

**School-level Factors in Public High Schools that Help Raise
Academic Achievement for Black Males**

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Abstract

This qualitative research study was conducted to explore the leadership perceptions of high school administrators who have been successful in raising academic achievement for Black male students. The key research question for investigation was: What school-level factors are public high school administrators optimizing to help raise the academic achievement of their Black male students? Utilizing semi-structured interviews which served as the primary data source, the researcher sought to uncover specific school-level factors that were being used to help increase the rate at which Black males graduated from high school.

After a thorough analysis of the data, the researcher was able to show five shared factors that were having an impact on Black male high school students: 1) retaining Black males on staff, 2) student-staff relationship building, 3) promoting involvement in school activities, 4) maximizing community partnerships, and 5) offering consistent positive reinforcement and special recognition. These five factors were found as having the greatest influence on the academic achievement of the Black males attending those high schools. It was clear that the five school-level factors promoted a certain degree of academic achievement when optimized independently. However, the researcher posits that, if implemented simultaneously, the five factors are likely to significantly raise Black male achievement and have a lasting effect on Black male students beyond high school graduation. Thus, further research is needed to understand the impact of applying simultaneously, the five factors to raise the academic achievement of Black male high school students.

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General Audience Abstract

A research study was conducted on raising Black male academic achievement. The researcher wanted to explore the opinions of high school administrators who had successfully raised academic achievement for their Black male students. Therefore, using in-person interviews and school documents as data sources, the researcher planned to find specific factors in a high school that showed evidence of helping to increase the graduation rates of Black male students. After collecting the data and fully analyzing each source, the researcher found five factors which the high school administrators regularly used to support their Black male students. These factors included: 1) hiring practices, 2) the staff, 3) school extracurricular activities, 4) community partnerships, and 5) formal and informal methods of offering positive feedback and special recognition. According to the high school administrators that were interviewed, these factors had the greatest influence on their Black male high school students' achievement.

Largely, the study's discoveries were closely associated and comparable to other research studies conducted on Black male academic achievement. It was clear that each of the five factors promoted academic achievement when implemented independently. However, the researcher argues that the five factors are likely to build greater support to help Black males achieve in high school if they are applied at the same time. This would lead to increased graduation rates. The researcher ends the study by discussing how the findings may impact the practices of other public high school administrators and recommending ideas for future research based on the results of her study.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to all the family and friends who have supported me throughout the doctoral process. Particularly, I would like to extend a profound sense of gratitude to Bryant Townsend, Taja McRae, Lateshia Clark, Pastor Larry C. Miles, Bonnie Meadows, Marlette Dixon, and Melissa Shaw, friends whose prayers, faith, funds, and/or words of encouragement helped me persevere in the course of this God ordained journey. Thank you so much for believing along with me, that God would fulfill this long-awaited promise and also for believing that I could actually earn a doctorate degree. All of you, along with several others, were the best cheering squad and prayer intercessors a Christian doctoral student could ever have; God knew who and what I needed to endure and successfully finish the process.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to Jerome Jackson for his extraordinary editing skills and abilities. Thank you for taking the numerous phone calls and allowing me to process aloud while listening with great patience. Your fortitude, flexibility, tolerance, attention to detail and solid support of me were very much appreciated. I am glad God appointed you to be an integral part of my journey as you were able to witness firsthand His many deposits, transferred directly from heaven and onto the document. God empowered us to be an excellent team, a partnership that hopefully created a publishable document!

Moreover, I dedicate this dissertation to all the young Black males who will be immensely impacted by this research and a lot more in the coming years. God created this great body of work so that generations upon generations of young Black males among others will be afforded a high-quality K-12 education. This dissertation is only a preview of the excellent work God will do, through me, to help eradicate the gaps that exist for this population of students; because Jeremiah 29:11 is God's promise to me for you!

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Milner (2007) articulated a set of truths about Black male students and public education that, despite countervailing forces and narratives, persists: “Black male students can and do succeed in every type of school across the world. Their success in urban schools is not an exception. There are committed, confident, and competent teachers who care about these students and their success” (p. 245). Even so, one of the most pressing issues facing our nation’s public high schools, especially those afflicted by poverty, is the alarming persistence of underachievement for Black males compared to other student groups (Schott Foundation, 2018). “Underachievement” denotes disparate educational outcomes such as lower graduation rates, wherein Black male students still trail the national graduation average according to an annual report produced by the Schott Foundation for Public Education (2018). At the time of reporting, Black males were estimated to have graduated at a rate of 59%, whereas White males were estimated to have graduated at a rate of 80%, which led to the graduation gap between Black and White males increasing from 19% to 21% between 2012 and 2013 (Schott Foundation, 2018). Similarly, underachievement denotes disparate educational outcomes such as poorer performance on standardized tests, where by almost every measure (i.e., English, mathematics, science, and college-admission tests), Black male high schoolers’ scores have shown either constant declines or marginal progress for years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Regrettably, Black male underachievement in public high schools continues to be a systemic problem in education policy and practice (Donnor & Shockley, 2010; Ford & Moore, 2013; Noguera, 2003, 2014; Noguera & Wells, 2011). This seems incongruous, given the plethora of federal policies and education reform initiatives that have emerged over the years to

address an achievement crisis that is widespread among minority students and those from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, a subgroup that a substantial number of Black male high school students fall under (Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Noguera & Wells, 2011). In particular, with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) (1965) and its subsequent reauthorizations, policymakers have continuously sought to establish accountability structures that focused on improving student achievement for these student populations. For example, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was introduced in 2002 because the federal government became increasingly concerned by the growing achievement gaps of minority students. As a result, a system of testing and accountability was devised which eventually brought about improvements in standardized test scores such that scores for minority students, as a whole, showed some of the highest levels of growth during this time (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Likewise, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was authorized in 2015 to help more minority students meet higher graduation standards. Since the authorization of ESSA minority students have experienced gains in their graduation rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

As a result of these federal policies along with other reform efforts, data reported by the National Center for Education Statistics showed that standardized test scores and graduation rates have steadily increased for some minority student groups like the students of Asian and Hispanic/Latino descent as well as Black females (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Irrespective to the overall gains in student achievement that have occurred for those minority student groups, evidence indicated that Black males were a subgroup of students that continued to lag on almost every indicator of academic achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018) and were still less likely to complete high school compared to male students of other races (Noguera & Wells, 2011; Payne, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2018). Moreover,

national data on Black male high schoolers reported over the years continue to bolster the notion that making considerable progresses to their achievement levels will be unattainable in the future if educational stakeholders do not work together to figure out the resources, policies, or practices that can greatly curtail underachievement for this student population (Schott Foundation, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

Decades after the ESEA and its subsequent reauthorizations, state education departments, school districts, and high school administrators continue to face the same conundrum regarding ways to steadily increase the academic achievement of Black male high schoolers (Schott Foundation, 2018). As previously discussed, federal policy and school reform undertakings have been central to progressively raising achievement for high school students in general, however many of the initiatives authorized have done little to significantly improve the trajectory of achievement for Black male high schoolers specifically (Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Noguera & Wells, 2011; Noguera, 2014; Payne, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2018). Policymakers and other stakeholders, according to Payne (2008), often do not account for the underlying factors and difficulties of educating minority students like Black males. Other studies have indicated that reform efforts that appeared to be viable in practice for high school students in general were shown ineffective among Black male students because implementation of these efforts likely demanded problematic changes to state policies or required these students' school districts to enact numerous other conditions that they could not successfully meet (Noguera & Wells, 2011; Payne, 2008). Therefore, the manner in which preceding reform efforts have been inequitably sanctioned has likely contributed to lower graduation rates for Black male students across the U.S. (Noguera, 2014; Payne, 2008; Schott Foundation, 2018).

However, a seeming problem linked to Black male underachievement lies in that state education departments and school districts often enforce federal policies and school reform practices across all school environments, contexts, and student populations, without regard for the specific supports and modifications that high school leaders would need to execute them successfully for all students (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006; Noguera, 2014; Payne, 2008). Complicating matters further, it is likely that some high school leaders found it difficult to distinguish reform efforts that could in fact impact the achievement of their Black male learners, given the myriad reform policies, practices, and strategies constantly at their disposal (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Considering the increase in accountability for school leaders and how integral effective leadership is in driving student achievement, the need for public high school leaders, to understand and put into action practices and strategies that most effectively impact Black male high school students academic achievement is paramount (Crum & Sherman, 2008).

Understanding how to steadily raise Black male academic achievement in public high school is problematic for education stakeholders, as there is little research that suggest specific school-level solutions that most effectively impact these students, especially those who attend high schools afflicted by poverty (Crum & Sherman, 2008; Noguera & Wells, 2011; Payne, 2008). Most research studies have focused on achievement gaps as a whole (Reardon et al., 2019); the achievement of Black students by identifying risk behaviors (Balfanz et al., 2007; Futrell, 2004; Hamre & Pianta, 2005; Parsons & Kritsonis, 2006); the issues connected to Black students who drop out of school have been studied extensively (Balfanz et al., 2007; Granger & Noguera, 2015; Roderick, 2003). Conversely, there has been restricted literature on Black male high schoolers' achievement from the perspective of public high school administrators (Ford &

Moore, 2013; Noguera & Wells, 2011). Far less is known about specific school-level strategies and practices that successful public high school leaders have implemented and sustained to help improve Black male achievement (Ford & Moore, 2013; Noguera & Wells, 2011), with even less available data on the impact that efficacy-nurturing practices have on Black male academic outcomes (Noble, 2011; Tyler & Boelter, 2008; Uwah et al., 2008). Therefore, this research study sought to fill a gap in literature by exploring the leadership actions of public high school administrators and the school-level factors that they optimized to help increase the academic achievement of Black males specifically, as evidenced by increased graduation rates.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to uncover those specific school-level factors that high school administrators have used to effectively address Black male academic achievement and to understand why their strategies are showing to be effective in raising the achievement of this student population. Drawing on Albert Bandura's theory on efficacy (1977), this study also took into account whether or not high school administrators were capitalizing on the connection between self-efficacy beliefs and academic achievement, wherein Black males graduate on time as a result of positive mastery, vicarious, verbal persuasion and /or physiological experiences received within the school environment. For this study, the researcher indicated that "optimizing school-level factors" was linked to the manner in which a high school administrator strategically made the best use of elements within the school environment to explicitly improve academic achievement for Black male students. In addition, the researcher's interpretation of academic achievement was based on standards outlined by the Department of Education's which generally linked academic achievement to students' outcomes such as on-time high school graduation—parameters that, when applied to years of historical data published

by the nation's preeminent educational organizations, revealed the degree to which Black males across the United States had been disadvantaged relative to their counterparts (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

While there have been previous studies that have pointed out a range of educational factors that were well-known to influence achievement for students generally, this investigation was essential for discovering school-level factors that impacted achievement for Black male high school students. Accordingly, the researcher explored the perceptions of public high school administrators who effectively controlled specific factors within their schools to mitigate the achievement issues that existed for their Black male student population. Therefore, by identifying school-level factors in public high schools that explicitly had an effect on Black male academic achievement, education stakeholders would be well-appointed to direct more resources and funding in support of practices that would deliberately impact graduation rates for these students (Ford & Moore, 2013; Varlas, 2005).

Research Questions

Considering the purpose of this qualitative study, the main research question for investigation was: What school-level factors are public high school administrators optimizing to help raise the academic achievement of their Black male students? This study's inquiry was also guided by the following sub-questions:

1. How are the identified school-level factors optimized in order to raise Black male academic achievement?
2. To what extent are the school-level practices consistent with practices that promote academic self-efficacy in students?

These research questions focused on identifying existing practices in public high schools that presented evidence of effectiveness for improving Black male high schooler's outcomes. In addition, the findings were intended to inform leadership actions that other public high school administrators could replicate within their schools to deal with this recurring problem in public high schools.

Significance of the Study

The difficulties that some public high school leaders encounter in raising academic achievement for Black male high school students are not new phenomenon in education research. However, this new research was important for many reasons. First, this study is contributing to an underdeveloped area of literature, which is especially significant given the lack of qualitative research approaches to the topic. Second, the number of studies that have investigated improving Black male academic achievement from the perspectives of high school administrators is limited (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). By focusing on this public high school issue from the perspective of a school administrator, the researcher was able to present a set of strategies as possible solutions for increasing Black male academic success that administrators in similar conditions could replicate. The insights presented by the researcher could also guide the development of education policy and refine public high school practices such that Black males' academic achievement constantly improves, thereby gradually increasing high school graduation rates for this population of students nationwide.

Finally, few studies have investigated school-level factors which are correlated to efficacy-nurturing practices in a public high school setting along with significant Black male student populations. In this respect, the discoveries from this study would strengthen the researcher's suggestion that public high school administrators could significantly impact Black

male students' academic achievement if they took the appropriate leadership actions to optimize and account for factors that existed within the school environment (Harper, 2015; Noguera, 2014; Noguera, & Wells, 2011; Reed & Swaminatham, 2016), and took an active part in nurturing the students' academic self-efficacy beliefs as a contributory factor (Noble, 2011; Tyler & Boelter, 2008; Uwah et al., 2008).

Research Methodology

This study was exploratory in scope and grounded in the perspectives of public high school administrators. A multiple-case design was integrated as an efficient way of gathering descriptive data and reporting the findings from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2014). By allowing the school administrators to share leadership approaches and success stories, this study provided insights that could benefit high school administrators who are searching for ways to raise Black male academic achievement in their schools (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Study Assumptions

While designing this qualitative study, the researcher made two assumptions. First, it was assumed that high school administrators would be best equipped to give an opinion on school-level factors that presented evidence of effectiveness with Black male students and the extent to which the school-level practices were consistent with practices that fostered academic self-efficacy beliefs in these students. Second, it was assumed that the school administrators that were selected to participate in the study would fully engage, answer honestly, and be willing to provide substantial evidence to support their interview responses.

Limitations of the Study

The research collected was primarily based on the interviews of public high school administrators. Thus, there were three key limitations identified during the early stages of the research:

1. The size of the sample was small; thus, the findings were not generalizable in a statistical sense to all public high schools. A larger sample of high schools culled from varied geographical locations would have enhanced the generalizability of the research (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Patton, 2002).
2. The interviews relied on the participants to respond competently and candidly to the questions (Yin, 2014).
3. The researcher's direct connection to this topic as an African American educator could have elicited researcher bias. As a result, analysis of the data could have run the risk of subjective interpretation of the findings by the researcher (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to studying public high school administrators who had success optimizing specific school-level factors to help raise academic achievement for their Black male student population. It was intended to clarify the perceptions of school administrators regarding factors in the school environment they believed were influential in boosting their Black male students' graduation rates. However, this study was not intended to account for the perceptions of private or charter high school administrators nor the factors that existed outside of the school building and beyond a school administrator's control like community factors, the students' background and family structure, and other institutions that supported students' development.

Finally, the quality of academic achievement was narrow in scope and limited to graduation rates for Black male students which were verified using data published on the district and state Department of Education websites.

Definition of Terms

The key words referenced throughout this qualitative research study were terminologies generally applied and communicated in educational settings. For instance:

Academic achievement. For this study, I defined this as the high rates at which Black males graduated from high school on time and at or above the national graduation average.

Academic self-concept. Refers to a student's beliefs about themselves intellectually (Whiting, 2009).

Academic self-efficacy Beliefs. Denotes a student's understanding about their capabilities relative to their academic performance (Usher & Pajares, 2008).

Barriers. For this study, it suggests social and personal influences outside of the school building that obstruct a Black male student from performing at optimal levels in school or graduating from high school on time (Noguera, 2003; 2014).

