of two informants attending one high school in the study, none of the 40 African-American informants reported problems with African-American peers related to high

achievement. Instead, they insisted that excelling academically was not a problem; they did not feel pressure to underachieve even when they were the “only one.” In response to the researcher’s question regarding peer reaction to his advanced coursework (Tyson et al., 2005), an African-American male informant responded:

That's a wide variety of reactions. It ranges from "Man, I can't believe you're taking this, this is really hard. Why are you messing with it in your senior year? You should be relaxing" to "Oh man, you are taking that? You must be smart and stuff. And (sic) that kind of thing." (p. 591)

Another African-American male informant responded, “I mean I can do honors, but I don't know if I could be working that hard. I'd probably slack off. So I just take regular college prep” (Tyson et al., 2005, p. 591). Carter’s (2008) assertion that African-American students believe schooling is a vehicle for their upward social and economic mobility supports the findings of Tyson study.

While not pervasive in the Tyson et al. (2005) study, the “burden of acting White” was deemed sociologically significant at one high school location. Unlike the other high schools in the Tyson et al. study, large income and course enrollment gaps were present between African-American and White students. In addition to the school counselor who was African-American, two African-American students attending this high school expressed knowledge of oppositional attitudes among African-Americans. Specifically, three themes surrounded the thought that (1) It was not cool to be enrolled in advanced classes, (2) African-American students did not place a high value on education, and (3) The pressure of being the only African-American student enrolled in an advanced class was difficult. Despite the race-related pressure observed within one of the six high schools studied, the African-American students that avoided advanced curricular offerings did so for fear of not doing well academically, not fear of peer ridicule. While the “burden of acting White” was not the purpose of the study, Tyson et al. suggest that larger studies be conducted to analyze and understand the achievement gap that exists between African-American and White students.

African-American male students are overrepresented in special education programs where they have limited access and exposure to the general education curriculum (Blanchett, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). African-American males are more apt to receive special education services under the intellectual disability, formerly mental retardation, and emotional disability, formerly emotionally disturbed,



categories. According to the 2006 Civil Rights Data Collection, African-American male students constituted 19% of the intellectually disabled and 22% of the emotionally disabled population while they represented fewer than 9% of the overall student population (Civil Rights Data Collection). The Schott Foundation (2010) reported that African-American males are classified as intellectually disabled nearly 3 to 1 in proportion to White males students enrolled in Virginia.

A qualitative study involving 10 African-American male high school students receiving special education services was conducted to determine student perception of school counselors and their willingness to utilize school counseling services (Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008). The study was based upon the premise that school counselors are in a position to advocate for students and manage programs to enhance academic achievement, career development and social growth of students. While the Ohio State University research team cautioned the study could not be generalized due to the sample size, the methods used were well described and the findings should not be dismissed. The findings offered suggestions for improving school counseling services for African-American male students receiving special education services.

The Moore, Henfield, and Owens study (2008) is relevant to the current literature review as the role of the school counselor can impact in particular curriculum programming for African-American male students in general and in special education. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) defines the role of the secondary school counselor using national standards in academic, career and personal/social domains. Moore et al. (2008) defines the role of the counselor as one who can address overrepresentation of African-American males in special education programs by helping other educational professionals better assist this student group. Using a coding system to analyze the data among and between the research team, three major themes or findings emerged. These themes were the perceived role of the counselor, interactions with the school counselor and the comfort level with the school counselor.

An analysis of the Moore et al. (2008) findings may encourage school counselors to reflect upon their practices and interactions with African-American males receiving special education services. Regarding the role of the counselor, the participants perceived the school counselor as one who assists with course selection and interpersonal or social conflicts. Quoting one of the participants regarding course selection, "One of my counselors put me in this class so I could pass and then graduate. He took me out of the class I didn't need and put me in the class

I did need to graduate” (p. 919). A different participant’s perception of the school counselor’s role regarding social conflicts was:

Actually just people that we can go to if we have any problems or if you have a friend that is going through some things, you go to the counselor and try to get some advice or something like that. (p. 918)

Additional findings revealed that career and higher education exploration was not mentioned by any of the participants. It is suggested that the absence of postsecondary planning in participant responses contribute to limitations African-American male students experience in school. Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas and Day-Vines (2009) assert that school counselors must be mindful of the covert and overt messages that they send to students about their college readiness and abilities.

The final theme identified by Moore et al. (2008) was that the comfort level with the school counselor could be described as respectful but not trusting interactions. Noguera (2003b) suggests that various environmental and cultural factors influence whether African-American male students trust their teachers only a little or not at all. Each of the participants in the Moore et al. (2008) study demonstrated comfort-level issues with their school counselor. These issues were related to past school counselor experiences, family-school boundaries, school counselor time availability and perceived school counselor bias. One participant shared, “When I was in elementary school, they [school counselors] would ask me stuff and I told them [school counselors], and they [school counselors] used it against me. And, I got put away in a foster home” (p. 920). Another participant replied, “Sometimes, they [school counselors] be trying to help you, and sometimes they just want to act different, like they really don’t have time for you (sic)” (p. 920). Participant responses associated with comfort-level may be compared to fear and aggression related to rejection sensitivity as suggested by Cassidy and Stevenson (2005).

### Instructional Experiences

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, 115, Stat. 1425) funds public schools to close the achievement gap for all students. Reevaluating the practices and procedures used to educate African-American male students requires attention to the NCLB performance indicators. The NCLB performance indicators for mathematics and reading achievement data are disaggregated for nine subgroups. These

subgroups are all students, five ethnic groups (American Indian, Asian, African-American, Hispanic and White), English Language Learners (ELL), Economically Disadvantaged, and Students with Disabilities (SWD). Despite attention to the aforementioned subgroups, significant gaps in academic achievement between African-American males and their peers continue to exist. Moreover, the nation's lowest performing high schools produced 58% of all African-American dropouts from the Class of 2008 (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2010). School leaders must look beneath the surface to identify intentional and unintentional practices that influence African-American males to drop out from public education.

The educational inequities for African-American males are national and pervasive in urban areas (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). Access to highly qualified and experienced teachers differs between schools that have predominantly African-American and predominantly White student populations. In 2008, approximately 25% of high school mathematics teachers who taught in predominantly African-American public schools had neither a certification nor a college major in mathematics. In comparison, for the same year, approximately 8% of high school mathematics teachers who taught in predominantly White public schools were not highly qualified (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). In English, approximately 13% of high school teachers who taught in predominantly African-American schools were not highly qualified. This percentage was approximately double that of those noncertified teaching English in predominantly White schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

#### *Retention.*

Retention is used as a strategy to provide poor performing students with remediation of academic skills and knowledge. A review of retention practices revealed adverse educational outcomes as students repeated the grade without significant changes in the teaching and learning strategies. Specifically, grade retention leads to a modest increase in the probability of dropping out of school (Jacob & Lefgren, 2008; Penfield, 2010; Roper, 2008). A longitudinal review of seventeen studies examining high school dropouts determined grade retention to be the most powerful predictor of dropout status (Jimerson, Anderson, & Whipple, 2002).

Educators continue to retain African-American male students despite numerous research studies that document adverse effects of grade retention as a remedy for poor achievement. The National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reports that African-American male students are retained at higher rates when compared to males and females of all other ethnicities. Specifically, approximately 14% of male students in kindergarten through grade twelve had repeated a grade with 26% of the 14% being African-American.

With the national on-time graduation rate for African-American males remaining at 47% (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010), various questions can be raised regarding the whereabouts of the remaining 53%. Is it possible that they have moved away, dropped out of school or are they still attending school? Chances are many of the unaccounted percentage fall into the latter two categories. When compared to their male peers, African-American males are substantially more likely to be retained (Roper, 2008). In Virginia, the 2008 on-time graduation rate for African-American male students was 49%, two percentage points higher than the national average but 24% lower than their White male peers in Virginia (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). As previously defined, the on-time graduation rate does not account for those students who require more than four years to graduate from school. Therefore, students retained at some point during their high school career are not counted within their graduating cohort. As shared by Patricia Wright, Virginia Superintendent of Public Instruction, "There is no final buzzer in education," these students must be encouraged to persist to graduation (Virginia Department of Education, 2010).