Education Reform. According to the Great Schools Partnership (2014), education reform refers to educational changes that are employed to improve the public education system elementary, middle, and high school programs.

Optimize. For this study, optimized is defined as a high school administrator making the best use of specific factors within the school environment to raise academic achievement for Black male students.

School administrator. For this study, the researcher defines a school administrator as an individual that oversee the operation of a school and/or are responsible for leading student

achievement and other initiatives at the school such as principals, assistant principals, instructional coordinators, and other support staff.

School-level factors. For this study, the researcher defines school-level factors as the aspects of a school environment that are under the jurisdiction of the school as a whole and communicate the school's character, principles, perceptions, beliefs, practices and rules that influence student outcomes, such as curriculum, instruction, facilities, resources, teachers, support staff, and the climate, among others.

Socioeconomic status (SES). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), socioeconomic status (SES) refers to the income level of a family in terms of a high, middle, and low-income scale.

Underachievement. Refers to the inconsistency between the Black males' educational outcomes and their actual educational ability (Noguera, 2014; Payne, 2008).

Summary

The goal of Chapter 1 was to explain the need to identify school-level factors in public high school that best impact academic achievement for Black male students and the need to spread these effective practices for broader implementation in public high schools nationwide. In doing so, the researcher expected to find an effective approach to progressively improving educational outcomes for Black male high school students.

To address this issue in its entirety, this study was organized to include five chapters. Chapter 1 was written to introduce the study. An analysis of literature that supported the study comprised Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provided a detailed description of the research methodology and design, while the research findings are provided in Chapter 4, followed by a discussion of the findings in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The following literature review consists of a three-section discussion of several bodies of research addressing factors that have contributed to the underachievement of Black males as well as their academic achievement. The first section comprises an examination of specific barriers to achievement for Black male high school students. The critical goals of this section are to review the most common areas wherein Black males encounter academic difficulty while trying to navigate their high school careers, to help explain why these barriers were problematic for Black males, and to understand the extent to which high school administrators can create learning environments that help raise academic achievement for these students in the face of the barriers. In the second section, factors shown to have a positive effect on the achievement of Black male high school students are reviewed. Among the numerous factors reviewed in the literature, the five school-level factors presented in this section were identified in research as having the most influence on the academic outcomes of Black male high school students.

Finally, the third section consists of a conceptual framework that serves as the foundation for the study's research methodology. Literature that underlines Albert Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and its relation to increasing academic achievement is summarized in this section. Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory has implications for individuals of all races, genders, and ethnicities and in various social situations, but this research emphasizes one component of that theory and its effect on academic achievement.

Barriers to Black Male Academic Achievement

While the focus of this study was to identify specific school-level factors that high school administrators optimize to help increase the academic achievement of Black male students, it

was critical to discuss barriers to the academic achievement of these students. Therefore, this section of the literature review presents data demonstrating the extent to which Black male high school students lagged on multiple measures of achievement. Then, factors accounting for these trends are discussed, such as the educational and social barriers that negatively affected these students' high school experiences and academic outcomes that were presented in the chapter.

Evidence for Underachievement

Black males have been documented as lagging on almost every indicator of academic achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018) and as less likely to persist in high school than males of other races (Schott Foundation, 2018). For instance:

Below Average Standardized Test Performance

Data reported by the National Center for Education Statistics (2016) showed Black male high school students as less proficient than White, Asian, and Hispanic males in virtually every subject category in 2011. Data reported in 2013 indicated that only 18% of twelfth-grade Black males were proficient in reading compared to 49% of their Asian male peers and 42% of White male peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The disparity persisted at the highest levels of reading as well, with only 2% of Black males reported as reading at the advanced level compared to 16% of their Asian male peers and 10% of White male peers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Likewise, Table 1 shows similar disparities for twelfth-grade Black males in reading as indicated by data released in 2018 through National Center for Education Statistics. The national average scale score in reading for twelfth-grade Black males was lower than the national average scale scores for White and Asian/Pacific Islander males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Table 1*National Average Reading Scale Scores for High School Male Students*

Race of Males	Reading Scale Score
Black	259
White	290
Asian	290

Black male twelfth-graders also failed to demonstrate solid academic performance and competency in math in 2013, as only 13% of them achieved at or above the proficient level in math compared to the higher percentages of White (41%) and Asian (42%) males (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Comparatively, White males scored 32 points higher, Asian males scored 44 points higher, and Hispanic males scored 12 points higher in math than Black males in 2018, according to national average scale scores as shown in Table 2 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Table 2*Differences in National Math Average Scale Scores for High School Male Students*

Race of Males	Math Scale Score
Black	129
White	161
Asian	173
Hispanic	141

While it is evident that Black male high school students scored significantly lower than high school males of other races on standardized tests, this disparity does not imply that all Black male high school students score below all male subgroups (National Center for Education

Statistics, 2018). However, the disparity in performance was wide enough to have impacted academic outcomes for Black males as a whole (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Low High School Graduation Rates

Gamble-Hilton (2012) and Palmer et al. (2010) discussed the imperative that Black males graduate from high school and college so that they might increase their chances of obtaining gainful employment in a competitive global market. However, reports showed that Black males were the least likely among student subgroups to graduate from high school at very high rates (Schott Foundation, 2018). For instance, data on graduation rates across the U.S. revealed great disparities in outcomes for Black males when compared to White males. In 2015, the rate of school completion for Black males increased to 59%, which pales in comparison to a graduation rate of 80% for White males in the same year (Schott Foundation, 2018). As Table 3 shows, both minor and major disparities were apparent in the 2011-12 cohort graduation rankings of large school districts nationwide, with Black males having graduated at lower rates than White males in all but one of the reporting school districts.

Table 3

Disparities in Graduation Rates For Black Males

School District	Black Male Enrollment	Black Male Rate	White Male Rate
Newark (NJ)	9697	75%	64%
Prince Georges County (MD)	44,774	55%	58%
Cumberland County (NC)	12,119	61%	67%
Baltimore County (MD)	20,836	67%	76%
Virginia Beach (VA)	8931	51%	68%
Fort Bend (TX)	10,559	64%	82%
Montgomery County (MD)	16,023	69%	89%
Guildford (NC)	15,246	57%	80%
Cobb County (GA)	17,112	51%	75%
Wake County (NC)	18,570	51%	82%

Unsurprisingly, other low-ranked districts featured some of the worst Black male graduation rates in comparison to White males for the 2011-12 cohort, as Table 4 shows (Schott Foundation, 2018).

Table 4

Significant Disparities in Graduation Rates For Black Males

School District	Black Male Enrollment	Black Male Rate	White Male Rate
Norfolk (VA)	10,578	31%	50%
Charleston (SC)	9947	30%	59%
Richmond (VA)	11,985	29%	34%
Duval (FL)	28,116	29%	47%
Cleveland (OH)	14,783	28%	34%
Pinellas County (FL)	10,251	28%	54%
Clark County (NV)	20,185	27%	45%
Philadelphia (PA)	41,620	26%	36%
Detroit (MI)	31,323	23%	13%

The report also revealed large school districts where the graduation gap between Black and White males was the widest among all large school districts surveyed (Schott Foundation, 2015). School districts like Atlanta Public Schools, Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Chicago Public Schools, District of Columbia Public Schools, and Miami Dade Public Schools, among others, were reported as having a Black-White male high school graduation gap of 21 points or more (Schott Foundation, 2018). By contrast, Black males were found most likely to graduate from high school in states with smaller Black male student populations, such as Idaho and Maine. These results demonstrate that improvements in the academic achievement of Black male high school students can occur, but also indicate a need for specific intervention measures that would raise graduation rates in states with larger Black male high school student populations (Schott Foundation, 2018).

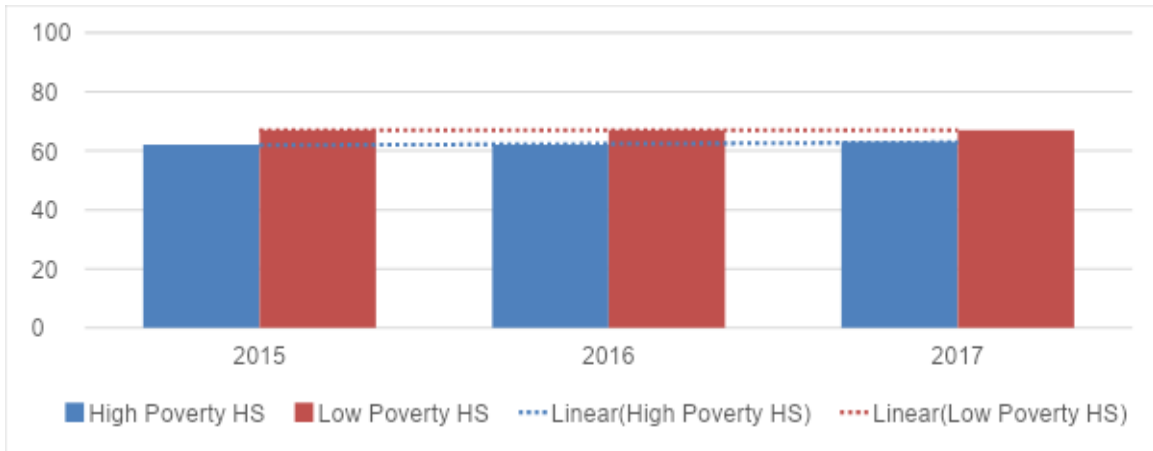
Nominal College Enrollment and Completion Rates

College enrollment data collected and reported by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center supplies vital information on high schools across the United States. The organization produces a benchmark report that shows national results for the following: 1) various high school categories such as low-poverty high school, high-poverty high school among other categories and 2) on rates of immediate college enrollment, rates of persistence, and rates of college completion six years after graduating from high school (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018). State education departments, school districts, and public high schools all reference the data released by the organization on immediate college enrollment to evaluate their impact on student academic success (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018).

Low-poverty high schools surpassed high-poverty high schools in the immediate college enrollment of their high school graduates as shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 which were created based on data provided by the National Student Clearinghouse, High School Benchmarks Report (2018). As shown in Figure 1, high-poverty high schools trailed low-poverty high schools slightly in immediate student enrollment in college, but trailed significantly in the rate of graduating cohorts completing college within a six-year time period, as shown in Figure 2 (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018). This finding has significant implications for Black male high school students because a higher percentage of Black males' are more likely to attend high-poverty high schools than not; these students are at greater risk of underachievement than Black males who attend low-poverty high schools (Noguera, 2014).

Figure 1

Immediate College Enrollment Rates

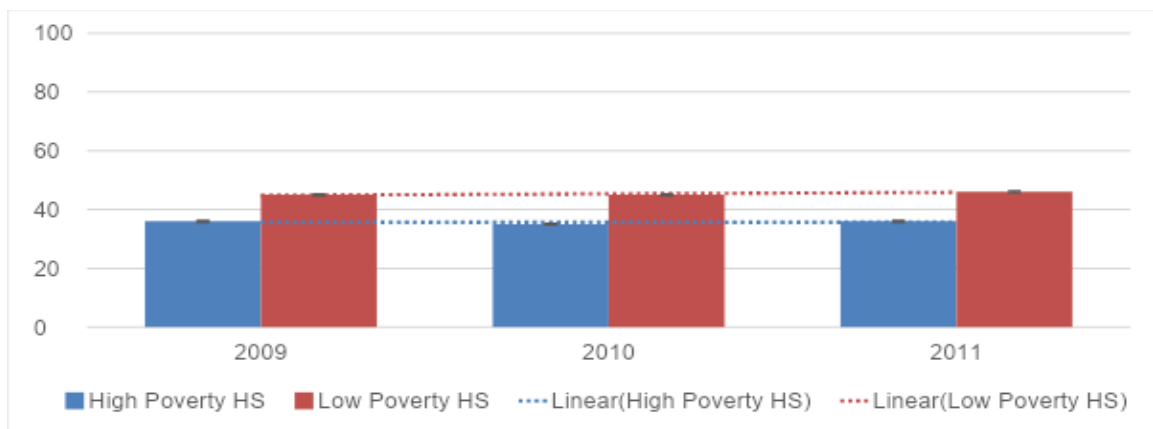


Note. This figure compares enrollment rates for low-poverty high school students and high-poverty high school students, in the first fall semester immediately after high school graduation.

Disparities among college completion rates for graduates who attended high-poverty and low-poverty high schools were most noticeable as shown in Figure 2 (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018).

Figure 2

College Completion Rates



Note. This figure compares the rate at which graduating cohorts 2009-2011, from both high-poverty and low-poverty high schools, completed college six years after high school graduation.

A benchmark report produced by the National Student Clearinghouse in 2018 also revealed a growing gap in enrollment between low-poverty and high-poverty schools: 77% of high school graduates in low-poverty schools enrolled in college immediately following graduation, while only 54% of high school graduates from high-poverty schools did. A gap was also discovered in college graduation rates: 55% of low-poverty graduates graduated college within six years of finishing high school compared to only 20% of graduates from high-poverty high schools (National Student Clearinghouse, 2018).

When Black male high schoolers are compared academically to other male high school students, the breadth of underachievement and poor outcomes becomes evident, as research indicates the alarming extent to which Black male students specifically trail White males in rates of standardized test performance, graduation rates, and college enrollment and completion rates (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2018; Schott Foundation, 2018). While all these findings are shocking, they are also a predictable outcome of high school administrators' inability to account for and redress the barriers to Black male academic achievement in their schools (Noguera, 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Additionally, many of these reports give the impression that Black male students were likely to have been exposed to less positive school experiences in high school than White male students (Noguera, 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016).

Factors That Trigger Black Male Underachievement

This section is comprised of a discussion of the different circumstances which were shown to be relevant triggers of Black male high school students' underachievement.

School-based Factors

School-based factors have been perceived as aspects of the school that characterize the setting, such as the personnel, climate and culture, curriculum and instruction, and infrastructure, among other factors (Maxwell, 2016; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). The subsequent school-based factors have been shown to likely trigger Black male underachievement.

Poor School Leadership. Numerous studies have found that the underperformance of Black males can be attributed to the ineffectual actions of the school leader (Irvin & Hudley, 2005; Noguera, 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). The impact of poor school leadership is detrimental for all students, but it is substantially more damaging for Black males, who have a greater risk of low academic performance (Ford & Moore, 2013; Payne, 2008; Ward, 2017). For example, poor school leadership, according to Hargrove and Seay (2011), was associated with a disparity in discipline referrals that negatively affected Black male suspensions as well as overrepresentation in special education. This would explain why other researchers have contended that a school leaders' inability to establish, implement, and sustain a clear vision around student learning and achievement contributed to lowering student achievement by at least two months of learning in a single school year (Garibaldi, 2007).

According to Booker (2007), low expectations exhibited by poor school leadership have the ability to function as self-fulfilling prophecies throughout the building, especially for minority students and students of low-income status, which increased the risk of their low academic performance and underachievement (Booker, 2007). Hughes and Bonner (2007) postulated that once Black males were categorized as at-risk, teachers frequently extended fewer opportunities for them to successfully interact in classroom activities, which gradually led to Black male students disengaging psychologically from participating in the classroom setting.

Other studies indicated that when school leaders and staff alike held negative beliefs about Black male students' ability to grasp more challenging material and perform at high levels, the students' opportunities to take rigorous classes such as honors or Advanced Placement courses were constricted, with evidence revealing that the lack of participation in these experiences had negative implications for these students' postsecondary experiences (Ford & Moore, 2013; Strayhorn, 2008).

Negative School Culture. Research has revealed the link between poor performance and a negative school culture including showing heightened rates of bullying and delinquency among Black male students (McEvoy & Welker, 2000). Other studies have indicated that certain aspects of the school environment—such as unsafe campus grounds, overcrowded classrooms, and dilapidated facilities—were linked to poor academic performance (Maxwell, 2016; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). For instance, research conducted by Back et al. (2016) indicated that overcrowding and large class sizes directly reduced achievement, as teachers were hindered from giving individualized support in overcrowded classrooms, thereby impeding urban students' opportunities to develop proficiency in the standards necessary to graduate from high school. Balfanz et al. (2007) and Strayhorn (2008) found that a lack of support in the classroom demotivated Black males to the extent that they were unwilling to persevere when they felt challenged academically. Furthermore, a negative school culture was shown to weaken Black male students' engagement and participation in school, marked by a decline in their achievement levels (Maxwell, 2016; Way et al., 2007).

Inexperienced Teachers. Baker-Doyle (2010) asserted that a critical role of school leader is to hire and retain quality teachers that are capable of constructing classroom environments that deliver high-quality instruction so that all students are prepared for academic

success. However, high school administrators who led high schools affected by poverty often had to hire inexperienced teachers due to an inability to attract or keep experienced and quality teachers (Buddin & Zamarro, 2009; Clotfelter et al., 2007; Metz & Socol, 2017). According to the research of Metz and Socol (2017), inexperienced teachers failed to prepare rigorous lessons, to motivate students, and to manage classroom behaviors because they lacked the essential skills to create, operate, and maintain optimal learning environments, all of which fundamentally affect Black male students' academic performance.

Inadequate Resources and Facilities. Research findings attributed underachievement for Black males who attend high-poverty high schools to a range of adverse conditions that such schools have had to contend with historically (Noguera & Wells, 2011). Unlike in low-poverty high schools, Black males who attended high-poverty high schools often experienced disparities in school-based services and resources (Butler, Shillingford, & Alexander-Snow, 2011), high teacher turnover (Papay, Bacer-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2017), overcrowded classrooms (Ward, 2017), dilapidated facilities (Metz & Socol, 2017), and many student discipline issues (Fenning & Rose, 2007); these disparities are linked to increased underachievement rates (Noguera & Wells, 2011).

Research studies also showed that social variables like unhealthy peer influence had taken a toll on the academic engagement of Black males, thereby contributing to their poor performance in the classroom and unwarranted absences from school (Noguera, 2003). Negative peer pressure, as noted in Ferguson's study (2001), led to the following outcomes for the males: (a) a lack of effort in academics, (b) a lack of focus in attending school, and (c) being identified as 'acting white' when pursuing academic excellence.

Individual Related Factors

In the context of underachievement, individual factors have been perceived as being harmful attitudes associated with a student's inner emotions, perceptions, and mindset, which could cause student groups like Black males to become less involved in school and affect their academic performance as depicted below (Clements & Seidman, 2002; Whiting 2006).

Lack of motivation. Clements and Seidman (2002) linked Black male students' negative attitudes about school and their personal lives to an adverse effect on achievement. This correlation was corroborated by research from Whiting (2006), who found that Black males lacked motivation in school because they felt like they were unable to relate the context of learning to their personal and social needs, such as self-determination, competence, and a connection to others. Whiting (2006) indicated that unmotivated Black males dismissed academic content and practices as intrinsically uninteresting or irrelevant; this disengagement, prompted by disciplinary problems, poor classroom performance, and dissociated school relationships, was shown to lower their chances for graduation.

Evidence from self-efficacy theories indicated that students' opinions about their own capabilities have played a role in their academic performance (Farrington et al., 2012; Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Klassen & Usher, 2010; Usher & Pajares, 2006). Bandura et al. (1996) noted that when students realized their aptitude for learning and accepted that academic success was within their control, they naturally worked harder and wanted to perform better in school. However, other research suggested that Black male underachievement was linked to low self-efficacy beliefs among the males themselves (Nebbitt, 2009; Noble, 2011; Tyler & Boelter, 2008), and advocated for interventions to augment Black male students' beliefs about their academic abilities (Nebbitt, 2009; Noble, 2011).

Low Self-concept. How Black males viewed themselves as learners strongly influenced how they performed in the school setting (Whiting, 2009). Whiting (2009) found that many barriers correlated with the self-concept of Black males who struggled academically and produced self-doubt that negatively affected their performance in school. Therefore, Whiting (2009) suggested that the development of a positive identity helped to instill a healthy attitude and confidence in Black males about their academic and leadership abilities; however, when a positive identity was not instilled during childhood, the lack thereof and presence of negative beliefs adversely impacted areas of their life including academics (Whiting, 2009).

Furthermore, the outcomes of studies conducted by Gullan et al. (2011) and Swanson et al. (2003) suggested similar findings—positive self-identity contributed to Black students' academic success, while negative self-identity negatively affected how Black students learned. When Gullan et al. (2011) studied the key aspects of identity development for Black people living in a high-poverty, urban neighborhood, they found that Black adolescents struggled to develop a positive sense of self because of the mixed community messages communicated about what success looked like. Swanson et al. (2003) pointed out that the negative attitudes expressed by Black males during challenging situations were the result of feeling the pressure of highly stigmatized, high-risk, and stressful environments linked to their social and home life.

Chronic Absenteeism. Studies have indicated that chronic absenteeism disproportionately affected student groups like minorities, students of low socioeconomic backgrounds, and students with disabilities—all subgroups that consist of a considerable percentage of Black males (Gottfried, 2015). For instance, a study conducted by Gottfried (2015) indicated a link between chronic absenteeism and heightened rates of high school dropouts, particularly among Black males. Other research on student attendance in public

schools showed that Black students had a higher absenteeism rate, which impacted their academic performance (Office of Civil Rights, 2016). As reported by the Office of Civil Rights (2016), the nonattendance demographics for Black students, which included Black males, at the secondary school level was roughly 26%, the highest of any other racial group. Based on data published by the Office of Civil Rights (2016), chronic absenteeism seemed to be one indicator of Black students' poor academic performance. The data presented imply that school leaders must address the underlying causes of chronic absenteeism affecting this student population, particularly Black male attendance issues.

On the other hand, other studies have shown that steady participation in school is associated with educational attainment (Feldman & Matiasco, 2005; Fredricks, 2012). For instance, studies on school activities showed that high school students involved in at least one activity had approximately 34% fewer missed school days than those not involved in activities (Frederick, 2012). Thus, this finding suggested that extracurricular activities were essential to tackling chronic absenteeism for Black male high school students; marked by improvements in attendance and achievement (Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Frederick, 2012).

Family Related Factors

Family related factors have been defined as the structure of a household including the family composition, residence, and socioeconomic status, among other characteristics (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). According to various studies, the subsequent family related factors were shown to impact Black male achievement in high school (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Hayes 2011; Hill & Taylor, 2004; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

Poverty. Poverty had a significant impact on academic achievement and was consistently linked to the achievement gap (Toldson, 2011). The effects of poverty placed Black

males at higher risk for having reading difficulties, inadequate language skills, performing lower than students from higher socioeconomic groups, and for graduating at least four years behind students of higher socioeconomic groups (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Aikens and Barbarin (2008) showed that most learners from poverty-stricken families typically attended poorly resourced public schools that offered them inadequate instruction. Consequently, these students typically performed poorly on standardized tests (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008). Other researchers found that a low socioeconomic status negatively affected academic performance because of the correlation between students' poverty status and not having their basic needs met (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013). Furthermore, Black males were found to be more likely than their peers to experience poor academic success marked by high dropout rates (Hill & Taylor, 2004), to have lower parent involvement (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017), and to have fewer educational opportunities and resources (Fraser et. al., 2004).

Lack of parental involvement. The role of parental participation in the school has been explored in numerous research studies and reports (Child Trends, 2013). Despite the breadth of coverage, there is a disparity across studies and reports in terms of parental participation and student achievement for high school students (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017). Most studies suggested that the degree of parental involvement on a child's schooling differed according to grade level, the achievement outcome being assessed, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Child Trends, 2013). Likewise, numerous studies have shown a relationship between parental involvement in their student's learning process and the household's socioeconomic status (Hayes, 2011; McQuiggan & Megra, 2017). For example, Hayes (2011) found a high socioeconomic status to be related to positive educational outcomes amongst most high school students. However, it was found that among urban Black parents, parents of a low

socioeconomic status were only slightly involved in their child's learning at the school-based level (Hayes, 2011).

The effect of barriers like lack of motivation (Amrose, 2003; Futurell, 2004), negative self-concept (Gullan et al., 2011; Whiting, 2009), poverty (Aikens & Barbin, 2008; Toldson & Lemmons, 2013) and negative peer pressure (Ogbu, 2004) on Black male academic achievement indicated the importance of school administrators exposing Black males to more positive school experiences (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). However, in spite of there being barriers keeping a substantial number of Black male high school students from reaching their full academic potential, numerous research studies showed that these students can still achieve academic success in high schools with the appropriate supports in place (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Booker, 2007; Brook et al., 2014; Gamble-Hilton, 2012; Toldson, 2011).

Raising Black Male Academic Achievement

Although a Black male's socioeconomic standing, family structure, and peer associations cannot be changed directly by the school, Parson and Kritsonis (2006) contended that there were certain elements of the school environment that were shown to help boost this population of students' chances for educational attainment. According to Payne (2008), a school leader's actions, and decisions have been shown to impact academic achievement both directly and indirectly. For instance, Hallinger (2005) found that a school leader's indirect impact on student achievement came as a result of their leadership decisions related to the school's climate and culture. Buddin and Zamarro (2009) and Tella (2017) found that a school leader's direct impact on student achievement derived from their supervision of instruction and classroom practices, which had the greatest impact on students who were most susceptible to academic failure.

The factors involved in raising Black male academic achievement are multifaceted, interrelated, and differ by school district and high school. However, an in-depth examination of interdisciplinary research studies revealed a connection between specific factors that existed within a school setting, self-efficacy beliefs, and the impact each can have on the achievement of Black male high school students. Moreover, other studies indicated that school leaders who focused on building culturally appropriate school environments were found to positively influence Black male achievement (MacNeil et al., 2009). Based on the findings of MacNeil et al. (2009) these school administrators had established a culture of high expectations and maintained environments wherein the school leaders, faculty, staff, and students all regarded each other with respect.

Factors that Impact Black Male Achievement

For this study, a review of the literature will address five key factors that were found to mostly influence Black male academic achievement among a range of other factors: (a) positive school culture, (b) quality teachers and instruction, (c) supportive school-based networks, (d) adequate resources and facilities, and (e) nurturing academic self-efficacy beliefs.

Positive School Culture. A review of research on school culture revealed an inherent link between a positive school culture and student achievement (Beets et al., 2008; Fan et al., 2011; Freiberg, 1998; Haynes & Comer, 1993; MacNeil et al., 2009). A school culture has been specified by the character and quality of a school environment (Fan et al., 2011; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004), and evidence has shown that the impact of these elements directly related to high school students' achievement (Maxwell, 2016). Research on school culture in urban education showed that the extent to which minority students experienced academic success was dependent upon a school culture that was positive, supportive, and culturally conscious (Haynes

& Comer, 1993). For instance, Butler et al. (2011) found that Black male achievement mostly occurred in schools that promoted positive teacher attitudes, offered Black males' incentives and rewards, and equipped staff to encourage students to take responsibility for their own success. Similarly, Toldson and Lemmons (2013) pointed out that schools that focused on promoting high academic standards rather than disciplining Black males were able to reduce suspensions of these students. Schools highlighted in the study reported that the number of Black males in special education was reduced by 6%, and 10% percent of their Black male students were suspended less as a result of a significant number of Black male students enrolling in honors classes or some type of advanced course (Toldson & Lemmons, 2013).

Other school culture research suggested that optimal learning alternatives in any constructive school setting could increase achievement levels (Keefe et al., 1985); similarly, a negative culture could impede a student's academic outcomes and success (Hoy et al., 2006; Way et al., 2007). Along those lines, Freiberg (1998) asserted that "the interaction of various school and classroom climate factors can create a fabric of support that enables all members of the school community to teach and learn at optimum levels" (p. 22). There was a consensus throughout the literature that the character and quality of school environment influences students' enthusiasm to learn and mitigates the negative impact of external barriers to academic achievement (Beets et al., 2008; Fan et al., 2011; Freiberg, 1998; Haynes & Comer, 1993; MacNeil et al., 2009; Maxwell, 2016; Sterbinsky et al., 2006; Way et al., 2007). However, the literature on school culture was unclear on defining and measuring the impact on student outcomes, which is why other studies called attention to the need to examine school culture connection to student outcomes within a multilevel research context (Good & Weinstein, 1986; Hoy et al., 2006).

Quality Teachers and Instruction. Researchers have linked a students' academic success to their perceptions of teacher support and expectations, suggesting that effective teachers can be the most significant factor that contributes to student achievement (Mercer et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2008; Tyler & Boelter, 2008). Other research studies suggested that more Black male teachers and mentors are needed in schools to best support the academic success of Black male students (Gamble-Hilton, 2012; Irving & Hudley, 2008). Research also indicated that when high expectations were promoted schoolwide, particularly by the teachers, students' efficacy was strengthened, ultimately empowering them to share control over their learning (Pianta & Hamre, 2009). These findings were consistent with models of teacher expectation effects from O'Connor and McCartney (2007) and Weinstein et al. (1995). For example, Murdock (1999) conducted a study on middle school students and their opinions about assistance from their teachers; his findings indicated that positive reinforcement from the middle school teachers was linked to their students' achievement outcomes.

Much of the research on quality teachers suggested that schools that had made the most substantial, measurable progress were distinguished by instructional practices that engaged teachers in the development of curriculum and assessment, used assessment data to identify areas where both students and teachers needed additional support, and incorporated quality time for teachers to collaborate on improving their classroom effectiveness (Back et al., 2016; Daniel et al., 2007; Ford & Moore, 2013). Research studies also showed that meaningful and relevant learning activities that related to the interests and goals of the students led to increased engagement in the classroom (Downey, 2008; Noble, 2011; Schunk et al., 2008; Zimmerman, 2000). In addition, instructional programs and approaches that were intended to nurture academic self-efficacy and stimulate student engagement and belongingness were found to have

a long-term effect on students' attitudes about learning and their academic success (Pajares et al., 2000; Downey, 2008; Noble, 2011).

Supportive School-based Networks. Recent studies related to academic achievement emphasized the importance of a school establishing a supportive network of school-based staff for Black male students (Balfanz et al., 2007). Tucker and Stronge (2005) asserted that the formation of positive student-teacher relationships influenced how Black males perceived their own academic abilities. While some studies suggested that the negative expectations of a teacher could impede matriculation for some Black male students, others indicated that the positive influence from other school staff, such as school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and other support staff could mitigate the effect of the negative teacher expectations (Ford et al., 2002; Granger & Noguera, 2015). Other studies noted that in schools where Black males sensed positive support from the principal, staff, and teachers, behavioral issues lessened and participation in the classrooms increased (Cornelius-White, 2007; Roorda et al., 2011). For instance, in a study conducted by Tyler and Boelter (2008), the teacher's support was best demonstrated by the teacher's belief that Black male students could learn, and as a result, the students showed an increase in engagement and their performance.

Adequate Resources and Facilities. Maxwell (2016) contended that schools played an active role in a student's educational attainment and suggested that by improving the conditions of a school, positive academic outcomes for students would follow. A growing body of literature also posited a theoretical link between the aesthetic aspects of a school environment and students' motivation to learn (Durán-Narucki, 2008; Oneill & Oates, 2001; Uline & Tschannen-Moran, 2008). For instance, Bowers and Burkett (1988) compared groups of elementary students in Tennessee who attended some of the state's newer and older schools, respectively.