Early dropout warning signs for ninth grade students are those who earn fewer than two credits or those who attend school less than 70% of the time (Balfanz & Legters, 2006). These ninth grade students have at least a 75% chance of dropping out of school. Additionally, Balfanz and Legters claimed that high schools with weak promoting power receive students from one or more low-performing middle grades schools. Hence, failure to succeed in ninth grade was evidenced by weak reading comprehension and mathematics skills as measured by the eighth grade NAEP assessment (Balfanz & Legters, 2004). The New York City and Chicago African-American male 2008 graduation rates, 28% and 44% respectfully, support the Balfanz et al. (2004) findings. Only 9% of African-American male students scored at or above proficiency on the eighth grade NAEP reading assessment in each school district (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).

The Schott Foundation claims that many large urban school districts fail to provide the core resources necessary for African-American males to systematically succeed in education (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). The Foundation further suggests that inexperienced and ill-trained teachers contribute to the achievement gap that exists between African-American males and their peers (2008). Representing 40% of the African-American male public school population, approximately 1.6 million students, 10 states produced the lowest graduation rates among the 2006 cohort. The 10 states and its corresponding African-American male graduation rate are: (a) Wyoming, 41%; (b) Georgia, 40%; (c) Illinois, 40%; (d) Nevada, 40%; (e) New York, 39%; (f) Florida, 38%; (g) Louisiana, 38%; (h) South Carolina, 38%; (i) Wisconsin, 36%; and (j) Michigan, 33% (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008).

The Schott Foundation claims that African-American male students fail to achieve in racially segregated, urban school districts that are located within the aforementioned states. Supporting this claim, the Education Trust, a nonprofit organization, focuses on access to equitable funding and teacher quality for poor and minority students (The Education Trust, 2010). An Education Trust study on teacher quality revealed that high-poverty and high-minority schools are likely to be staffed by inexperienced teachers and those who are not highly qualified (Peske & Haycock, 2006). Neild and Farley-Ripple (2008) revealed similar findings in their study of a high-poverty urban district comprised of an 85% minority student population. Specifically, inexperienced teachers and those who were not highly qualified staffed the neediest schools.

### School Relationships

Building a positive rapport with students is essential to student achievement. Every high school student should have at least one faculty member who is knowledgeable of the student's aspirations, strengths and weaknesses (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). Despite a clear self-awareness of academic giftedness in a study on self-perception and motivation, African-American males required validation from their teacher to succeed in Advanced Placement science classes (Rascoe & Atwater, 2005). Elevated levels of conflict between African-American male students and their teachers occurred when the students perceived rejection based upon their race (Thomas, Coard, Stevenson, Bentley & Zamel, 2009). Cassidy and Stevenson (2005) found that African-American males engaged in aggressive,

hypermasculine behaviors to earn respect from peers and cope with sensitivity to perceived rejection in school. African-American male students respond cooperatively in school environments when they believe educators care about them and expectations for high academic performance are communicated (Noguera, 2003b).

### *Teacher*

Academic success and engagement in school activities among African-American male students is often nurtured by teacher support (NASSP, 2004; Neild & Farley-Ripple, 2008; Noguera 2003b). Day-Vines and Day-Hairston (2005) assert that school counselors are essential to facilitating student-teacher relationships through teaching awareness of African-American male subculture. While multifaceted, this subculture can be described as the need to exhibit a hypermasculine facade without demonstrating personal vulnerability. Effective teachers, as perceived by African-American adolescent male students, express a personal interest in students, practice fairness and offer praise (Toldson, 2008). Whiting (2009) determined that African-American male students who dropped out of school lacked positive and strong relationships with a caring teacher or educator.

African-American males may not identify with teachers and the school community when they do not perceive genuine support from teachers. Stereotypes associated with poor achievement and discipline can negatively influence their sense of belonging within the school community (Honora, 2003). For these and other environmental factors, as suggested by Noguera (2003b), educators are cautioned that building trusting relationships with African-American male students requires time.

Being respected by their peers and teachers is important to African-American males. Specifically, they may respond in a hypermasculine manner toward peers and authority figures if perceived to be disrespected by others. It is suggested that educators can establish productive and trusting relationships with African-American males by developing an understanding of African-American youth culture (Cassidy & Stevens, 2005; Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; Noguera, 2003b). Past and current achievement and suspension data are cause to question whether African-American male behavior and emotional expressions are misunderstood by educators (Monroe, 2006; Skiba et al. 2002; Thomas et al. 2009). Repeated use of exclusionary

discipline strategies has been associated with high levels of tension between African-American male students and their teachers (Thomas & Stevenson, 2009).

A comparison of two quantitative studies involving national surveys of African-American male student perception revealed linear relationships between academic achievement and student-teacher relationships (Toldson, 2008). The surveys involving nearly 3,300 students were the Health Behavior in School-age Children (HBSC), the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) and the Children and Adolescent Social Support Scale (CASSS). Significant findings attributed for differences between “F-C” students and “B-A” students when African-American male students perceived support from their teachers. Descriptors defining perceived teacher support were, “being treated with respect”, “teachers say things that make you feel good about yourself”, and “people at school listen” (Somers, Owens, & Piliawsky, 2008; Toldson, 2008). In essence, the findings from both studies confirmed that high-achieving African-American male students experience encouraging relationships with their teachers.

#### Summary of the Literature

Fewer than 50% of African-American male students graduated on-time with their peers across the nation in 2008 (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010). The graduation rate for African-American males remained the same at 47% from the 2006 to the 2008 graduating cohorts. Graduation rates were below 30% in 10 of the nation’s 2008 lowest performing urban school districts. The 10 urban school districts and its corresponding African-American male graduation rate are: (a) Jefferson Parish (LA), 28%; (b) New York City (NY), 28%; (c) Dade County (FL), 27%; (d) Cleveland (OH), 27%; (e) Detroit (MI), 27%; (f) Buffalo (NY), 25%; (g) Charleston County (SC), 24%; (h) Duval County (FL), 23%; (i) Palm Beach County (FL), 22%; and (j) Pinellas County (FL), 21% (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2010).

It is suggested that the national on-time graduation rate for African-American males can be improved with attention to education resources and programming (Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2008). Increased understanding of the motivation behind student conduct infractions may result in the use of discipline sanctions other than suspension or expulsion (Monroe, 2006; Rausch & Skiba, 2004). Moreover, experienced, highly qualified teachers are better equipped to provide rigorous, culturally responsive instruction that may lead to improved

academic outcomes for African-American male students (College Board, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tate, 2008).

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the early warning signs that students may exhibit prior to dropping out from high school (Jimerson et al., 2002). Balfanz and Legters (2004) identified high schools across the nation that had poor promoting power and called them dropout factories. An essential finding of Balfanz and Legters' (2004) was that majority minority student populations located in large cities and poor rural areas were common characteristics of the identified high schools. Dropping out from high school as early as ninth grade was among the findings of a longitudinal study related to the Texas test-based accountability system (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Vasquez Heilig, 2008). Although used as a national model for NCLB accountability measures, the Texas high-stakes tests created many insurmountable obstacles to graduation for minority students. While each of these studies contribute to the dropout literature, they also widen the literature gap that is disaggregated and specific to the African-American male dropout reality.

The existing literature related to the national dropout and graduation rate is limited to aggregate reporting of gender and ethnicity. Annual publications produced by the the U.S. Department of Education often report student achievement by ethnicity and gender. Specifically, most of these publications do not present the data disaggregated by African-American male, African-American female, White male, White female, Hispanic male, and so on. Orfield, Losen, Wald and Swanson (2004) affirm that improving the on-time graduation rate requires public reporting of disaggregated data based upon ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status. Contributing to this effort in 2005, the National Governors Association introduced the Graduation Counts Compact, an agreement to use a standard calculation of the high school graduation rate. To determine NCLB accountability measures, all states must use the Compact formula/rate to disaggregate graduation rates for all required subgroups following the 2011-2012 school year. Currently, 20 states use the Compact formula to calculate and publicly report the high school graduation rate. Of the 20 states, only 19 states report disaggregated graduation rate data for minority, disadvantaged and students with disabilities subgroups (Curran, & Reyna, 2009).