The newer schools were equipped with state-of-the-art features and stylish colors, while the older schools operated with traditional and dated features. Findings from the study revealed that students attending the newer schools outperformed students who attended the older schools on all available measures of achievement. However, Picus et al. (2005) contended that upgraded facilities and resources did not always yield significant achievement improvements for poor schools and school districts.

Moreover, earlier research demonstrated the link between the developmental advantages of extracurricular participation and school completion rates (Fredricks, 2012). According to Fredericks (2012), youth participation in school activities such as sports, the arts, and cultural and academic clubs suggested that this involvement helped them grow developmentally while reinforcing their interest in school. Feldman and Matjasko (2005) suggested that school activities such as school clubs and sports function to promote social responsibility, instill a sense of school pride, enhance peer-to-peer contacts, and facilitate teamwork for students.

Academic Self-efficacy Beliefs. The academic self-efficacy theory is substantiated in the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977), which itself is derived from Albert Bandura's (1977) social learning research. Through his research, Bandura (1977) observed people actively seeking information, interpreting it, and then using that interpretation to regulate how they responded to various situations or tasks they encountered. He attributed these responses to human behaviors that were driven by an individual's internal motivation or the lack thereof (Bandura, 1977). As Bandura observed, self-efficacy beliefs were the primary reason people acted, and the effect of one's actions on their beliefs was based on the extent of the positive or negative outcomes that transpired as a result of the experiences gained (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) also posited that one's level of self-efficacy determined whether a person started

certain tasks, as well as the degree of tenacity expended to complete the task when faced with obstacles. Along these lines, self-efficacy became a major component of Bandura's theory (Bandura, 1977).

Self-efficacy beliefs were defined as beliefs and judgements that people retained about their capabilities that have been shown to positively affect academic outcomes and achievement in numerous ways (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Other studies suggested a correlation between self-efficacy and positive outcomes, including outcomes in a school environment (Bong, & Skaavlvik, 2003; Elias & Loomis, 2002; Klassen & Usher, 2010; Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Researchers have found that self-efficacy beliefs were context sensitive; general self-efficacy beliefs were therefore less applicable to academic achievement than specific academic self-efficacy beliefs, which could then be further specified by subject matter (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). For example, school experiences were found to reinforce academic self-efficacy during childhood, while other life experiences, such as graduating from college or operating a successful business, tended to increase self-efficacy throughout adulthood (Bandura et al., 1996). Self-efficacious students were found to be students that achieved more in school because they worked harder, persisted longer, persevered in the face of challenges, and had greater optimism and lower anxiety (Usher & Pajares, 2008). For these reasons, researchers on this topic asserted that academic self-efficacy beliefs have been associated with academic outcomes for the general student population (Britner & Pajares, 2006; Chen, 2003; Elias & Loomis, 2002; Liem et al., 2008; Liew et al., 2008; Schunk & Pajares, 2002; Zimmerman, 2000).

In this context, academic self-efficacy is characterized as a student's belief about their capacity to accomplish academic tasks (Bandura et al., 1996; Elias & Loomis, 2002; Pajares, 1996). Grounded in an in-depth examination of Bandura's (1993) theory, three of the four

sources of self-efficacy in the academic setting—mastery, vicarious experience, and verbal persuasion—emerged as having a strong influence on a student’s performance and achievement level. Physiological state was the least influential of the four sources of efficacy (Bandura, 1993). However, academic self-efficacy and its specific association to Black male achievement has not been widely investigated (Bailey & Paisley, 2004); what follows is a review of the most relevant sources of self-efficacy to this study—vicarious and verbal persuasion—and how they may influence Black academic achievement.

Among the four self-efficacy factors, vicarious and verbal persuasion states, along with supporting evidence, are addressed in the following sections. However, based on the studies conducted on academic self-efficacy beliefs in general, there are compelling reasons to believe that there would be diverse benefits to nurturing academic self-efficacy beliefs in Black males; while certain aspects of nurturing of academic self-efficacy beliefs may facilitate achievement for some students, others may not (Schunk & Meese, 2005; Usher & Pajares, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000). However, while the correlation between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement has been demonstrated generally, there are researchers (e.g. Nebbitt, 2009; Stinson, 2006) who believe that there is a need for studies that investigate this relationship as it relates to Black male students. Elements of self-efficacy that emerged as having an implicit impact on Black male achievement were evident in research studies wherein school leaders offered Black male students’ positive reinforcement and strong support through school relationships, mentors, and role models.

Vicarious Experience. Vicarious experience is a source of efficacy that tends to strengthen an individual’s belief that they have what it takes to successfully complete a task or produce an outcome (Bandura, 1993). Bandura (1993) associated vicarious experiences with

individuals seeing others perform related tasks without adverse outcomes; then, their actions generated an efficacy expectation that they could also succeed or improve if they persisted in their effort to complete similar tasks. Bandura (1993) also posited that vicarious experiences were particularly powerful when an individual saw similarity in another person and then assumed that person's performance was indicative of their own capability. Other researchers (Liem et al., 2008; Pajares 2007; Pajares & Schunk, 2001) pointed out that students who believed that they could successfully accomplish academic tasks despite challenges had high academic self-efficacy beliefs as a result of their positive school experiences. Additionally, a review of studies about academic self-efficacy and academic performance were positively linked to the increased grades and standardized scores of secondary students (Mercer et al., 2011; Pietsch et al., 2003). For example, Motlagh et al. (2011) found that academic self-efficacy beliefs were a considerable factor in students' high achievement levels by examining students' grade point averages and completed self-efficacy scales. The implications of vicarious experiences in an academic setting were that students generally believed that they could perform at the same level or even outperform other students in the completion of a related task (Usher & Pajares, 2006). For instance, Caraway et al. (2003) found that self-efficacious students' academic self-efficacy was raised higher when a peer taught them better ways of completing learning activities. Therefore, the effects of modeling were shown to be relevant in this context, especially for students that had little or no prior experience with a learning activity.

Vicarious experiences shown to boost self-efficacy beliefs in Black males were found to be modeled by the males' parents and through mentoring relationships (Saunders et al., 2004). For instance, Saunders et al. (2004) suggested that the parents of Black males served as important contributors to their achievement and were instrumental in the development of their

academic self-efficacy. High parent aspirations were causally linked to an increase in Black male interest in education (Majoribanks, 2005). In a study conducted by Davis (2003), high-achieving Black males were found to have exhibited positive attitudes about school because they were emulating the positive attitudes communicated by their parents. Davis (2003) found that the parents were able to assist their sons in successfully navigating through high school and graduation by helping them understand the important role that education played in their future success. Positive male mentors have played an especially important role in the lives of Black males with absentee fathers (Strayhorn, 2008). Studies from numerous researchers have indicated that Black male mentors served as important contributors to Black male students' academic self-efficacy beliefs (Bonner et al., 2008; Grantham, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008). Whiting (2009) explains that "many older Black males with developed sense of self-efficacy understand that others may have negative stereotypes about Black males, but they choose to reject these views because they deem themselves to be intelligent and talented" (p. 224). According to Noguera (2003), Black male mentors have functioned as the proper examples of manhood for adolescent Black males and have played an important role during their transition from the primary grades to the middle grades, especially during the times when hormonal changes occur along with increased levels of responsibility and social interaction. Bonner et al. (2008) also suggested that high performing Black males had male mentors who closely embodied the positive characteristics that they wanted to emulate.

Verbal Persuasion. Verbal persuasion was described as people offering oral praise to raise the confidence level of another (Bandura, 1993). According to Usher and Pajares (2006), verbal feedback, whether negative or positive, mattered in the level of confidence exhibited when completing tasks. Bandura posited (1993) that it was more difficult to instill high efficacy

beliefs by verbal persuasion than to change a person's beliefs by verbal persuasion. However, verbal persuasion had been shown to have a greater impact on an individual's beliefs when it was exercised in conjunction with mastery and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1993).

Studies conducted in academic settings showed a correlation between verbal persuasion and student performance (Usher & Pajares, 2006; Zimmerman, 2000). For example, Zimmerman (2000) found that students' academic self-efficacy beliefs heightened as a consequence of the positive feedback they received from their peers or teachers, and that the feedback impacted the students' academic performance in the classroom. Verbal persuasion was found to impact academic self-efficacy beliefs in students when teachers incorporated praise and instilled inspiration of achievement regularly in the classroom (Usher & Pajares, 2006). When teachers encouraged students to try and gave them consistent, credible, and specific encouragement, positive changes in students' attitudes around learning, classroom participation, and active participation were observed (Usher & Pajares, 2006). Additionally, Bailey and Paisley (2004) found that there were numerous benefits to nurturing Black male academic self-efficacy beliefs to optimize academic achievement in a high school setting. For instance, factors that functioned as hurdles to Black male academic successes had little to no effect on their academic performance once a 'can-do' attitude was cultivated. According to Bailey and Paisley (2004), developing and nurturing academic excellence in Black males showed that they:

- Put forth more effort to learn because they had higher levels of resilience, self-confidence, and self-control
- Discounted the negative views and stereotypes others had about them and refused to minimize their academic abilities and skills due to peer or societal pressures

- Dismissed feelings of inferiority or inadequacy in school settings because they were personally motivated to learn and engage in the classroom
- Took the necessary actions to achieve, such as completing homework assignments, studying, and seeking out the proper support when necessary, because they put education first.

However, Stinson (2006) argued that research on Black males should examine more closely the self-efficacy levels of successful Black male students in relation to the influences of school, family and community, teachers, and high-achieving peer groups.

In aggregate, the previous discussion points toward the import and predictive quality of Bandura's social cognitive theory, particularly as it relates to the constructs of self-efficacy beliefs for a students' academic success (Schunk & Meese, 2005). For instance, Schunk and Meese (2005) suggested that because self-efficacy beliefs are developed through a person's understanding of four key components—how that person performs on a given task, their physiological response to that task, encouragement or persuasion from others, and comparison to peers' performance on said task—and that this development often takes place in the context of schooling, educators and school administrators have an outsized role to play in fostering environments and interactions that encourage self-efficacy development. Even so, by raising efficacious students, public high schools could promote a reversal in underachievement for Black male high schoolers, thereby yielding significant increases in their educational attainment status (Downey, 2008; Nebbitt, 2009; Tyler & Boelter, 2008). Increased educational attainment could then lead to an improved quality of life for young Black males (Nebbitt, 2009).

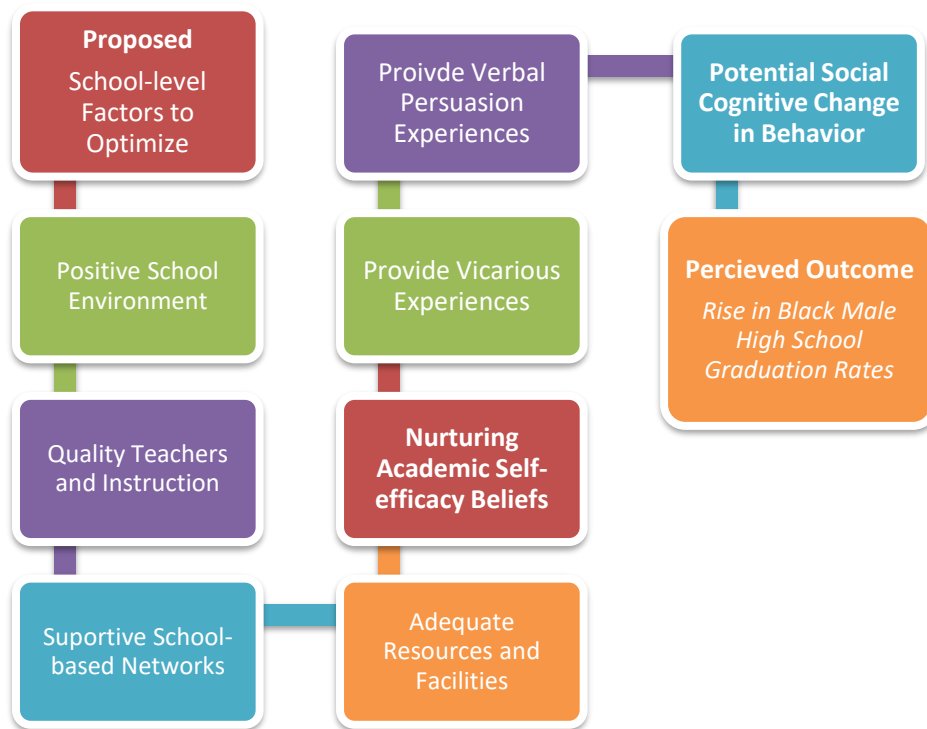
Conceptual Framework

The preceding literature review informed the conceptual framework for this study. A conceptual framework was designed to illustrate one broad dimension for this study: how high school administrators can influence the factors that they control within the school setting to steadily raise academic achievement for Black male students. Figure 3 embodies the framework upon which this qualitative research study was developed and proposes an interrelated approach to boosting graduation rates for Black males. School-level factors were the key characteristics of the framework because they formed the basis for the entire study, in response to the central research question and two sub questions.

Similarly, Figure 3 demonstrates the link between academic self-efficacy and academic achievement. As indicated by the research (Bandura et al., 1996; Pajares, 2007; Schunk & Pajares, 2002), academic self-efficacy beliefs can have a significant effect on students' performance and achievement levels. Therefore, consideration of academic self-efficacy as a part of this model was necessary to show to what extent the school-level practices of successful public high schools are consistent with practices that nurture efficacy beliefs in students.

Figure 3

Suggested Conceptual Framework



Note. This figure proposes the implementation of an interrelated school approach to raising Black male academic achievement in public high schools.

The framework shows the important role that each specified facet should play to have a significant impact on Black male graduation rates as well as the interrelatedness of these facets. For instance, the first five components of the model are associated with the leadership actions of high school administrators, suggesting the implementation of school-level factors that need to work in combination of one another in order to deliver the best level of support for Black male high school students. The next three components illustrate the impact that the school-level factors in combination with nurturing academic self-efficacy beliefs can have on Black male school behaviors. Social cognitive changes that can take place in Black males are likely the result of the school-level factors' influence operating simultaneously and effectively within the

school setting to provide the males with effective vicarious and verbal persuasion experiences. Finally, the last component shows what might happen due to a change in the mindset of the males towards completing high school, which leads to an increase in Black male graduation rates.

Summary

Chapter 2 presented literature that gave an understanding of school-level factors and efficacy-nurturing practices that were generally associated with raising Black male high school students' academic achievement. While there was limited literature to substantiate the impact that an efficacy-nurturing high school environment would have on Black male high school students specifically, generalized literature demonstrated a connection between academic self-efficacy beliefs and a student's academic performance. Thus, this evidence provided compelling support for the study's assertion that a holistic approach to raising Black male achievement—one that incorporates efficacy-nurturing practices and school-level factor mitigation—gives high school administrators, especially those that lead schools afflicted by poverty, the best possible means of steadily increasing these students graduation rates. Going forward, Chapter 3 presents the research methodology which defined the research questions, case study selection procedures, and data collection and analysis process.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Chapter 3 presents the research methodology for this qualitative study, which was exploratory in scope and grounded in the perspectives of public high school administrators. The researcher employed a multiple-case design as an efficient way of gathering descriptive data and reporting the findings from multiple perspectives (Yin, 2014). By allowing public high school administrators to share leadership approaches and success stories, this qualitative study provided insights that may prove beneficial to other public high school administrators, searching for ways to raise Black male academic achievement that translate into increased graduation rates for this student population (Creswell, 2013).

Furthermore, this chapter frames the research methodology for the multiple-case design. First, the research questions are presented, followed by the case study selection procedures used to identify prospective case sites and participants. Then, the data collection procedures are discussed at length and the methods of data analysis are clarified. Finally, the chapter discusses the study's trustworthiness, ethical concerns, and confidentiality practices, factors that were essential to protecting the identities of those involved as well as for authenticating the findings.

Research Questions

Considering the purpose of this qualitative study, the main research question for investigation was: What school-level factors are public high school administrators optimizing to help raise the academic achievement of their Black male students? This study's inquiry was also guided by the following sub-questions:

1. How are the identified school-level factors optimized in order to raise Black male academic achievement?

2. To what extent are the school-level practices consistent with practices that promote academic self-efficacy in students?

Research Design

A qualitative research technique was employed to gather data on the perceptions of high school administrators regarding school-level factors which best supported the academic achievement of Black male students. Creswell (2013) presented qualitative investigation as a valuable method for education researchers, noting the following benefits: (1) the collection of data would be based on the lived experiences of humans; (2) data collection was unrestricted, allowing the researcher to interact with the research participants directly, while providing opportunities to record details and dive deeper into the perceptions and opinions of the participants when necessary; and (3) the methodology would allow for a smaller sample size, which reduces the amount of resources, time, and funds needed to conduct the research. For these reasons, the qualitative method was considered the most appropriate method for conducting this study because it allowed for an in-depth probe into a systemic phenomenon in public high schools and from the perspectives of high school administrators (Creswell, 2013).

Case Study Method and Selection Procedures

A multiple-case design was integrated into this qualitative research approach because the data collection process entailed numerous fact-finding and investigation possibilities, which, according to Stake (2006), were regarded as solid building blocks for attaining facts around phenomena. For example, a strength in conducting a multiple-case design was the method's capacity to capitalize on a variety of sources, such as documentation, interviews, and field notes to substantiate findings (Yin, 2014). The design also served as a means of efficiently reporting reliable findings on this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013), ensuring a data set comprised of factual,

rich, and deep information paired with the evidence of success that each school had demonstrated by graduating Black male students at rates of 80% or higher (Yin, 2014). As a result, this methodology provided the most potential for the researcher to make a significant contribution to the disciplines of education research, policy, and practice (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Yin, 2014).

While phenomenology, narrative, and ethnography were other research designs considered for this study (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011), the multiple-case design was more applicable because the researcher assumed that school administrators, as case participants, would be most knowledgeable about the phenomenon based on their experiences and leadership expertise linked to Black male students at the high school level (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). By investigating this topic from multiple school leader perspectives, effective school practices were captured, revealing tangible, evidence-based factors that other high school administrators could replicate to impact the achievement of their Black male student populations (Yin, 2014). Therefore, phenomenology, narrative, and ethnographic methodologies would have limited this study, as these approaches typically study a common culture or feeling instead of phenomena (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Purposive Sampling. The researcher used purposive sampling to select the case study sites and participants. According to Creswell (2013), purposive sampling enables a qualitative researcher to stipulate specific attributes about the case studies which are consistent with the phenomenon of significance and the population that is being studied. Marshall and Rossman (2011) posited that the purposive method of sampling constitutes an appropriate method by which researchers can gain deeper insight about the phenomenon through the lived experiences

of relevant case participants. Therefore, this method of sampling was used to inform the criteria for selecting the sites and participants as well as to inform the two-stage screening process that was carried out. Yin (2014) suggested that researchers administer a two-stage screening process when the number of eligible prospects is large; in this case, it was appropriate because of the numerous high schools that were situated in the school district.

Multiple-case design has no explicit rules about how many cases to select for replication purposes; however, Creswell (2013) suggested three to five cases while Yin (2014) suggested six to ten cases as a sufficient means to help substantiate the findings. Based on Creswell's (2013) and Yin's (2014) suggestions, all of the high schools and the respective school administrators were considered for participation in the study to corroborate or challenge the idea postulated in the Conceptual Framework – that beyond federal policies and reform efforts, there are specific factors in public high schools that school leaders can optimize simultaneously to successfully and steadily raise Black male academic achievement. The necessary procedures performed to identify eligible case study sites and participants among the twenty high schools are outlined in the following sections.

Site Selections. Creswell (2013) and Yin (2014) emphasized the importance of explicitly selecting sample sites and participants that were likely to ensure that the phenomenon being studied would be found. Based on their suggestions, the first stage of the selection process involved the researcher vetting all of the high schools located in ABC Public School System to identify eligible case sites. The researcher selected case study sites that correlated to other public high schools located within the U.S., delimiting the criteria to the selection of schools with: a) student enrollments over 500; b) a Black student enrollment that made up over half of the overall student population and a Black male enrollment that made up at least 40% of the Black student

population; c) Black male students graduating at a rate above 75% over four consecutive years; and d) Black male 4-year graduation rates showing uptrends that outpaced the 4-year graduation rates for Black students in general, at the national and state levels, and for Black male students at the school district level (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014).

Constructed on the results of the first screening, 10 of 20 high schools were found most eligible to serve as case study sites because they met all the criteria, and therefore were placed on a list for recruitment consideration. The criteria used to vet the high schools played a central role in the selection process because to carry out a study that would prove reliable, the researcher needed a sufficient number of case study sites which fit within the scope of effective purposive sampling (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Consequently, the list of eligible high schools was used to inform the second stage of the screening process, which involved determining further eligibility of the identified schools based upon the school administrators meeting selection criteria specific to their backgrounds.

Participant Selections. The second stage of the selection process involved the researcher vetting all of the school administrators linked with the 10 eligible high schools. The criteria for the school administrators were important, as the researcher needed to study the perspectives of school leaders who had experience educating high school students, particularly Black male high school students. The researcher also needed to interview school leaders who had been at their schools long enough to demonstrate a certain level of understanding about the Black male student population as well as for their leadership actions to have had influence in the school and on this population of students.

The criteria used to screen the school administrators were delimited to each leader: a) having at least 10 years of general education experience, b) having at least four of those years

practiced at the high school level, and c) leading the eligible high school for at least two years. Based on the screening results, the 10 school administrators linked to the list of 10 eligible high schools were found qualified to function as prospective case study participants because they met all the criteria. After conducting stage two of the screening process, a comprehensive list of eligible case study sites and participants was created which acted to inform which schools would be invited to partake in the study as a result of the purposive sampling and two-stage screening processes.

Participant Recruitment. Recruiting the case participants involved two steps that would complete the selection process: 1) approaching the prospective case participants and 2) obtaining consent to join the study (Yin, 2014). After receiving approval from ABC Public School System to conduct the study, the researcher emailed the 10 eligible school administrators. The email invitation included an introduction and study details (Appendix A) and a consent form (Appendix B). The correspondence required each administrator to reply and express their interest in participating in the study, as well as to submit a consent form, as shown in Appendix B. Based on the recommendations of Yin (2014), the correspondence also supplied the eligible school administrators with information regarding their roles in the interviews, including:

- Why the interview was taking place and the type of data to be collected
- Details of the interview protocol
- How participation was voluntary, with the opportunity to withdraw consent any time during the study

The researcher expected the 10 school administrators that were found eligible to participate in the study. However, only six of the administrators participated, as determined by the number of consent forms received. Lastly, the researcher was interested in interviewing all

six school administrators and committed to following up with each individual at least three times, through either an email or a phone call to schedule an interview, before eliminating any administrator from participating in the study due to a lack of response. The researcher was successful in contacting, scheduling and conducting six semi-structured interviews over a span of three months.

Data Collection

In the following sections, a description of the primary and secondary data collection instruments and an explanation for the selection and use of these instruments is provided. Then, the data analysis process is described at length.

Data Collection Procedures

Instrumentation for this study consisted of three methodologies that were widely used for qualitative research: semi-structured interviews, document reviews, and field notes. A varied approach to collecting data was used to 1) capture descriptive information of the phenomenon being studied, 2) help strengthen the reliability of the case study findings, and 3) increase confidence in the research theory (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In addition, using multiple methods helped to triangulate the data (Creswell, 2013; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Triangulation of the data occurred when the researcher used diverse data collection methods to address the research questions and substantiate the findings (Creswell, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews. Over the course of three months, the researcher was able to schedule and perform six semi-structured interviews; each school administrator participated in an independent audio-taped session. The responses gathered from the tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews served as the primary data source (Yin, 2014). A key feature of a semi-structured interview, according to Yin (2014), was the use of prewritten open-ended questions

(Appendix C) asked of all participants being interviewed. The researcher referenced previous research on academic achievement to inform the development of the prewritten open-ended questions which explained why the researcher was successful at eliciting conversation, inciting reflection, and stimulating deep thinking during the interviews (Yin, 2014). The pre-written questions were worded in a manner that left room for each school administrator to dialogue openly about their leadership successes and challenges, as well as to expound on their perspective of the phenomenon freely and at their own discretion (Yin, 2014).

In addition to utilizing prewritten open-ended questions, the researcher employed an interview protocol, found in Appendix C, to bring structure to the interviewing process while allowing flexibility to probe deeper into the participants' responses when needed (Yin, 2014). Each school administrator was interviewed in a single session in accordance with the interview protocol. Five of the six interviews were conducted over the telephone, while one interview was conducted in person. However, each interview was taped using a recording device on the researcher's private laptop and remained within a thirty minute to an hour timeframe (Yin, 2014). Each interview started with an introduction, an explanation of the study, and a background question that allowed the administrators to talk about familiar information (Yin, 2014). After the six interviews were finalized, the recordings were imported into a particular technology program for transcribing. Each interview recording was transliterated into text, materialized into individual transcripts, and securely emailed to the school administrators for review (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). Subsequently, each transcript was imported into NVivo 12 software to undergo the data analysis process.

Document review. For the purposes of this study, a document review of the school's strategic plans including accountability information were accounted as sources of secondary data

supporting this study. A review of the documents was performed to uncover additional evidence, if any, of strategies and practices explicit to addressing the academic achievement of the schools' Black male student populations (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The school documents were sent to the researcher via email from the school administrators while the accountability data was accessed via the school districts' state education department website. While reviewing the data, the researcher used a template (Appendix D), with mind to the following indicators:

1. *School Climate* – was there evidence of factors specifically directed at improving attendance and making Black male students feel safe at school?
2. *Curriculum and Instruction* – was there evidence of factors specifically directed at raising Black male students' standardized test performances?
3. *Supportive School-based Networks* – was there evidence of staff assigned to addressing Black male students' college and career readiness skills?
4. *Adequate Resources and Facilities* – was there evidence of school resources and/or aspects of the facilities geared toward stimulating Black male students' engagement in school programming and the classroom?
5. *Academic Efficacy* – was there evidence of practices specifically directed at nurturing Black males' academic efficacy?

While an analysis of the school documents provided an opportunity to gain greater insight into the phenomenon, data collected from these sources were not used to answer the three research questions because there was no evidence of strategies and practices explicit to addressing the academic achievement of their Black male students. However, evidence collected from the documents was used to help build the case participants' demographic profiles outlined

in Chapters 4 and 5 which consisted of significant enrollment, attendance, and graduation figures in alignment with the literature.

Field notes. Understanding the context of any study is critical to developing a holistic perspective, and therefore Patton (2002) suggested that researchers use field notes during qualitative research to record important ancillary details about the interviews, such as the setting, the mood of the interview, etc. Another advantage inherent to this approach, as noted by Creswell (2013), was that the researcher could review the notes for evidence of themes and patterns. Therefore, the researcher's field notes functioned as another form of secondary data and were recorded after each interview (Patton, 2002). The written portrayals of the school administrators' behaviors during the interviews were limited due to the interviews taking place over the phone. However, recording field notes about the behaviors that were captured during the phone calls was useful in avoiding personal biases while pinpointing themes and patterns during the data analysis process, as this topic had personal significance to the researcher (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis Procedures

Gathering data from the tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews helped generate in-depth information about the school-level factors that were being optimized to help raise academic achievement for Black male high school students. To analyze the information, the inductive analysis method was conducted, and thus, the data analysis process is explained in detailed in the subsequent sections.

Transcription

After the six interviews were completed, the recordings were imported into the NVivo 12 transcription program for transcribing. Each interview recording was transliterated into text and

materialized into individual transcripts in which they were securely emailed to each school administrator for review (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) posited that a member check helps to ensure that emerging theories and inferences developed by the researcher are in accordance with the beliefs and thoughts of the study's participants. A member check permitted the administrators an opportunity to gauge the accuracy of their transcripts and edit the transcripts upon review and reflection. However, the school administrators were unable to assist with editing the findings as they were not prepared to offer insights into how they collectively had similar or different perspectives since their individual participation remained confidential.

Following the member checks, each transcript was imported into NVivo 12 software to undergo a data analysis process. The researcher utilized the NVivo software to perform the data analysis process which involved coding the data. Numerous researchers supported the use of software to analyze qualitative data (Creswell, 2013, Johnson & Christensen, 2012) because they believed technology allowed a researcher to efficiently organize text into various codes, categories, and themes. Therefore, the software was used to help the researcher code the transcripts in an efficient and effective manner; data collected for this study was examined closely, case by case.

Inductive Analysis

With the use of the NVivo 12 software, the researcher performed inductive analysis to delve into the interview transcripts. Inductive analysis is “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (Patton, 2002, p.453). According to Patton (2002), the inductive process involves working between the data repeatedly to identify patterns and establish a set of emerging themes. During the inductive analysis process, coding the transcripts was vital to the

precision of the data analysis process in which the researcher performed both open coding and selective coding. In qualitative research, coding is the process of reading and labeling the data sources to find distinctive patterns and the relationships within the data (Williams & Moser, 2019).

Open Coding. Consistent with inductive analysis, the researcher started with analyzing three transcripts first wherein the researcher coded each transcript, line-by-line (Williams & Moser, 2019). Data from the three transcripts were analyzed and sorted into several open codes. As suggested by Williams and Moser (2019), open coding helped the researcher pay particular attention to each transcript to select key phrases, words or sentences. The researcher found seven codes between the first three transcripts which were grouped together for continuous coding of the remaining three interview transcripts. These transcripts were carefully analyzed in the same manner for the identification of new codes or placed within the existing seven codes. Constant comparative analysis was performed to help the researcher complete methodical comparisons that would assist in determining which open codes presented strong patterns and links within the data (Kolb, 2012). Five additional codes were found, for a total of 12 open codes being found among all the interview transcripts. As a result of efficient open coding and constant comparative analysis that occurred during the process, the researcher was able to begin conducting selective coding (Williams & Moser, 2019).

Selective Coding. Selective codes started to evolve from the data as a result of the 12 existing open codes. During this coding process, the researcher searched for relationships and patterns between the 12 open codes (Williams & Moser, 2019). Constant comparative analysis was performed to help the researcher complete methodical comparisons of the open codes, wherein 10 selective codes were identified (Kolb, 2012). After careful analysis of the 10

selective codes, the researcher used a mapping feature in NVivo to cluster the 10 selective codes into well-defined categories. According to Williams and Moser (2019), categories emerge when similar groups of data are arranged together enabling a researcher to define the characteristics of the categories. The mapping feature helped the researcher define eight key categories of data by merging selective codes in which a direct relationship to different codes was clear.