Publicly reporting disaggregated achievement, graduation and dropout data will raise public awareness of areas needing improvement. Organizations such as the Schott Foundation,



The Civil Rights Project, The Education Trust, and The National Governors Association will continue to promote their educational reform agenda. The Compact formula has provided the means for all states to report graduation rates using a universal criterion. It has been five years since the Governors Association Compact and fewer than half of the nation's states report disaggregated graduation rates. This delayed response to implement the Compact formula is indicative of the Orfield et al. (2004) assertion that states report misleading subgroup data.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The research questions related to public school practices and procedures were analyzed and answered using descriptive statistical analyses. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) espouse that a mixed methods approach provides richly blended findings of data and beliefs for school improvement studies. Quantitative research methods were used to collect and analyze longitudinal data for each factor outlined in the conceptual framework: (a) suspension, (b) expulsion, (c) advanced coursework, and (d) retention in grade. A qualitative method was used to present African-American male student perception of relationships with teachers and adults in school. The descriptive account of African-American male student perceptions was compared to the perceptions of their White male peers. An online survey, analyzed in this study, created by the school district studied, was the source for the student perception information. The survey questions that were analyzed are listed in Table 2 that is located in Chapter 3 of this study.

#### Description of the Subjects and Location

The subjects in this study were 125 African-American males who dropped out of high school prior to completing the requirements for a Standard Diploma during the 2009 and 2010 school years. During this time, the Virginia Department of Education required a minimum of 22 credits to earn a Standard Diploma. In addition to 22 credits of coursework, students were required to pass End-of-Course SOL assessments. Purposeful selection of the subjects was conducted from a pool of 137 African-American male students who dropped out from high school during the identified timeframe. A purposeful sampling approach, often found in qualitative studies, is used to gather information that is experienced by the participants (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996). The subjects selected were those African-American males who dropped out for reasons associated with achievement, behavior, and personal choice. Subjects not selected were those who dropped out for reasons associated with health and undocumented movement to another school division.

The subjects dropped out of one of the following settings: one of two comprehensive high schools or an alternative high school program located in an urban Virginia school district. Each comprehensive high school had a student population between 1,500 to 2,000 students. Each alternative high school program was housed within its own building and offered a similar

curriculum with limited access to vocational classes. Each comprehensive high school was responsible for the achievement data of the alternative education students living within the school attendance zone served by the high school.

The pseudonym, Lakeside County Public Schools, is used to protect the confidentiality of each subject, high school and alternative program. During the 2009 and 2010 school years, the combined free and reduced price lunch rate for the division was 63% and 68% respectively. The student population consisted of approximately 48% African-American and 44% White with the remaining percent largely being Hispanic. During the 2009 and 2010 school years, the Virginia on-time graduation rate for African-American students attending Lakeside County Public Schools was 63% and 69% respectively and for White students 72% and 67% respectively. Also during this time, Lakeside County Public Schools did not make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the areas of English or mathematics performance for African-American students. However, AYP was achieved in the areas of English and mathematics performance for White students (Virginia Department of Education).

#### Delimitations and Limitations

For the purposes of this study, delimitations are the factors or conditions that were deliberately crafted to facilitate analysis of the conceptual framework. Demographic characteristics of the purposefully selected sample are a delimitation of the study. Likewise, the scope of each contributing factor located within the conceptual framework is restricted to specific focus areas. Other delimitations include the selected school division, type of longitudinal data that was collected and the years the subjects dropped out.

Lakeside County Public school district was selected due to the researcher's ability to gain access to longitudinal data for each subject. Permission to access the longitudinal data were granted when a research proposal was submitted to and approved by the Director for Research, Evaluation and Testing. Longitudinal data were collected on African-American male students who dropped out of the school division during the 2009 and 2010 school years. Extracted from the school division and state database, the longitudinal data include suspension and expulsion, advanced coursework, retention, and state test (SOL) information.

Limitations of the study are those factors or conditions that are outside of the control of the researcher. One limitation was the inability to interview the subjects because they have dropped out of school and cannot be located.

### Data Collection and Analysis

A mixed methods approach was used to study 125 African-American male high school dropouts. The African-American male subjects are those who dropped out of high school during the 2009 and 2010 school years. Longitudinal achievement data were gathered from the Lakeside County Public school division student information database and the Virginia Educational Information Management System (EIMS). The EIMS database provided test score data and Advanced Placement course enrollment information that was not available in the division student database. Data representing contributing factors located in the conceptual framework (suspensions, expulsions, advanced coursework and retention) were collected and organized by grade level into an individual matrix for each subject as shown in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Subject Matrix of Achievement Data*

Subject No. _____	No. OSS Sanctions	OSS Days Total	Expulsion Days Total	Retained Grade	Year of Drop Out Credits Earned Total	Advanced Course/ AP Course	Earned Credit
Grade							
K							
1							
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10							
11							
12							

*Note.* Subjects were randomly assigned study codes consisting of numerals 1-125. The subject number is the randomly assigned study code used to maintain anonymity. Grade level achievement data were recorded on a separate matrix sheet for each subject. Data were separated by year when the subject was retained in grade. OSS = Out-of-School Suspension. <sup>a</sup>The number of times the subject received out-of-school suspension in the grade level. <sup>b</sup>The total number of out-of-school suspension days served in the grade level. <sup>c</sup>The total number of expulsion days served in the grade level. <sup>d</sup>A notation was made at the associated grade level if the subject was retained. <sup>e</sup>The total number of credits earned toward graduation at the time the subject dropped out of school. The number of total credits earned was placed in the grade level the subject dropped out of school. <sup>f</sup>The advanced course title or the Advanced Placement (AP) course title was recorded with the associated SOL test score or AP exam score. SOL = Standard of Learning. <sup>g</sup>A yes or no response was recorded if the subject earned the credit associated with the advanced course or AP course.

Once collected and organized into the matrix, each contributing factor was tallied and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Suspensions and expulsions were reported for frequency and number of days. Advanced Placement and advanced coursework were reported by course enrollment and persistence to successful completion of the course. The number of retentions was recorded for each occurrence at the elementary and secondary levels. The number of credits/verified credits earned toward a Standard Diploma was recorded to identify the last high school grade level in which the subject was enrolled.

### *Research Question 1*

How do public school practices and procedures related to discipline sanctions, curriculum planning, and instructional experiences influence African-American males to drop out of one school division in Virginia?

*Data collected.* Data representing each contributing factor located in the conceptual framework were collected. Longitudinal suspension and expulsion, advanced coursework, retention, and state test (SOL) information was also collected for each subject in the study. The number of days absent due to suspension and expulsion was collected beginning with the subject's years in middle school through the drop out date. Advanced coursework and associated state test (SOL) data during the middle and high school years were collected. Earned credit denotes the subject earned a passing grade in the advanced coursework and a passing score on the associated SOL test. Beginning with elementary grade levels, the number of retentions and the grade level retained was collected.

A further and underlying question to be investigated with research question one involves African-American male student relationships with adults in their school.

### *Research Question 2*

Do African-American male elementary, middle, and high school level students, perceive the value of adults in their school in similar or different ways? If in fact, there are *significant* differences among these three groups in how they *feel* about teachers and other adults, implications for effective strategies at different grade levels might result.

*Data collected.* The African-American male and White male student survey responses regarding perception of relationships with teachers and adults at school were collected. The student responses were extracted from the online survey of student perception that was

administered during the 2009 and 2010 school years. The Lakeside County Schools district-created online survey was the source for this information. The survey questions that were analyzed are listed in Table 2.

There are varied degrees of interpretation associated with the analysis of attitudinal scales using qualitative versus quantitative methods (Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Kumar, 1999; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The school district-created survey used a Likert scale to measure the level of student agreement or disagreement with each question. The survey population studied included elementary, middle and high school African-American male and White male students. A qualitative method of analysis was used to maintain consistency with reporting student response data as agreement or disagreement. Specifically, each level of agreement (strongly agree, agree) and each level of disagreement (disagree, strongly disagree) was combined to report student perception with face validity. Conversely, it is feasible to analyze the survey data quantitatively. However, doing so may limit the strength of the findings as an assumption is made that a clear distinction exists between each level of agreement and disagreement. Given the age group of the survey population, it is feasible that one's "strongly disagree" could also be another's "disagree" and one's "agree" could be another's "strongly agree".

*Analysis of data collected.* Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data that are organized in tables that represent the discipline sanctions, curriculum programming, and instructional experiences components of the conceptual framework. The student perception survey data were analyzed using a qualitative method. Each level of agreement (strongly agree, agree) and each level of disagreement (disagree, strongly disagree) was combined to report percentages of "agree" and "disagree" for extracted survey questions. A comparison of the African-American male and White male student responses, disaggregated by elementary, middle and high school grade levels, is reported. During the 2009 academic year, students in grades 10 and 11 were surveyed. The following year, students in grades 11 and 12 participated in the online survey.