In addition to open and selective coding, the researcher also conducted a key word query as a fourth check for new codes. A comparative analysis of the keyword query and the eight categories was then performed to attempt to uncover any new relationships between and within the eight categories, however no new relationships or other significant themes were found (Williams & Moser, 2019). Once data saturation was achieved, constant comparative analysis was performed once more to ensure the trustworthiness of the correct themes that were emerging from the eight categories (Creswell, 2013). While analyzing qualitative data, according to Williams and Moser (2019), themes or topics can emerge that account for an overall description of the data. As a result of constant comparative analysis, the researcher was able to identify 10 common themes within the eight categories. The first set of themes identified were – a) structured environment; b) personalizing connections; c) conveying high expectations; d) recruiting and retaining quality teachers; e) extending weekly academic support after school; f) promoting involvement in extracurricular activities; g) advocating for strong school relationships; h) involving community partnerships; i) supplying constant positive reinforcement and constructive feedback, and; j) providing exposure outside of the school.

However, to further establish trustworthiness of the data analysis and coding procedures, the researcher conducted a peer debriefing with one dissertation committee member (Creswell, 2013). After careful consideration of the data was made between the researcher and the

dissertation committee member, clear connections between the study's research questions, conceptual framework, and the findings were established. As a result, only five major themes were uncovered from the 10 themes, suggesting specific school-level factors that had been helpful in raising Black male high school students' academic achievement. The five major themes identified were: a) recruiting and retaining Black male staff, b) advocating for strong school relationships, c) promoting involvement in extracurricular activities, d) involving community partnerships in the school, and e) delivering constant positive reinforcement and constructive feedback. Furthermore, the five major themes were aligned with much of the literature review which corresponded to the responses received from the case participants (Creswell, 2013).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is often challenged because of a given study's inability to consistently ensure validity as largely found in quantitative studies (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Qualitative studies frequently use smaller subgroups and populations, which Johnson and Christensen (2012) believes lead to less credibility. Therefore, the researcher established the study to address significant aspects of trustworthiness—including credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability—to strengthen the reliability of the research findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Credibility

Establishing credibility early in the study was critical to ensure that the study was progressive and that a discussion of the findings would be grounded in reliable data (Patton, 2002). Although there were various methodical ways of establishing the authenticity of the findings, Patton (2002) posited that a study's believability is indeed founded through its

participants. Therefore, credibility for this study was established through the purposive sampling process and member checks, which were used to help strengthen the plausibility factor (Patton, 2002). For instance, Patton (2002) posited that a member check helps to ensure that emerging inferences developed by the researcher are in accordance with the beliefs and thoughts of the study's participants. Therefore, each of the participating school administrators had the opportunity to review their transcripts and provide feedback about the completeness and accuracy of their transcript (Patton, 2002). However, the administrators did not evaluate the study's findings for accuracy.

Transferability

Transferability was another important aspect of trustworthiness that was established in this qualitative research study. Among methods of transferability, researchers suggested purposive sampling; this technique was used to select the case study sites and participants (Creswell, 2013). As such, transferability of this study was likely established (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, by providing an in-depth account of the contextual information and the conclusions that were central to the study, the findings of this study would allow other readers to make their own generalizations (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Therefore, transferability also occurred when the research findings showed evidence of applicability to similar populations, settings, and contexts (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

Dependability

Establishing dependability in a qualitative study helps to ensure consistency and solidarity in the findings such that the same conclusions would be repeatable if conducted by other researchers (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). It encompasses the participants' analysis of a study's findings supported by the data as received from the same participants (Johnson &

Christensen, 2012). This aspect of trustworthiness was essential to this study because it helped the researcher keep the findings grounded in the data, eliminating any influence of the researcher's personal viewpoints (Johnson & Christensen, 2012).

For this study, dependability was established using the peer review method during the data analysis process (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Based on the suggestions of Creswell (2013), the researcher utilized the support of an external researcher to check the accuracy of the data analysis, findings, and conclusions, and made corrections to the findings centered around the constructive feedback provided, which helped to ensure that the final conclusions of the study were complete, consistent, and repeatable.

Conformability

Conformability in a qualitative study solidifies trustworthiness by bringing about confidence in a study's findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). An audit trail entailed recording pertinent details while analyzing the data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). When addressed properly, conformability authenticates the data analysis process, safeguarding the findings from the researcher's own interpretations. To avoid researcher bias, audit trails are usually performed throughout the data collection process to ensure that the findings and conclusions remain grounded in data (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Conformability for this study occurred using an audit trail. The researcher clearly outlined the data collection procedures so that future researchers may replicate this study's research methods and anticipate generating similar findings (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Data collection procedures included utilizing a protocol to conduct each semi-structured interview, recording field notes after each interview, and reviewing school documents. From the development of the methods to presenting the findings, the researcher shared: 1) interesting

themes that were observed during the collection process, 2) how decisions were made during the analysis process, and 3) how the researcher derived at the findings and conclusions. In addition, a dissertation committee member ensured that the findings and conclusions were substantiated in the data. Overall, trustworthiness of the study was achieved. The researcher was able to align findings of this study in accordance with the data and the conceptual framework constructed for the study.

Assurances of Confidentiality

Confidentiality of the study's case sites and participants was a priority for the researcher and central to ethical research practice. Therefore, the school district, the high schools, and the school administrators' identities were anonymous, and data was controlled in accordance with the ethical standards and protocols established by the school district and the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (Patton, 2002). Specific protocols were well-thought-out to avoid the collection of identifiable information about the school district, the high schools, and the school administrators (Patton, 2002). For instance, pseudonyms were used to conceal the identities of the school district, high schools, and school administrators involved (Yin, 2014). A key was created linking the pseudonyms to the actual names and this key was saved on a secure hard drive as well as a back-up drive that only the researcher had access to (Yin, 2014).

Once approval was granted from both the university and all other participants involved (i.e. school district, administrators), the researcher moved forward with the belief that the research study placed participants at no risk. All data was secured to maintain the privacy of the research content and participants (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). After the data was collected, the researcher used Microsoft Word files and the NVivo 12 computer program to secure data items such as the interview responses, document analysis results, the key used for the

pseudonyms, and the field notes, and only the researcher had access to the drive and the program (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). In addition, all research data would be purged after three years eliminating any future risks related to the case sites and participants confidentiality.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher took a personal interest in finding ways to promote the educational success of Black male students because it was important to her that a significant increase in the number of Black males who achieved academic success and graduated from high school on time occurred in public high schools across the nation. For this purpose, the researcher designed this qualitative research study to explore public high school administrators who are demonstrating success raising academic achievement for Black males in a manner that produces long-lasting results. The researcher functioned as the primary researcher responsible for conducting the research methodology, which included collecting data from semi-structured interviews, school document reviews, and field notes. In addition, the researcher used an interview protocol to ensure consistency between case studies.

For over 21 years, the researcher served as an educator in a variety of urban, suburban, and post-secondary education settings, supporting students PK-12 and college students. Because of her diverse experience in the field of education, the researcher was aware of the influence that her predispositions could impose on the study while collecting data, analyzing the data, and interpreting the findings. To eliminate or dispel personal bias, the researcher employed the following tactics based on the suggestions of various research scholars:

- The researcher incorporated a solid method for collecting and triangulating the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2012)

- The researcher followed a protocol that comprised open-ended questions and considered every response during the data analysis (Patton, 2002)
- The researcher acknowledged the limitations of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011)
- The researcher requested the assistance of the dissertation committee to review the research at various stages of the study (Yin, 2014)
- The researcher was well-informed of her university's guidelines for conducting an ethical study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012)

Summary

The first two chapters offered an introduction to the problem surrounding Black male underachievement and a review of the literature that presented factors that can have a positive effect on raising their academic achievement. Chapter 3 detailed the research methodology which defined the research questions, case study selection procedures, and data collection and analysis process. A multiple-case design was conducted, and six public high schools served as the unit of analysis for the case studies.

As mentioned previously, there is a clear need for useful research in education that will pinpoint factors in public high schools that can effectively mitigate Black male students' underachievement. Therefore, perspectives provided by the case study participants were important for this study. Thus, the goal of Chapter 4 is to demonstrate that the research methodology explained in this chapter was followed, presenting the reliable findings that emerged from the data.

Chapter 4

Findings

This qualitative study allowed the researcher to explore school-level factors that high school administrators employ to help raise Black male academic achievement. The researcher executed a multiple-case design methodology, as explained in Chapter 3, to collect data from semi-structured interviews and a review of school documents including accountability data. Additionally, the methodology was steered by the subsequent research questions:

1. What school-level factors are public high school administrators optimizing to help raise the academic achievement of their Black male students?
2. How are the identified school-level factors optimized in order to raise Black male academic achievement?
3. To what extent are the school-level practices consistent with practices that promote academic self-efficacy in students?

In Chapter 4, the researcher gives an account of the data analysis by sharing the participant criteria and demographics for each case study site and participant. The chapter also presents the findings that emerged from the analysis drawing on the conceptual framework constructed for this study and answering the three research questions.

Case Study Participant Criteria

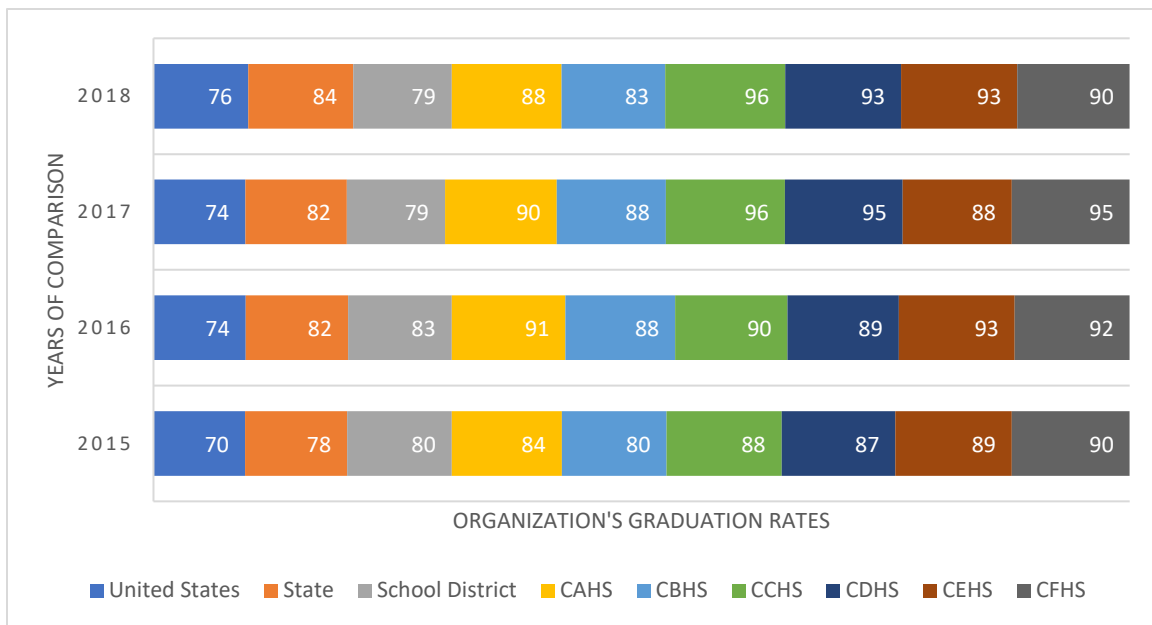
Six high school administrators were invited to participate in this research study because of their schools' track record of mitigating underachievement for their Black male student population. The researcher selected these administrators because they fulfilled the criteria outlined in chapter 3 such as: (a) leading a high school that has a high enrollment of Black male students wherein those students makeup at least 40% of the student population, (b) leading their

current school for at least two years, and (c) their Black male 4-year graduation rates showed uptrends that outpaced the 4-year graduation rates for Black students in general, at the national and state levels, and for Black male students at the school district level.

As shown in Figure 4, these six high schools met the criteria for consistently graduating more than 80% of their Black males on time, unlike other high schools located in the same school district. In addition, their Black male 4-year graduation rates showed uptrends above the national and state Black student 4-year graduation rates and outpaced the 4-year Black male graduation rates of their school district. For instance, the Black male graduation rates of the participating high schools averaged 12 points above the national rates, 4 points above the state rates, and 10 points above the school district rates, for 2015-2018.

Figure 4

A Comparison of Black Male Graduation Rates for four years, 2015 – 2018



Note. This figure shows the percentages of Black male students who graduate with a high school diploma, on the national, state, and local levels, within four years of starting ninth grade, from 2015-2018.

Participant Demographics

This section provides demographic information for the schools at which the study's participating administrators work. Pseudonyms were created to conceal the identities of the high schools, the school administrators, and the ABC Public School System wherein all the case studies were conducted.

Case Study 1: Comprehensive A High School

Comprehensive A High School (CAHS) is comprised of approximately 2,300 students in grades 9-12. Roughly 87% of the student population is Black, 49% of whom are Black males. Also, CAHS attendance data showed that nearly 94% of its Black male students come to school.

Furthermore, CAHS is led by Mr. Blue, a Black male who has a doctorate degree in education leadership. Mr. Blue also has over 20 years of experience in education, 13 years at the high school level and eight years leading CAHS.

Case Study 2: Comprehensive B High School

Comprehensive B High School (CBHS) is comprised of approximately 1,700 students in grades 9-12. Roughly 52% of the student population is Black, 45% of whom are Black males. Also, CBHS attendance data showed that nearly 90% of its Black male students come to school.

Furthermore, CBHS is led by Mr. Decent a Black male leader who has a master's degree in education. Mr. Decent also has over 20 years of experience in education, 16 years at the high school level and 13 of those years spent functioning as a leader at CBHS.

Case Study 3: Comprehensive C High School

Comprehensive C High School (CCHS) is comprised of approximately 1,000 students in grades 9-12. Roughly 80% of the student population is Black, 45% of whom are Black males. Also, CCHS attendance data showed that nearly 93% of its Black male students come to school.

Furthermore, CCHS is led by Mr. Stockholm a Black male who has a master's degree. Mr. Stockholm also has over 20 years of experience in education, 15 years at the high school level and six years leading CCHS.

Case Study 4: Comprehensive D High School

Comprehensive D High School (CDHS) is comprised of approximately 2,800 students in grades 9-12. Roughly 55% of the student population is Black, 46% of whom are Black males. Also, CDHS attendance data showed that nearly 90% of its Black male students come to school.

Furthermore, CDHS is led by Mr. Mann a Black male who has a master's degree in education. Mr. Mann also has over 30 years of experience in education, 10 at the high school level and 20 years leading CDHS.

Case Study 5: Comprehensive E High School

Comprehensive E High School (CEHS) is comprised of approximately 1,000 students in grades 9-12. Roughly 82% of the student population is Black, 53% of whom are Black males. Also, CEHS attendance data showed that nearly 96% of its Black male students come to school.

Furthermore, CEHS is led by Mrs. Malcolm a Black female who has a doctorate degree in education leadership. Dr. Malcolm also has over 25 years of experience in education, 10 years at the high school level and at least three years leading CEHS.

Case Study 6: Comprehensive F High School

Comprehensive F High School (CFHS) is comprised of approximately 2,200 students in grades 9-12. Roughly 50% of the student population is Black, 50% of whom are Black males. Also, CFHS attendance data showed that nearly 93% of its Black male students come to school.

Furthermore, CFHS is led by Mrs. Smooth a Black female who has a master’s degree in education. Mrs. Smooth also who has over 23 years of experience in education, seven years at the high school level and at least three years leading CFHS.

As shown in Table 5, the case participants’ backgrounds reflect the diversity in education leadership that continues to evolve in public education and that is represented in the schools. Thus, these qualities have likely played an important role in their capacity to effectively address the challenges encountered by their Black male student population. Likewise, all of the case participants have considerable high school experience and over half of them have been leaders at the participating schools for more than five years. The significance of the experience at the high school level as well as the number of years heading the participating schools might explain why the Black male students are graduating at high rates.

Table 5

Participating High School Administrators’ Demographics

Case Participant	Case Site	Race	Gender	Education	High School Experience	Years Leading School
Blue	CAHS	Black	Male	Doctorate	13	8
Decent	CBHS	Black	Male	Master’s	16	13
Stockholm	CCHS	Black	Male	Master’s	15	6
Mann	CDHS	Black	Male	Master’s	10	20
Malcolm	CEHS	Black	Female	Doctorate	7	3
Smooth	CFHS	Black	Female	Master’s	7	3

Data Analysis Presentation

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with six high school administrators. During the taped interviews, each administrator discussed his or her leadership perceptions and experiences to provide deeper insights regarding the research questions introduced in this study. Consistent with inductive analysis, the researcher performed both open code and selective code

analysis with the use of NVivo 12 software. She identified eight categories through an analysis process that applied coding in addition to constant comparative analysis. However, a thorough analysis of the data was performed to uncover the common patterns and relationships between these eight categories, which led to the emergence of five major themes. Moreover, the researcher reviewed documents from each school and found useful attendance and graduation data about the Black male students. While analysis of the attendance and graduation data suggested the broad impact that each school had on Black males, the documents themselves did not generate sufficient data to effectively support and answer the three research questions.

After analyzing the data, the researcher found five identifiable school-level factors that were shown to have an impact on the males' educational outcomes. The five key factors that were being optimized to help raise academic achievement for the Black male high school students were related to the following leadership actions: 1) hiring practices, 2) quality staff, 3) a variety of school activities, 4) strong community partnerships, and 5) formal and informal methods of offering positive feedback and special recognition. Overall, these five factors were identified by the researcher as having the greatest influence on Black male students who attended the participating high schools.

However, the researcher acknowledges that the five key factors are not representative of all the potential school-level factors that can help raise the academic achievement of all Black male high school students. Additionally, the researcher acknowledges that the findings of this study are primarily appropriate for high school administrators who lead the following types of public high schools: a) schools with large populations of Black male students that are interested in addressing the achievement needs of this subgroup in a proactive manner and 2) schools that

show low graduation rates for their Black male students and need access to evidence-based practices that have the potential to impact their graduation rates.

Research Questions Findings

In this section, the researcher addresses the way in which the five themes that emerged from the data analysis answered the three research questions.

Research Question 1

What school-level factors are public high school administrators optimizing to help raise Black male academic achievement?

The researcher answered the main research question by classifying themes that were commonly cited by the participating administrators as having an effect on the outcomes of Black male students. An analysis of the data revealed five major themes that showed evidence of helping to raise academic achievement for Black male students at the participating schools: 1) recruiting and retaining Black men on staff, 2) advocating for strong school relationships, 3) promoting involvement in extracurricular activities, 4) involving community partnerships in the school, and 5) delivering positive reinforcement and constructive feedback.

These five major themes suggested that there are specific school-level factors in public high schools that can be used to effectually raise Black male academic achievement, which translates into increased graduation rates. For instance, the first theme, recruiting and retaining Black men on staff, revealed that the high school administrators perceived that having Black men on staff is important because they can serve as role models for their Black male students. Therefore, Black men were frequently recruited to help satisfy instructional, leadership, and itinerant positions—such as teachers, custodial staff, coaches, administrators, counselors, and

security—and then strategically utilized to function as role models and mentors who are able to help increase Black male students' accountability in the school.

With regard to the second theme, advocating for strong school relationships was a factor cited in support of impacting Black male students' intrapersonal skill development. The administrators are using their staff to help model and address appropriate school behaviors, increase engagement in the classrooms and around the school, and encourage the males' interest in finishing high school. The administrator's indicated that Black male students feel cared about, respected, and encouraged as evidenced by a decrease in their schools' behavioral issues, school suspensions, and absenteeism. The third theme, promoting involvement in extracurricular activities, revealed that the Black male students' involvement in school activities was vital to keeping them engaged and interested in school. Thus, the school administrators work to ensure that there are interesting clubs and sports activities available for Black males to participate in throughout the school year.

Moreover, the fourth theme, involving community partnerships in the school, and fifth theme, delivering positive reinforcement and constructive feedback, demonstrated how the school administrators perceived their schools as positive environments that are motivating Black male students to do well and discouraging them from dropping out. For example, all of the administrators had in common the practice of having school personnel displaying respect towards Black male students by consistently complimenting them personally, recognizing their academic and athletic achievements, and commending their good behavior. In relation to theme five, the responses revealed that the administrators are using community partnerships and their schools' alumni to serve as mentors, guest speakers, and facilitators of special programming during and after school to help develop essential social and college prep skills and to motivate

their Black male students to succeed academically. In short, the findings support the concept that there are factors within the high school environment that school administrators can optimize to help raise achievement for Black male students.

Research Question 2

How are the identified school-level factors optimized in order to raise Black male academic achievement?

All five themes answered this sub question. Based on the findings, administrators are optimizing a combination of five school-level practices to address Black male students' achievement issues; as Figure 4 indicates, this is likely having a direct effect on the males' graduation rates. For this study, "optimizing school-level factors" meant that a high school administrator made the best use of specific components of the school environment to address Black male students' underachievement. In addition, academic achievement was defined based on the Department of Education's standards that generally linked academic achievement to students' outcomes such as on-time high school graduation (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Therefore, the responses conveyed below demonstrate how the identified factors are being optimized to help raise Black male students' academic achievement that translates to an increase in graduation rates.

Theme 1: Recruiting and Retaining Black Men on Staff. The school administrators' hiring practices were a key factor that emerged from the interviews, with four school administrators explicitly expressing how recruiting and retaining Black men on their staff was a priority for them because they use their Black male staff to function as positive role models and mentors, helping Black males see the possibility of graduating from high school and going to college. For instance, Mrs. Malcolm touted the value of retaining Black men on staff:

40% of my staff in general are African American males and I strategically hire African American males to serve in various leadership positions including in the classroom. My own personal philosophy is that our kids are able to see their face in the people that work in our buildings. So, I think that is really huge to be able to see someone who is going to college or see someone who carries himself well and then they have that connection to be able to say, I had at least one African American male in my building that I go to when I feel like I'm struggling or who celebrates me. And so, I think that's critical. So, I'm very deliberate and strategic around how I hire, make sure there is a balance across content areas and across different categories within the schoolhouse. (personal communication, March 27, 2020)

According to the school administrators' responses, retaining Black male teachers and staff also enables schools to place Black men in leadership positions and help provide guidance and support to the Black male students, who then experience higher levels of personal and academic growth at school. For instance, Mr. Stockholm shared that there are "a significant number of Black male teachers on staff that I believe play a prominent role in holding our young men accountable and for showing behaviors that are appropriate within those interactions in the classroom" (personal communication, January 13, 2020). Mr. Mann concurred, offering: Even our security team is made up of folks that Black male students can relate to. And I think that we preach that not only is it doing your due diligence to make sure kids are doing what they are supposed to be doing in the hallways, but also talking to students about the right choice, and building those positive relationships with Black males is making the difference. (personal communication, March 27, 2020)

Mr. Blue also expounded on this point in depth:

I intentionally recruit highly intelligent and highly effective African American male teachers, counselors, and administrators to serve as models in my school and we have African American males in leadership and in classroom positions and in administration throughout our school community. They also lead in those positions and lead outside of those position as mentors to our young men. (personal communication, January 14, 2020)

Despite noting the benefits of having Black men on staff, Mr. Blue specifically underlined how challenging it is to retain them, primarily because lack of adequate compensation:

So, we have some really good teachers who are males who have left the profession because they just can't take care of family or they've just moved to become administrators because the salary allows them to better take care of the families. But we need we need Black male teachers in the classroom and the guidance counselor's office and, you know, everywhere. So, you know, those are the only internal challenges. (personal communication, January 14, 2020)

There was also a consensus among the school administrators about the role that hiring quality teachers play in raising student achievement as a result of the teachers' ability to make students feel good about attending school and learning. As Mr. Mann asserted, "it goes back to finding the right teachers....I really have some great teachers. I have great leadership in departments that worked hard to bring in new teachers, particularly if a teacher retires" (personal communication, March 27, 2020). Mr. Decent elaborated:

It's very, very important that we've done a good job at creating a safe space for the young people to be in, so once you know that you [are] safe you can sit there and concentrate on why you are there, which is your academics, and then having teachers that care. You

know, we're here to work with you. We don't give you a pass. (personal communication, January 27, 2020)

As these responses indicate, over half of the school administrators are experiencing firsthand the impact that regular exposure to positive Black men and other quality staff can have on Black male students. The school administrator's perceptions relayed how optimizing this school-level factor have the potential to assist their Black male students in meeting high academic expectations and fostering self-respect, which was associated with improved social interactions both in the classrooms and in after school activities as well as increased motivation to finish school.

Theme 2: Advocating for Strong School Relationships. Responses from the interviews indicated the significance of the staff building relationships with Black male students within the school. All the administrators expressed how encouraging the staff to establish positive connections with Black male students is critical to their success because the personal contacts help the students feel more comfortable in the classrooms and safer in the building. Therefore, advocating for strong school relationships help promote a school culture that assumes that all Black male students are capable of academic success. As Mrs. Smooth explained:

I think the other thing that's important for our Black males is that they have a voice and that they're being listened to and being in a caring environment. They all want [to] have that rough and tough exterior and that's [how] you fail in here. But they like to be listened to. (personal communication, December 17, 2019)

Mr. Stockholm agreed, "my teachers that are somewhere between years one and ten are able to make the relevant connection with students...and are able to identify with things

that our students are interested in learning” (personal communication, January 13, 2020).

Mr. Blue elaborated on the necessity and impact of these connections:

As we get our teachers being able to acclimate them because it is especially important that they set an example because our young men are looking at that, you know. So, it's ok if you wear your dreads, you know, that's fine. And so, then the communication that you have with that young man is that it's ok for you to wear your hair the way you are, the way you do. But we got to make sure that the messaging that goes along with it is appropriate here in the school, that we are a mecca of excellence. (personal communication, January 14, 2020)

Mr. Decent walked through the strategic actions his school takes to ensure Black males feel safe, supported, and respected while in school, but also expressed how not all of the students are receptive to building relationships with teachers and staff:

Although we are accepting the role as educators and as a father figure for our young males, we still encounter resistance every now and then. Although they appreciate you, although they look forward to seeing you, they still have that anxiety and they still have those moments like “yes, I appreciate what you are doing, but you're not my father and he should be the one here doing this.” We have those conversations as well. So, we try to get them over the hump. (personal communication, January 27, 2020)

This recurring theme around relationship building also highlighted the positive impact that these strong connections had on students’ intrapersonal development skills. Each administrator shared how they optimize these strong school relationships to help improve students’ connectedness, thereby preventing or lessening behavioral problems on their campuses and in the classrooms. For instance, Mr. Mann explained:

You build those relationships and then you know, so teachers know who they can [call] on if a student is not doing what they're supposed to do. So, it's like football coach, basketball coach, if a student is in a sport and not doing what they are supposed to do, then teachers are going to contact the coach before they contact the parent. (personal communication, March 27, 2020)

Mrs. Malcolm concurred:

I think the leadership behaviors that I have exhibited as well as my administrative team is around “if your mom and dad don't make you do it we're going to make you do it because it's the right thing to do.” So, there are kids that may not have enrolled in dual enrollment course during the school day...but now they are because there was someone in here at the school saying “you need to do well on this test because it's the opportunity for you to go into college as a sophomore”.... So, again, I think it's around the relationships. We've talked a lot about systems and structures and resources, but a lot of what occurs, that encourages Black male students to do well, deals with relationships because I always believe a kid will do anything for you when they know you believe in them. (personal communication, March 27, 2020)

The school administrators consistently expressed how these positive connections at school can motivate Black males to achieve at higher levels academically as a result of increased accountability. Their responses also conveyed the belief that making sure leadership and the entire school staff is available for Black males before school, during lunch, or after class is what makes a lasting impact on their intrapersonal development, thereby improving their engagement in the learning process, their association with peers, and their overall conduct in school

Theme 3: Promoting Involvement in Extracurricular Activities. The interview responses indicated that supporting Black male participation in extracurricular activities, like sports or student associations, is helping to improve their academic achievement. Five of the six participating administrators explained why they deliberately promote Black male students' involvement in extracurricular activities. For instance, Mr. Mann shared:

So, I think just having the right people in our clubs – sponsors looking at different organizations to bring in that stimulate students academically – gives them opportunities to see other things that are happening in the world. We have those clubs, and we encourage students to get involved. (personal communication, March 27, 2020)

Each of the administrators was clear in stating that Black male participation in clubs and sports is having a positive impact on their Black male students because of the level of accountability they receive from coaches and club sponsors that normally would not be required of many of the students from their parents. In addition, the administrators optimize athletic activities to help sustain Black male engagement and interest in attending school and as a means to provide tutoring needed in addition to the academic support given in class. “One of the great things that we do for our male students,” noted Mrs. Smooth, “is that we offer all sports....We do a great job of having kids wanting to be a part” (personal communication, December 17, 2019).

She continued:

Because of that, there's academic support to be a part of sports. And so just from our sports, we have two hours of academic coaching that takes place five days a week, Monday through Friday. Even in the summertime, when they do workouts, all of our coaches are required to have at least three hours of study in the summer. (Smooth, personal communication, December 17, 2019)

Mrs. Malcolm also emphasized the importance of Black male students participating in athletic activities:

Having the system and structure and resource of a strong athletic program is very instrumental in the success of our African-American males because kids listen to coaches and they respect the coaches and so they instill in them the importance of academics...they're required to participate in a mandatory study hall where their grades are monitored, when they are required to go Khan academy to prepare for the SATs. So, we have a lot of clubs and activities that are non-athletic at our school. (Malcolm, personal communication, March 27, 2020)

Mr. Stockholm concurred:

Our school has pretty rich athletic program and athletics at CCHS go hand in hand with academics. Our student athletes have good relationships with coaches who also serve as teachers or support staff in our building. So, there is actually a lot of motivation for the males. (personal communication, January 13, 2020)

All of the school administrators shared that they optimize extracurricular activities because they provide a positive after school outlet and associations that reinforce positive engagement in the classroom. According to Mr. Blue:

So, a lot of our coaches actually work here in the building, not just as gym teachers. Like, we have our head football coach is a guidance counselor. Our head basketball coach is an English teacher. You know, our athletic director teaches sports medicine.... So, you find that the athletic piece is an important anchor to tie young people to the academic program. But we have to teach them that, you know, that'll take them to strategic places. But their academics has to keep them there. And even when their athletic ability fades,

they know their minds and the work that they've done to develop their minds is what's going to allow them to enjoy success as adults. (personal communication, January 14, 2020)

According to the interview responses, the school administrators optimized afterschool activities because of the number of benefits they provide their Black male students such as a) staying connected to a safe, structured environment, which helps reduce unwarranted behaviors, b) receiving direction from positive male role models, c) receiving additional academic support and d) expanding their social networks. The school administrators believe that promoting involvement in extracurricular activities helps to reinforce positive associations between school belonging, academic motivation, and achievement for their students.