Survey participants were not allowed to skip questions and had to answer each question before advancing to the next question. Based upon the grade level, the survey may have taken approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. While there is no statistical evidence regarding the reliability of the division-created survey, it is believed to be valid and reliable for school division

use. Reasons supporting these beliefs include how the survey was administered, data collection procedures, question readability and end-user response. An adult, who supervised the completion process, administered the survey during the school day. Students were given ample time to read and respond to each question. Students were informed their survey responses were confidential, were aimed at school improvement, and were an opportunity for students to provide feedback on how they feel. The Lakeside County central office tallied the student responses and electronically sent the results to the school principal and school leadership team. This data reporting process has been utilized for the past two years and the same questions have been used. Although school leadership teams have the opportunity to request adjustments to survey questions, no one has asked for the removal or clarity of certain questions. Principals and leadership teams review the grade level and building level survey data to identify needs surrounding safety and school climate. Gall, et al. (1996) suggests that researchers may use less stringent questionnaire validity and reliability standards when whole group response is considered instead of individual response.

Table 2

*Survey Questions: Male Student Perception of Adults in School School years: 2009 and 2010*

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1. Adults in my school make me feel welcomed or cared for.
  2. Most of the adults I see at school every day know my name or who I am.
  3. My teachers encourage me to understand what I need to do to succeed in school.
  4. My teachers connect what I am learning in class to life outside of school.
  5. Teachers in my school treat students with respect.
  6. Adults in my school would take me seriously if I reported something that was unsafe.
  7. Adults in my school are fair when it comes to disciplining students.
- 

*Note.* Students taking the survey had to respond to each question. The question response choices were strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree.



*Research Question 3*

What are the primary reasons for why African-American male students dropped out of one public school division in Virginia prior to graduation?

*Data collected.* The number of absences due to suspension and expulsion beginning at the middle school level through the date the drop out occurred was collected. The number of retentions experienced since the elementary school level was also collected.

*Analysis of data collected.* A descriptive statistic technique was used to identify if a relationship exists between the number of African-American male dropouts and the number of suspensions, expulsions and/or retentions.

## CHAPTER IV ANALYSIS OF DATA

### Introduction

This chapter begins with an explanation of the problem and a review of the purpose of the study. The methodology used for data collection and analysis procedures are discussed. Specifically, each component of the conceptual framework is examined using three research questions. The findings of the study are presented using the research questions organized as section headings. Finally, the chapter summary provides a transition to Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, and Recommendations.

### Problem and Purpose Revisited

The dropout rate is a costly problem shared by society. Youth who drop out of high school often rely on government assistance, as they have not acquired the skills to compete for higher incomes. A dropout is less likely to contribute to the nation's economy and more likely to engage in risky behaviors resulting in unwedded parenting and incarceration. The incarceration rate among African-American male dropouts in 2007 was higher than that combined of all other incarcerated male dropouts (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin & Palma, 2009).

Extraneous factors related to societal norms, familial dynamics and public school operations contribute to the nation's African-American male dropout problem (Noguera, 2003b; Oliver, 2006; Prier & Beachum, 2008). Recognizing issues associated with societal norms and familial dynamics are beyond an educator's control, factors associated with school practices and procedures were studied. Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine school practices and procedures that influence African-American males to drop out of one school division in Virginia.

### Application of the Research Questions

Beginning with elementary grade levels, suspension, expulsion, retention and advanced coursework data were analyzed for each of the 125 subjects in this study. The review of each subject's record revealed confounding variables related to language and nonexistent data for four subjects whose data were consequently omitted from the findings. Two of the omitted subjects were refugees from Africa without prior education until enrolling in the Lakeside County Public

Schools as adolescents. The two other omitted subjects were transfers from school divisions located in another state. Records from the previous school divisions were nonexistent and both subjects dropped out during the year of enrollment in the Lakeside County Public School division. Given the omission of four subjects, the data analyzed represent 121 African-American male students who dropped out of school during the 2009 and 2010 school years.

To measure relationships with teachers and other adults in school, a different data set was used. Lakeside County Schools administered a school climate survey to students in elementary, middle and high school during the 2009 and 2010 school years. For comparison purposes, African-American male and White male student response data to school relationships questions were extracted from the survey. The researcher believes that data collected from the survey provide a representative description of the perception of African-American male students attending schools in the division.

### *Research Question 1*

How do public school practices and procedures related to discipline sanctions, curriculum planning, and instructional experiences influence African-American males to drop out of one school division in Virginia?

*Suspension/Expulsion.* Losen and Orfield (2002) raised concern regarding inflated rates of out-of-school suspension for African-American male students and the associated loss of instructional time. They further suggested that high rates of suspension result in low student achievement outcomes. Table 3 presents the number of out-of-school suspension occurrences, days and expulsions experienced in middle and high school. The occurrences (times suspended) and suspension days data are presented using a range representing one year at each grade level. For example regarding occurrences, 43 subjects were suspended between one and five times while in the sixth grade. A further example for suspension days, 34 subjects served between one and ten suspension days while in the sixth grade.

Table 3

*Count of Subject(s) and Out-of-School Suspension Occurrences and Days by Grade*

Occurrences	Grade						
	6 <sup>a</sup>	7 <sup>b</sup>	8 <sup>c</sup>	9	10	11	12
0	69	54	62	50	45	20	11
1 – 5	43	64	42	90	34	20	3
6 – 10	2	7	11	7	3	0	0
11 - 14	1	0	0	3	0	0	0
Suspension Days	Grade						
	6 <sup>a</sup>	7 <sup>b</sup>	8 <sup>c</sup>	9	10	11	12
1 – 10	34	52	28	54	22	16	2
11 – 20	10	14	16	28	10	4	1
21 – 30	2	4	7	10	3	1	0
31 – 40	0	1	2	4	2	0	0
41 - 62	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
365-day expulsion	0	2	0	3	1	0	0

*Note.* n = 121. Values represent counts of out-of-school suspension occurrences and suspension days during the time of enrollment. Out-of-school suspension occurrences were separated and counted by school year for subjects who were retained in grade. Suspension occurrence and suspension days data across grade levels reflect subjects who were suspended during the corresponding grade level. With the exception of 16 subjects who were suspended only once, subjects who received a suspension are included in the count across multiple grade levels. Seventeen subjects had never been suspended. No subject had been suspended more than 14 times in one school year. With the exception of expulsion, no subject had served more than 62 suspension days in one school year. <sup>a</sup>Data missing for eight subjects in this grade level only. <sup>b</sup>Data missing for six subjects in this grade level only. <sup>c</sup>Data missing for five subjects in this grade level only.

*Coursework.* The College Board (2010) reports that minorities are underrepresented in the Advanced Placement program. To address this historical issue, the College Board recommends that underrepresented students be introduced to advanced coursework during their middle school years. The advanced coursework referenced is a Lakeside County Public Schools

accelerated course offered at the respective grade level. Algebra I, geometry, and earth science are the advanced middle school courses considered in this study. As referenced in Table 4, no subjects participated in the College Board Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Only 1 of the 121 subjects had ever taken an advanced studies course in middle school.

Table 4

*Subject Enrollment in Advanced Coursework*

Subject No.	Course	SOL Test Score <sup>a</sup>	Earned Credit <sup>b</sup>
3	World History II	372	No
4	World History II	430	Yes
10	English 9 Advanced	-	Yes
	English 10 Advanced	-	No
	World History II Advanced	400	Yes
14	Earth Science	438	Yes
	English 9 Advanced	-	No
	World History I Advanced	463	Yes
	Biology I Advanced	461	No
	World History II Advanced	439	Yes
20	English 9 Advanced	-	No
	World History I Advanced	463	Yes
	World History II Advanced	426	Yes
23	English 9 Advanced	-	Yes
	English 10 Advanced	-	Yes
	World History II Advanced	498	No
37	English 10 Advanced	-	No
	World History II Advanced	434	No
45	World History II Advanced	415	Yes
64	English 9 Advanced	-	Yes
	English 10 Advanced	-	Yes

*Note.* n = 121. Subjects were randomly assigned study codes consisting of numerals 1-125. Subject No. is the randomly assigned study code used to maintain anonymity. No subject had ever enrolled in the Advanced Placement (AP) Program of the College Board. The advanced coursework referenced is a Lakeside County Public Schools accelerated course offered at the respective grade level. <sup>a</sup>SOL test score is that of the associated Standards of Learning end-of-course assessment. SOL test score 400–499 is proficient and 500–600 is advanced proficient. Advanced coursework not requiring a SOL test will have a dash in lieu of a score. <sup>b</sup>Earned credit means the subject verified a Carnegie unit toward graduation by passing the class and the associated SOL test.

*Retention.* Although intended to remediate critical skills not mastered, early grade (K-3) retention is one of the most powerful predictors of dropping out of school in later years

(Penfield, 2010). Likewise, Balfanz and Legters (2006) emphasize the problems associated low promoting power of freshman to senior status as a strong indicator of future dropouts. As shown in Table 5, kindergarten and first grade have the highest frequency of elementary grade retentions. Of the high school years, most of the subjects dropped out in ninth grade. Subject data reflect those who were retained in grade once and those who were retained in the same grade twice. For example, a kindergarten student in year 2005-06 is retained in grade once if he is a kindergarten student the following year in 2006-07. The same kindergarten student is retained twice if he remains a kindergarten student in 2007-08. Subjects may appear across multiple grade levels as 65% of them were retained at least twice in two different grades.

Table 5

*Count of Subject Retention by Grade*

Grade												
K <sup>a</sup>	1 <sup>b</sup>	2 <sup>c</sup>	3 <sup>d</sup>	4 <sup>e</sup>	5 <sup>f</sup>	6 <sup>g</sup>	7 <sup>h</sup>	8 <sup>i</sup>	9	10	11	12
Retained Once <sup>j</sup>												
19	12	6	9	8	1	11	22	11	60	32	12	8
Retained Twice in Same Grade												
1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	14	5	5	0

*Note.* n = 121. Five subjects were not retained in any grade. Middle and high school counts include subjects who were expelled for a 365-day period. <sup>a,b</sup>Missing retention data for nine subjects. <sup>c,d</sup>Missing retention data for ten subjects. <sup>e</sup>Missing retention data for seven subjects. <sup>f-h</sup>Missing retention data for six subjects. <sup>i</sup>Missing retention data for seven subjects. <sup>j</sup>Subjects appear across multiple grade levels as 65% were retained at least twice in different grades.

Notwithstanding missing retention data for seven subjects, 96% of the remaining subjects were retained at least once during their educational career. Table 6 represents the percentage of subjects who were never retained and those who were retained multiple times during their educational career.

Table 6

*Percent of Subject Retention*

Retention Frequency	Zero Times	One Time	Two Times	Three Times	Four Times
Percent Retained	4	29	42	17	2

*Note.* n = 121. Missing data account for 6% of subject population. Retention counts include subjects who were expelled for a 365-day period.

An unintentional finding of the data revealed that 19 of the subjects experienced social promotion. Social promotion occurs when a student is promoted to the next grade level without meeting the academic performance standards. This practice is done when it is believed retaining the student will have devastating social and emotional affect on the student (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). One subject skipped fifth grade, two subjects skipped seventh grade, and the remaining subjects skipped eighth grade. Lakeside County Public Schools offered an alternative education program for overage middle school students during the 2001 through 2006 school years. The program provided remediation and small group instruction in the core areas of mathematics, English, science and social studies. Students who successfully completed the program were accelerated to high school. It is possible that the subjects who were socially promoted, during their middle school years, were participants in this alternative program.

*Research Question 2*

Do African-American male elementary, middle, and high school level students, perceive the value of adults in their school in similar or different ways?

*Relationships with teachers.* The academic success and level of engagement in the school community for African-American males is often fostered by supportive teachers and school personnel (Day-Vines & Day-Hairston, 2005; NASSP, 2004; Neild & Farley-Ripple, 2008; Noguera, 2003b). Second to parental support, teacher social support is strongly correlated to the academic achievement of African-American males (Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2008). Given the inability to locate the subjects for interview, a separate set of data was used to ascertain African-American male student perception. The Lakeside County School division created and administered the survey questions listed in Table 2 as a means to identify needs surrounding school climate.

Table 7 and Table 8 reflect two years of data disaggregated for African-American male and White male student perception of adults in their schools. The 2009 school year includes survey responses from African-American male and White male students in grades 3, 5, 7, 10 and 11. The 2010 school year includes survey responses from African-American male and White male students in grades 4, 6, 8, 11 and 12. Students participating in the survey were required to report ethnicity, gender and grade level but were not required to share their name or student identification number. Therefore, the researcher is not able to verify if any of the 121 African-American male subjects in the study completed the survey. Hence, the survey data are a separate, discrete data set that was used to identify African-American male student perception.



Table 7

*Male Student Perception of Adults in School by Ethnicity SY 2009*

		Elementary African-American Boys (n = 405)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	91	81	96	82	91	85	78
Disagree	9	19	4	18	9	15	22
		Elementary White Boys (n = 358)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	94	83	97	83	94	90	84
Disagree	6	17	3	17	6	10	16
		Middle African-American Boys (n = 179)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	77	91	89	63	75	77	56
Disagree	23	9	11	37	25	23	44
		Middle White Boys (n = 173)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	84	88	94	68	83	82	68
Disagree	16	12	6	32	17	18	32
		High African-American Boys (n = 285)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	75	74	87	58	64	79	53
Disagree	25	26	13	42	36	21	47
		High White Boys (n = 202)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	63	68	84	51	69	76	49
Disagree	37	32	16	49	31	24	51

*Note.* The values represent percent of total student response. The Lakeside County school division created and administered the survey online. African-American male and White male students in grades 3, 5, 7, 10 and 11 completed the survey. Elementary = 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades. Middle = seventh grade. High = 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. Questions 1–7 are listed in Table 2. Each level of agreement (strongly agree, agree) and each level of disagreement (disagree, strongly disagree) has been combined to report the percentage of student “agree” and “disagree”.

Table 8

*Male Student Perception of Adults in School by Ethnicity SY 2010*

		Elementary African-American Boys (n = 193)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	95	76	95	74	94	90	81
Disagree	5	24	5	26	6	10	19
		Elementary White Boys (n = 183)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	95	73	96	83	93	94	86
Disagree	5	27	4	17	7	6	14
		Middle African-American Boys (n = 366)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	79	83	90	63	71	78	54
Disagree	21	17	10	37	29	22	46
		Middle White Boys (n = 329)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	83	85	92	63	76	84	62
Disagree	17	15	8	37	24	16	38
		High African-American Boys (n = 241)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	76	83	83	53	64	79	48
Disagree	24	17	17	47	36	21	52
		High White Boys (n = 178)					
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	72	67	83	53	63	75	53
Disagree	28	33	17	47	37	25	47

*Note.* The values represent percent of total student response. The Lakeside County school division created and administered the survey online. African-American male and White male students in grades 4, 6, 8, 11 and 12 completed the survey. Elementary = fourth grade. Middle = 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. High = 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Questions 1–7 are listed in Table 2. Each level of agreement (strongly agree, agree) and each level of disagreement (disagree, strongly disagree) has been combined to report the percentage of student “agree” and “disagree”.

Table 9 and Table 10 reflect two years of aggregate grade level data for male student perceptions of adults in their schools. The African-American male and White male student responses have been combined to determine if perhaps there are differences among the three grade-level responses to the survey. This whole-group data set may be useful when comparing the data disaggregated by ethnicity.

Table 9

*Male Student Perception of Adults in School SY 2009*

Elementary School Boys (n = 763)							
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	92	82	96	82	92	87	80
Disagree	8	18	4	18	8	13	20
Middle School Boys (n = 352)							
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	80	89	91	65	79	79	62
Disagree	20	11	9	35	21	21	38
High School Boys (n = 487)							
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	70	72	86	55	66	78	51
Disagree	30	28	14	45	34	22	49

*Note.* The values represent percent of total student response. The Lakeside County school division created and administered the survey online. African-American male and White male students in grades 3, 5, 7, 10 and 11 completed the survey. Their responses have been combined to reflect elementary, middle and high school grade levels. Elementary = 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades. Middle = seventh grade. High = 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. Questions 1–7 are listed in Table 2. Each level of agreement (strongly agree, agree) and each level of disagreement (disagree, strongly disagree) has been combined to report the percentage of student “agree” and “disagree”.

Table 10

*Male Student Perception of Adults in School SY 2010*

Elementary School Boys (n = 376)							
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	95	75	95	78	94	92	83
Disagree	5	25	5	22	6	8	17
Middle School Boys (n = 695)							
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	81	84	91	63	74	81	58
Disagree	19	16	9	37	26	19	42
High School Boys (n = 419)							
	Quest. 1	Quest. 2	Quest. 3	Quest. 4	Quest. 5	Quest. 6	Quest. 7
Agree	75	76	83	53	64	78	50
Disagree	25	24	17	47	36	22	50

*Note.* The values represent percent of total student response. The Lakeside County school division created and administered the survey online. African-American male and White male students in grades 4, 6, 8, 11 and 12 completed the survey. Their responses have been combined to reflect elementary, middle and high school grade levels. Elementary = fourth grade. Middle = 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. High = 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Questions 1–7 are listed in Table 2. Each level of agreement (strongly agree, agree) and each level of disagreement (disagree, strongly disagree) has been combined to report the percentage of student “agree” and “disagree”.

*Research Question 3*

What are the primary reasons for why African-American male students dropped out of one public school division in Virginia prior to graduation?

*Suspension/Expulsion.* The number of absences due to suspension and expulsion beginning with the middle school grades through the drop out date was collected for each subject. Table 3 displays the number of subjects who missed school because of out-of-school suspension and expulsion. Each subject’s suspension days are tallied and reported using a range of days that are organized by grade level. Approximately 14% of the 121 subjects were never suspended from school during their secondary school years. Unlike those never being suspended, 86% of the subjects were excluded from school at some point during their middle and

high school years. Of those subjects excluded due to suspension, 73% were suspended across multiple grade levels.

Balfanz and Legters (2006) suggest that students suspended at least once in middle school have a higher probability of not graduating on time when compared to students who are not suspended. Specifically, the loss of instructional time resulting from exclusionary discipline sanctions further disconnects African-American males from school which increases the risk of dropping out (Lee & Burkam, 2003; Neild & Farley-Ripple, 2008). The U.S. Department of Education reports rates of suspension and expulsion as measures for student persistence in school. As displayed in Table 3, in the middle school, seventh grade maintains the largest number of subjects spending up to two weeks of more out of school. Far exceeding all high school grade levels, ninth grade is the time where a period equal to an entire marking period of instruction was lost due to suspension.

To analyze the suspension data at the high school level, one must also have data regarding the number of subjects who were high school upperclassman. In accordance with the Virginia Department of Education, students must earn 22 credits to receive a standard high school diploma. These credits must also be verified by passing end-of-course SOL tests or other approved assessments. Table 11 displays the grade classification of subjects based upon the credits they earned prior to dropping out. The following is the minimum number of credits that must be earned to be considered the following: sophomore – 5 credits, junior – 10 credits, and senior – 16 credits.

Table 11

*Subject Grade Classification at the Time the Subject Dropped out of School*

Grade Classification	Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
Number of Subjects	46	38	23	14

*Note.* n = 121. Grade classification is based upon the minimum number of standard credits earned prior to dropping out of school.

Most high school suspensions occurred at the ninth grade level with some subjects missing as few as one day and as many as 62 days. Three subjects were expelled for 365 school days during the ninth grade year. As displayed in Table 11, most subjects were in the ninth grade at the time they dropped out. Subjects who were sophomores at the time they dropped out followed a similar pattern with suspension and expulsion days missed. While fewer seniors were suspended as displayed in Table 3, fewer than 12% persisted to reach their senior year.

*Retention.* The Schott Foundation (2010) suggests various reasons for the stagnant national on-time graduation rate of 47% for African-American males. The instructional practice of retention in grade is among those reasons. The retention data are reported in Table 5 and Table 6. Retention in grade was a common thread shared among 96% of the subjects. Further supporting the literature, the largest portion of retentions was experienced in kindergarten, first and ninth grades. Over aged and under credited, 84 of the 121 subjects dropped out during their first and second year of high school as shown in Table 11.

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Summary

The related literature provides evidence of societal, familial and public school factors that contribute to the nation's African-American male dropout problem (Balfanz & Legters, 2006; Madyun & Lee, 2010; Noguera, 2003b; Oliver, 2006; Prier & Beachum, 2008). Recognizing factors educators may control, the purpose of this study was to examine school practices and procedures that influence African-American male students to drop out. Specifically, four components associated with public school practices and procedures provided the conceptual framework through which the study was conducted. These components are (a) discipline sanctions, (b) curriculum programming, (c) instructional experiences and (d) school relationships. Each of these components was further defined by contributing factors identified as suspension, expulsion, advanced coursework, retention in grade, and teacher support.

A mixed methods approach was used to answer the three research questions that guided the study. The research questions are: (1) how do public school practices and procedures related to discipline sanctions, curriculum planning, instructional experiences and student relationships with adults in their school influence African-American males to drop out of one school division in Virginia?; (2) do African-American male elementary, middle, and high school level students, perceive the value of adults in their school in similar or different ways?; and, (3) what are the primary reasons why African-American male students dropped out of one public school division in Virginia prior to graduation? Longitudinal achievement data associated with 125 African-American male students who dropped out from one urban school division during the 2009 and 2010 school years were analyzed. Also analyzed were African-American male and White male student survey data of their perception of teacher relationships. The division-created survey was used as a separate, discrete data set, to provide the perception information.

Analysis of the collection of longitudinal data revealed patterns associated with school practices and procedures that were common among the subjects. Similarly, patterns in the African-American male student perception of teachers were observed. These patterns are consistent with the literature that suggests a relationship between such practices, procedures, and perceptions and reasons why African-American male students drop out of school. A significant

finding of each component of the conceptual framework is as follows: (a) discipline sanctions: 86% of the subjects who dropped out were suspended at least once during their years in middle or high school; (b) curriculum programming: no subject had ever taken a College Board Advanced Placement class; (c) instructional experiences: 96% of the subjects were retained in grade at least once; and (d) school relationships: subject perception of teacher respect for students varied as subjects aged. The findings are based upon the analysis of the survey data and the 121 subjects attending one urban school division in Virginia and are not necessarily generalizable to other students attending Lakeside County schools. However, practitioners are encouraged to apply the conceptual framework to replicate the study for student subgroups that are not performing as required by federal mandates.

The remainder of this chapter provides implications of the findings organized by each component of the conceptual framework, recommendations for practitioners, as well as suggestions for further research. The implications and recommendations in this chapter are based upon the findings of the study as well as the researcher's 19 years of experience as a high school teacher, elementary school assistant principal and principal, middle school principal, and central office administrator. Practitioners who serve African-American males in urban school environments are encouraged to consider the implications and recommendations that follow.

## Implications

### *Discipline Sanctions*

Exclusionary discipline practices remove the student from valuable classroom instruction as well as the opportunity to socialize with peers in an educational environment. While serious conduct infractions may require immediate removal from the educational setting, less serious conduct infractions may not. Short-term suspensions suggest that the student is not considered a danger to the school community since the student is allowed to return within a few days. The findings of this study revealed that the administrators suspended students multiple times during a school year. While the administrator may suspend students to maintain an orderly environment, the administrator may also expect or hope for a positive change in the suspended student's behavior. From this researcher's experience, a subtle unspoken and perhaps unintended message is communicated each time a student is suspended. In addition to the student, the parent(s), classmates, and teachers hear this message. In most cases, the desired message is – *inappropriate*



*behavior is not tolerated here.* Instead, the message translates to – *you are not wanted here* which becomes the symbolic scarlet letter.

How might one expect an adolescent to respond when the - *you are not wanted here* message is sent, particularly in front of peers? It is suggested that African-American males will demonstrate hypermasculine behaviors as a way to cope with perceived rejection and unfair treatment in the classroom (Cassidy & Stevens, 2005; Noguera, 2003b; Toldson, 2008). Parents have difficulty believing that teachers and administrators care when their child is repeatedly suspended. Collaboration between home and school is compromised when parents believe alternative discipline measures are not used to address their child's conduct infractions.

The Virginia Board of Education provides model guidelines and policies that allow expulsion from school for conduct infractions that are associated with the use of weapons, serious assaults and substantial drug violations (Virginia Board of Education, 2010). School divisions may expel students without offering educational services. In such cases, the student remains out of school and goes without instruction for one year. For poor students, one year without instruction further puts them at risk for academic failure and exposure to criminal behaviors as described by The Children's Defense Fund Cradle to Prison Pipeline Campaign. Experiencing instructional loss, academically unprepared for the next grade level, expelled students return to school retained in grade and older than most of their classmates.

### *Curriculum Programming*

Engaging instruction with connections to real-world experiences keep students in school. Students need to see the "what is in it for me" in school before they take ownership (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The opportunity to help students understand such connections begins as early as elementary grades when children begin to articulate wanting to be a police officer, firefighter, doctor or teacher. Recognizing the potential of every student begins with an analysis of their academic aptitude, learning style and interests. Once equipped with such data, educators may intentionally advise and schedule students in coursework that prepares them for life after high school graduation. Students fail to graduate when a clear plan to graduation and career exploration is not developed and systemically communicated. Systemic communication between home and school includes year after year discussion and exploration of post high school plans. The absence of such plans may communicate unintended messages about college readiness and abilities (Bryan, Holcomb-McCoy, Moore-Thomas & Day-Vines, 2009).

African-American male students continue to be adversely affected by societal stereotypes of academic inferiority. Federal guidelines require state departments of education to monitor and address issues associated with disproportionality and overrepresentation of African-American male students in special education programs. Moreover, the College Board also reports that African-American males are among the underrepresented in its programs. Nine Lakeside County high school subjects successfully completed advanced high school coursework. Despite their proven academic ability, only one was scheduled in an advanced class during the middle school years. Students often rise to the level of expectation set by the adults around them. Low expectations based upon deficit thinking result in push-out of advanced and vocational offerings.

### *Instructional Experiences*

Thoughtful decision-making based upon student achievement or the lack thereof must take place before a student is retained in grade. Undoubtedly, educators are well meaning when the decision is made to retain a student. The decision to retain should consider division policies and multiple criteria associated with credits earned, mandatory state testing, and skill attainment in core academic areas. A review of various Virginia school divisions' policies revealed criteria for grade level promotion. However, the policies did not delineate restrictions to the number of times a student may be retained. Similarly, the divisions' regulations did not define expectations for how the retained student's instructional program should change. Changes to a retained student's instructional plan may involve close monitoring, sustained remediation and frequent assessment of mastery levels.

The findings of this study support the dropout research conducted by Penfield (2010), and Balfanz and Legters (2006). An overwhelming number, 96% of the Lakeside County subjects were retained; many during the critical years flagged by the aforementioned researchers. Given the literature and research that demonstrate the positive correlation that exists between dropouts and retention, the retention data analyzed in this study were puzzling. Accepting the decision of their child's retention can be an emotional undertaking for parents. Similarly, given the age and developmental level of the student, accepting and understanding the news of being retained can be difficult for the student. In each situation, the parent and the student must rely upon the expert advice and decision of the teacher(s) and administrator. Furthermore, the parent may not feel knowledgeable or adequately equipped to question the retention decision made by the school administration. Entrusted with the interest of what is best for the student, educators must

seriously consider the ramifications associated with the decision to retain. Arguably, it is unconscionable to allow multiple retentions to occur in a student's educational career. Dropping out of high school may appear to be the only option for a student who realizes he or she is under credited and over aged.

### *School Relationships*

In recent years, relevance, rigor and relationships have been added to the traditional "3 Rs" in education (NASSP, 2004). Children are impressionable and have unique needs as they grow older but all want to be respected. Regardless of grade level, based upon their level of understanding, students want to feel cared for, be heard, and be accepted for their individual differences. Even elementary students can articulate why they like or dislike their teacher. Elementary students may perceive the teacher as mean if the teacher yells and screams in class. To an elementary student, yelling and screaming may be defined as disrespectful. Mutually respectful learning environments are ones where teachers and students feel safe to trust and value each other's opinions and culture. Students who attend school regularly spend a significant portion of their waking hours at school. For some students who attend schools in urban settings, the school provides consistency that is not always afforded at home. The teacher, counselor, coach or administrator may be the father or mother figure missing in the student's life. For educators, acting in loco parentis truly has an expanded meaning besides what one may have learned in graduate school. As a surrogate parent who attends the sporting and extracurricular events of their students, educators can develop bonds with students that can encourage positive academic outcomes (Monroe, 2006).

Although it may sound trite, many teachers claim the positive influence of a former teacher inspired them to become an educator. Others may remember the unkind words or demeaning practices of a past teacher that may have motivated them to be an educator. The words of Clark Mollenhoff in his poem, entitled *Teachers*, speak to the core of influence and power that educators possess.

You are the molders of their dreams.  
The gods who build or crush their young beliefs of right or wrong.  
You are the spark that sets aflame the poet's hand,  
Or lights the flame of some great singer's song.  
You are the gods of the young the very young.  
You are the guardian of a million dreams.  
Your every smile or frown can heal or pierce a heart.  
Yours are a hundred lives a thousand lives.  
Yours is the pride of loving them, the sorrow, too.  
Your patient work, your touch, makes you the gods of hope  
Who fill their souls with dreams, and make those dreams come true.

A sense of belonging and ownership within the school community is developed and nurtured when students perceive their teacher as someone who cares.

The Lakeside County African-American male and White male student perception of teacher responsiveness declined as the students aged and matured. This may account for the student's ability to process feelings at higher levels with consideration of multiple teacher interactions during the school year. Additionally, earning the trust and respect of an adolescent takes time and more effort when compared to earning the trust and respect of a younger child. School counselors play a critical role in advocating for all students and building student-teacher relationships that may need repair. As one of the gatekeepers for systemic practices and procedures, the school counselor may connect students with programs that directly affect achievement, curricular programming and school involvement. Researchers agree that school counselors must step up to the plate to address the needs of typically underserved student populations (Day-Vines and Day-Hairston, 2005; Moore, Henfield, & Owens, 2008).

### Recommendations for Practitioners

The conceptual framework that provided the foundation for this study may be used to replicate concentrated analysis of discipline sanctions, curriculum programming, instructional experiences and school relationships. Systemic implementation of data-driven decision making should be supported by the division central office data management team. This team should provide school administrators with division-wide test data that are disaggregated by student

subgroup. Using disaggregated data to stimulate discussion, principals are encouraged to establish a culture of data-driven decision making in every aspect of school improvement. Using a concentrated, data-driven approach to school improvement, school teams may review African-American male student achievement and involvement in school programs and extracurricular activities.

Given the thorough review of related literature and analysis of data, listed below are anticipated solutions that may effectively address the African-American male dropout problem.

### *Discipline Sanctions*

Establish and offer alternatives to short-term out-of-school suspension. Such alternatives may include but are not limited to restorative justice practices, community service, and morning or after-school detention. Additionally, in-school suspension for immediate removal from the area where the disruption or infraction occurred may also be effective in reducing lost instructional time. Researchers suggest that African-American male students experience higher rates of suspension from school when compared to their peers (Balfanz & Legters, 2006; Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002).

Alternative discipline sanctions may keep African-American male students in school, subsequently reducing the gap in learning that is experienced when the student is removed from the classroom. Partnerships should be established with local agencies to create off-campus sites where students, who must be suspended, may attend, continue to receive instruction and be counted present. Boys' and Girls' Clubs, local departments for youth development and faith organizations are among the local agencies that may serve as safe zones for off-campus sites. The goal of alternatives to out-of-school suspension is to keep the African-American male student connected to school with the opportunity to learn from the discipline incident.

Prevention and intervention efforts are essential to creating and maintaining respectful learning environments. Require sustained professional development for new and veteran teachers in the areas of de-escalation, classroom management and differentiated instruction. Adopted strategies should enable teachers to effectively address behavior problems by coaching and modeling acceptable behavior and social skills. Teachers must demonstrate behaviors they wish their students to emulate. Both intentionally and unintentionally, educators use sarcasm, banter, and debate while speaking to students in ways that may trigger an inappropriate student response. Monroe (2006) suggests that teachers should reflect and adjust their own behaviors as

a means to facilitate responsive classroom environments. Refusing to be *punked down* in front of peers, the African-American male student may retaliate in a confrontational manner that ultimately results in being sent out of class. Sustained professional development should be required for all teachers regardless of years of service. Verbal and physical de-escalation techniques may include role-playing for modeling expected behavior and discussions that involve students, teachers, administrators and school counselors.

African-American males relate to a dynamic youth culture that is greatly influenced by hip-hop music, speech and fashion trends. Generational disconnects or middle-class principles held by educators may interfere with their willingness to respect the symbols held in high esteem by youth culture. Monroe (2006) and Noguera (2003b) suggest that educators embrace and learn this culture to build trusting relationships with African-American male students. Embracing youth culture requires an appreciation for what is important to African-American male student. Educators may demonstrate this understanding and appreciation through differentiated instructional activities. An example may include the opportunity to use a hip-hop artist as the person that students could complete a character analysis and comparison during a novel study. Highly effective teachers understand how students learn best and use a variety of teaching strategies and tools to gain student interest.

### *Curriculum Programming*

Deliberately schedule and assign African-American male students into rigorous coursework as early as such coursework is offered in the school division. In other words, if there is an elementary gifted program, after-school enrichment program, summer institute or middle grades advanced program, encourage African-American male participation. Early exposure to rigorous instructional programs can enable African-American male youth to develop a positive academic self-image. Early experiences with academic rigor may begin the process of reversing the stereotype that being successful in school is limited to athletic ability. As with any instructional program, a sustained instructional support plan should be required for those students who may need encouragement and extra time to master concepts. The purpose of an instructional support plan is to provide the framework for developing good study habits and ongoing remediation outside of the classroom hours. The concept of *no pain, no gain* and post graduation planning must be consistently reinforced with African-American male students. There are programs designed to help underrepresented student populations excel in college prep

and Advanced Placement classes. One national program, Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), is designed to support academically average middle and high school students succeed in rigorous coursework.

Early enrollment in gifted and talented programs fosters a culture of high academic expectations and erases stereotypes associated with deficit thinking. Principals are encouraged to promote professional learning communities that focus on building a culture of high expectations for all students. A culture of high expectations is one that develops over time when everyone in the school community commits to a *no excuses for failure attitude* every day. Armed with a *no excuses* mantra and systemic instructional support plan, principals, counselors and teachers can enable African-American male students to feel comfortable and confident in advanced class settings. In a nurturing and validating classroom environment, African-American males are better equipped to address racial peer pressure and other societal stereotypes that may challenge their self-confidence (Rascoe & Atwater, 2005; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005).

Parent and community support may be considered the mortar that is used to support a culture of high expectations for all students. There is a positive correlation between African-American male student academic achievement and parental support (Somers, Owens & Piliawsky, 2008). Educators must intentionally inform parents of the specific benefits and sacrifices associated with taking advanced coursework. The benefits may include facts around college and career preparation and sacrifices should include discussion around balance between study time and social activities.

Maintaining the expectation that all students will participate in advanced course offerings and graduate ready for college and career options requires an alignment of resources. The reality of the economy forces educators to establish partnerships with businesses, colleges, and neighboring school divisions to provide multiple pathways to and beyond graduation. Creative sharing of resources may expand course offerings, internships, human resources and other tools needed to make career and college connections for students. Effective educational partnerships provide real-world opportunities, reinforce shared norms and promote the expectation for academic excellence for all students. Expanded course offerings and vocational opportunities provide the relevance African-American students need to remain engaged in school.

### *Instructional Experiences*

Researchers in the field continue to indicate retention in grade as a strong predictor of future high school dropouts. Based upon the findings of this study and national retention and dropout data, it appears as though educators are not reading the professional literature. Elementary teachers need to know that a decision to retain the socially immature child puts the child at risk for not completing high school. Similarly, the high school teacher needs to know that many first-time freshmen who become disengaged and disconnected will not graduate four years later. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2010) reports that African-American male students are retained at higher rates than any other racial group. Educators must take ownership by proactively addressing this problem with relevant and culturally responsive instruction.

Although retention in grade places African-American males at risk, so does social promotion. Findings from this study revealed 16% of subjects were socially promoted during their elementary (one subject) and middle school (18 subjects) years. Approximately 85% of the socially promoted subjects skipped eighth grade. How does one expect a student, who has not comprehended previously taught material, to skip a grade level and still be academically successful? In every case, the socially promoted subject was retained at least once after they matriculated to high school but before they dropped out. These data suggest that neither social promotion nor retention is effective as students are not prepared with the necessary skills to be academically successful. Educators must be informed of the academic and social difficulties students suffer when pushed onto the next grade without the necessary level of academic preparedness.

The Virginia school division promotion and retention policies reviewed focus on the student's failure to achieve. This researcher suggests that these policies should also include regulations for systemic practice. Central office coordinators, principals and teachers must work collaboratively to develop systemic instructional support plans to identify and address early warning signs of academic failure. These plans are vehicles for prevention and should include professional development for teachers, counselors and principals across all grade levels. Schools should be organized into Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) comprised of highly qualified teachers who deliver engaging and meaningful instruction. The PLCs should collaborate within school and across the school division to analyze data as well as share best



practices and interventions that are effective. Ineffective teachers, counselors and principals who have not positively responded to redirection and targeted professional development should be relieved of their duty.

Providing effective instructional experiences must be intentional and directed by data analysis. Addressing the instructional needs of African-American male students is multifaceted and must consider their social emotional needs. Multiple strategies may be used to address the needs of students who may be at risk of being retained or socially promoted. Effective strategies focus on prevention, prevention, and prevention to address the issue before it becomes a problem. Principals are encouraged to assign skillful teachers, who demonstrate command of content knowledge, to students who have the greatest academic needs. From this researcher's experience, the skillful teacher will encourage students to think critically, deliver relevant instruction and build relationships with students and their parents.

### *School Relationships*

Madyun and Lee (2010) suggest that one of the most influential individuals in the life of an African-American male student is their mother or grandmother. Many African-American males who are raised in single-parent homes by mother or grandmother, the matriarch, are nurtured, perhaps coddled and taught the importance of respect. From this researcher's experience, African-American male youth develop a strong need to be respected by others and may believe only mother or grandmother receives unconditional respect. At school, African-American males are willing to demonstrate respectful behaviors but feel strongly that teachers must also demonstrate respect. After all, in the African-American male student's opinion, teachers are not the family matriarch. While this impression seems simple to understand, not all teachers or administrators embrace it. Teachers or administrators often believe that students should respect them because of their position of authority. This incongruence among belief systems is often the catalyst for escalating defiant behavior African-American males may demonstrate in school. Educators are encouraged to embrace the unwritten rule of how to *earn* the respect of African-American male youth. Today's youth are very different from the youth who did as directed by the teacher just because the teacher said so.

To build rapport with African-American male youth, educators must also *earn* their trust, as it is not automatically shared. The matriarch also teaches African-American male youth not to talk about family business, which supports Noguera's (2003b) suggestion that cultural factors

influence African-American male trust in teachers. Better equipped with de-escalation and people skills, school counselors can support teachers and administrators with how to develop relationships with African-American males. School counselors may be assigned as advocates for students who are identified as having difficulties academically and behaviorally. Using a proactive approach, the counselor may establish a relationship with the student and parent through early discussions of recommended coursework, extracurricular activities and appropriate interventions. In the event the targeted student is removed from class for a conduct infraction, the principal has a support system in place and an alternative to potential exclusionary sanctions. As issues arise in the school, the African-American male student may self-direct and seek help from his advocate as a means to avoid getting into trouble.

Schools should be inviting environments where all students feel connected and safe. African-American male students who drop out of school are more likely to be suspended from school and less likely to be involved in extracurricular clubs and activities. Many extracurricular clubs and activities have rules that terminate membership if the student is suspended; further disconnecting the suspended youth from school. African-American male students who are not experiencing academic success need a hook to keep them anchored at school, an adult mentor or advocate could be the hook. Similarly, peers can also serve as the hook that keeps students in school. However, African-American male students who are at risk for dropping out are unlikely to be associated with peers who are being successful. Therefore, engaging the African-American male student in school extracurricular activities is essential to provide positive peer interaction. Aside from the school counselor, adult mentors and advocates can be teachers, coaches, volunteers and members from community partners. Relationships should never be conditional or held hostage. Specifically, principals and teachers should never take away the opportunity for the student to see the adult mentor as a form of punishment.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study suggest questions that may be explored as further research into African-American male students who persist to graduate with their cohort. Research questions regarding resiliency and protective factors may be explored using the conceptual framework that was applied in this study. Replicating the analysis of longitudinal suspension and expulsion, advanced coursework, and retention data, the findings may be used to determine differences

between African-American male dropouts and graduates, and other students. Unlike the current study, participants may be interviewed to gain an understanding of student relationships with teachers. The significance of further research in this area is the ability to identify what protective factors may exist that are within the control of school officials.

Implications from this study suggest the call to conduct action research to address the needs of every student who may be at risk of dropping out of school. Although African-American males were the focus of this study, the recommendations may be applied to each subgroup as defined by NCLB. Educators may apply the recommendations included in this study to analyze and redesign school practices and procedures that put students at risk of dropping out of school.

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