Theme 4: Involving Community Partnerships in the School. Half of the administrators specifically emphasized that a key factor in raising achievement levels for their Black males has been the number of organizations they have been able to bring into the school to establish additional support networks for these students. Two specifically emphasized that expanding the number of community connections their Black males have access to acts as another school relationship that helps to build their self-esteem and motivation for academic success. For instance, Mrs. Malcolm discussed hosting a male summit wherein “males are invited to participate in a daylong activity where we had various guest speakers and to talk about Black male issues, but also encourage them to do well academically [and] talk about goal setting” (personal communication, March 27, 2020).

Similarly, Mr. Stockholm discussed hosting an Alumni Day wherein former students, both young and old, return to CCHS “to talk about their college experiences,” noting that “it does provide a level motivation for our current seniors [to] say ‘if they can go to college, if they can

make something of themselves, I could do the same” (personal communication, January 13, 2020). Another administrator specifically emphasized how having multiple community partnerships gives them greater access to other supports that can benefit their Black male students’ college and career readiness, like postsecondary planning. First, Mr. Blue explained the school’s goal in fostering these kinds of partnerships and outlined the general approach:

That has been one of the primary pathways which has led us to be successful with our African American male students. We have really leaned on those relationships through many activities, such as mentoring days where we've actually broken down into single gender groups and ... talk to them about how they got to where they were, what were some of the challenges that they faced? How do they overcome those challenges? Why was it so important to exercise perseverance?... Just kind of really setting the standard as it relates to character with our boys, because we know that if we can get our boys to see themselves in a position where whether what they see value in themselves, then they will commit to their own well-being inside and outside of the classroom. So, we've had several partnerships that have assisted us with this. (personal communication, January 14, 2020)

Then, Mr. Blue detailed how these partnerships work in practice:

We have my fraternity brothers XXX and for the last seven years have been in the building meeting every Wednesday night with a group of boys and a mentoring program called XXX. We used to have to go out and recruit young men to be a part of it. Now the young men are knocking down the doors to be a part of the program. We have a 90% plus graduation rate and college attendance rate based on that, based on the participation of that program where they’re getting leadership development, where they're getting

academic resources and supports, and where they're actually going out and going to colleges. They're having college students that were in the programs come back and speak to them about what they process and what their experiences are like. And they're starting to just kind of, you know, create a bridge for them so that they can begin to see themselves more immediately. And what that next step looks like, because they can see us as professionals in our 40s and 50s, but they see themselves as 16 and 17-year old and they wonder what that 25- or 30-year gap looks like. So, having those graduates to come back to the program and actually pour into our young people, into our young men, helps them to bridge that immediate gap. And because of that, we've seen more of them go to college. (personal communication, January 14, 2020)

Overall, half of the school administrators discussed how engaging community partnerships are connecting Black male students with the right people and resources to help accelerate their educational goals and personify their career interests. One main benefit that the administrators highlighted was how their multiple affiliations have increased Black males' access to positive male role models, which helped improve their connectedness to the importance of the high school experience. The school administrators also reflected positively on the type of community partnerships that are helping their males with college planning and exposing them to various career paths that are likely to grow their chances for educational attainment and future success.

Theme 5: Delivering Positive Reinforcement and Constructive Feedback. According to the interviews, Black male students are receptive to both verbal and nonverbal positive feedback and value being recognized for their academic and athletic accomplishments. Two of the school administrators specifically mentioned how they use positive reinforcement as a

preventive approach by providing consistent recognition for all types of positive behaviors. As Mrs. Smooth put it:

I think by just having high expectations for our Black males, praise, we are a PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support) at school. We just praise our kids and reward them for a little achievement. You know, if you went from 0 to a 1 point to you, you know, we praise you. (personal communication, December 17, 2019)

Mr. Decent also emphasized the importance of respecting his Black male students and recognizing their efforts:

I believe my staff does a good job of meeting our kids where they are and giving them positive reinforcement and accolades for the progress they make. So, an example, you may still be underneath the bar, in a certain area, but you have improved from last year. We celebrate that and I think with anything else and one of the myths also is that high school kids ... don't like to receive rewards and stars, kudos and hand claps and it's actually the opposite. All young people want to be ... appreciated.... We understand that at CBHS, so we promote our kids' success at all times and even a small gain is a positive gain. This mentality helps us to move our kids in the right direction. (personal communication, January 27, 2020)

Three of the school administrators talked about the importance of incorporating positive reinforcement into the school structure in order to influence the change they desired to see in their Black male students. For instance, Mr. Stockholm shared:

So, you know, the whole idea of somebody believes in you, somebody is going to be in your corner, someone is going to hold you accountable. You may not understand precalculus, you may struggle with trig functions, but there's someone here that's going to

work. I think that's probably the most beneficial: every student having one adult—whether it's a classroom teacher or school counselor, coach, secretary—somebody that they can actually sit with, who is working and pushing them, to say “this is what you need to do to be successful. If you don't understand it, let's go about getting help.” Those are the factors, probably the most important factor helping our Black male students.

(personal communication, January 13, 2020)

Mr. Blue explained:

We do academic/athletic celebrations. We celebrate the team.... It's just very important that we are intentional about celebrating the academic success of our students. Our best football player—MVP, was an all-state running back—is going to have an opportunity to go to an Ivy League college because he's going to graduate. We have academic celebrations every quarter where we actually have about 2,400 students in the school, we had over 55% of them make honor roll and so we celebrated each one of them and we had probably about 25% of them with 4.0 GPA or greater. So, you know, we make learning cool. (personal communication, January 14, 2020)

Mrs. Malcolm added:

I also think that that our success can be attributed to the fact that we have very, very open communication with our parents who receive daily messages from me as the principal through our Blackboard system. So, whether it's a phone message, text message, or email, they are always informed about the academic success of students as well as what they can do as a parent to make sure their child stays on track. We produce a monthly newsletter, we have quarterly parent meetings, to provide our parents with a toolkit and resources that they may need. We also celebrate; we do a lot of celebrating. So, every morning I

celebrate students on the morning announcements and afternoon announcements, as I'm doing informal observations. (personal communication, March 27, 2020)

As indicated by the responses above, positive reinforcement was presented in ways that were appropriate for high school students, particularly Black male students, with much of the feedback expressed as verbal support and commendation. It was clear that administrators optimized positive reinforcement to help motivate the Black males to demonstrate behaviors that brought about special honors and positive recognition. Equally, the interview responses illustrated that positive reinforcement of any type coupled with high expectations were critical to helping build Black male students' self-confidence and providing them with more gratifying experiences at school.

In summary, these findings support the belief that a high school environment can play an instrumental role in helping to raise the academic achievement of Black males, if the school leader optimizes school-level factors that are specifically beneficial to Black males. For instance, the importance of Black male students having male role models, in the school, who look like them and who can relate to their everyday life challenges, can play a major role in their academic success. It was noted from the interview responses that the students' ability to relate to the Black male staff and Black men from the community helps them to remain focused and driven to attend school regularly, to anticipate graduating from high school, and even be determined to stay away from violence and other unsafe behaviors outside of school. It was also noted that engaging Black male students in various constructive relationships across the school can be instrumental in helping them thrive academically beyond the barriers many of them encounter outside of the school environment. These strong relationships within the school are

functioning to help minimize discipline issues, redirecting defiant behaviors that are normally associated with Black males who are considered at-risk.

Finally, delivering constant positive recognition of all types was considered a primary means for the school administrators including their faculty and staff to improve Black male interactions at school, both in the classroom and while participating in extracurricular activities. The school administrators all mentioned that they go the extra mile to praise their Black male students and remind them that they could achieve success. Therefore, it is understood that the positive reinforcement offered at the school can ultimately help motivate Black male students to stay the course and finish high school.

Research Question 3

To what extent are the school-level practices consistent with practices that promote academic self-efficacy in students?

Consideration of the academic self-efficacy theory in this study was essential for demonstrating the extent to which the school-level practices that occur in public high schools are consistent with practices that nurture academic self-efficacy beliefs in students. As discussed in Chapter 2, academic self-efficacy beliefs are grounded in Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory and relates to a person's confidence in their capacity to successfully execute a task or produce an outcome. This belief is developed as a result of four types of experiences an individual may be subjected to – mastery, vicarious, verbal persuasion, and physiological experiences (Bandura, 1977). For instance, in an academic setting, a direct experience of nurturing self-efficacy beliefs through mastery, occurs when a student grasps a task or is able to control an outcome in the school setting wherein vicarious experiences raise a students' belief about their capability when they observe people similar to them succeed by their persistent efforts. Conversely, verbal

persuasion nurtures self-belief about one's capability through the oral persuasion of influential people leading a student to believe that they possess the capacity to accomplish a certain task or solve a certain problem while a direct experience of physiological influence on self-beliefs causes a student to form an opinion about their capability based on their emotional state at the time of attempting to accomplish a task or produce an outcome. Lastly, according to Bandura (1977), having a deep sense of self requires an individual to have experience in: 1) overcoming obstacles through effort and perseverance; 2) having individuals in your life such as parents, coaches, managers who communicate in ways that builds one's confidence that they have what it takes to be successful; 3) having mentors and role models to look up to; and 4) being mindful and in control of one's emotional state so that negative emotions aren't misinterpreted in given situations e.g. a depressed state causing an individual to lose confidence when approaching a task or outcome.

Based on the findings of this study, four of the five major research themes are consistent with two of the self-efficacy sources that promote academic self-efficacy in students; one theme did not show a relationship to efficacy-nurturing practices in the context presented for this study. In addition, mastery or physiological experiences were not recognized among the four themes. For instance, themes one, two, four, and five are most strongly associated with practices that promote academic self-efficacy beliefs for the Black male students. The findings indicated that the leadership actions carried out in themes one, two, and four, which operate to provide vicarious experiences, led to the positive reinforcement and constructive feedback that constitute theme five, thereby providing verbal persuasion experiences. Conversely, research theme three was found to be unrelated to efficacy-nurturing practices; while administrators referenced promoting

involvement in extracurricular activities in the context of improving engagement in school, this factor was not an indicator of nurturing capability or success for Black males.

The findings indicate that the implementation of four of the five identified themes in a high school environment can create both vicarious and verbal persuasion experiences for Black male students, playing a major role in increasing their chances of graduating from high school in four years. For instance, receiving continuous constructive feedback and verbal praise from the Black men who are on staff and individuals who serve as volunteers in a high school can impact the Black male students who have low academic self-efficacy beliefs about their performance in a specific subject or about finishing high school. Communicating in ways that boost a Black males' confidence - that they have what it takes to achieve academically - can lead them to efficaciously accomplish school assignments, pass standardized tests, or reach a goal such as graduating from high school. Additionally, having Black men on staff and serving as volunteers in a high school provides Black male students vicarious experiences in which they can be exposed to positive Black men as mentors and roles models that the students can pattern themselves after academically, professionally, culturally, and socially.

It was also made clear through the findings that themes two and four, the use of strong school relationships and community partnerships, function to create vicarious experiences that can help influence Black male students' academic expectations. According to the data, these two school-level factors are helping to provide additional vicarious experiences that are communicating in ways that cause Black male students' to believe that they have what it takes to be successful in high school and beyond, particularly motivating them to strive for future success beyond high school such as enrolling college immediately following high school graduation.

Other Relevant Discoveries

In addition to the five emerging themes, there was one noteworthy observation made during a review of the school documents relating to the demographic profiles of the high schools. Although the schools' demographic data were not used to answer the research questions, they served to provide additional information about the apparent achievement of the males in the participating schools. It was noted from the demographic profiles that roughly 90% of each school's Black male students attend school, indicating that the schools have minimal attendance issues with their Black male students.

There was no concrete evidence presented in this study's data suggesting that there was a direct link between the implementation of the five themes and the Black male student's high attendance rates. However, the researcher posits this significant observation in the data suggests three potential effects in relation to the research questions: 1) that the leadership actions of the school administrators are having a significant impact on their Black male students' attendance rate, 2) that the school-level factors are having an impact on Black male academic achievement as a result of their regular attendance at school and/or 3) that the Black male students' good attendance may also be a factor in their increased graduation rates.

Another significant reflection noted about the taped interviews was how none of the school administrators cited use of traditional reform methods such as reduced class sizes, a rigorous curriculum, offering advanced courses, imploring parental involvement or conducting standardized testing to address their Black male achievement issues. All of the school administrators mentioned their use of student data to inform general academic related decisions for the student population as a whole, and Mr. Stockholm specifically referred to his use of the school's master schedule to support all students in meeting graduation credit

requirements. Additionally, Mrs. Malcolm, Mr. Blue, and Mrs. Smooth mentioned the importance of establishing a strong school structure to account for the underlying factors and difficulties of educating Black males. However, academic-based reform efforts were not mentioned during the interviews as essential to helping improve the trajectory of achievement for the Black male students.

Summary

Interview responses from the participating high school administrators indicated that there are specific school-level factors that can be optimized to help raise Black male students' academic achievement and that these factors are consistent with practices that promote high academic self-efficacy beliefs in these students. The school-level factors that were shown to have an impact on their Black male academic achievement were in effect as a result of the leadership actions of the high school administrators and their ability to effectively control for these practices, in collaboration with the school staff and the surrounding communities, within the school environment.

As Chapter 4 presented the important findings that emerged from the data drawing from the conceptual framework constructed for this study, Chapter 5 will conclude this research study with a discussion of the findings, implications for high school administrators, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussions, Implications, and Recommendations

The objective of this qualitative study was to identify school-level factors in public high schools that helped raise academic achievement for Black male high school students, enabling the researcher to develop a model for raising their academic achievement. For this reason, the researcher performed multiple-case research in public high schools that showed steady growth in the graduation rates of their Black male students and used the subsequent research questions to steer the study's investigation:

1. What school-level factors are high school administrators optimizing to raise Black male academic achievement?
2. How are the identified school-level factors optimized in order to raise Black male academic achievement?
3. To what extent are the school-level practices consistent with practices that promote academic self-efficacy in students?

As follows, Chapter 5 will discuss the research's limitations, comparison between the findings and the conceptual framework, and the findings and their connections to the literature.

Moreover, the chapter will provide implications for high school administrators and recommendations for future research.

Limitations

The ensuing discussion of the findings, implications and recommendations should be regarded with consideration of the following limitations that this study essentially encountered. First, the findings of this study are based on data collected from a small sample of public high schools recruited from one large school district in the mid-Atlantic region, which normally will

limit the generalizability of the findings. However, education researchers and practitioners can refer to the school administrators' interview responses outlined in Chapter 4 to determine the transferability of the findings to other public high school settings. Next, the methodology employed in this study might not have completely captured all the leadership actions of the school administrators and all the school-level factors that are most effective in increasing Black male high school graduation rates. However, the researcher ensured that the research methodology explained in Chapter 3 included pertinent details that should speak more accurately to the reliability of the current findings or inform the reliability of future findings upon replication of this study.

Furthermore, the definition of Black male academic achievement employed by this study was limited to the male's graduation rates. The reporting of increased graduation rates is not necessarily a comprehensive indication of a Black male's achievement level, as it is possible for a Black male to graduate from high school with poor grades and low-test scores. Therefore, the researcher recommends adapting the study to include rates of immediate college enrollment, if applicable, to strengthen the significance of this qualitative study. Finally, the findings of this study yield limitations because the themes are based entirely on the perceptions and responses of high school administrators. Consequently, the researcher relied solely on the administrators to respond knowledgeably and truthfully to the questions, and therefore recommends that education researchers consider other data collection methods in addition to conducting semi-structured interviews to improve the triangulation of data and heightened trustworthiness of future findings.

Comparison of the Findings to the Conceptual Framework

The findings of this qualitative research study corroborate the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter 2. Based on the investigation, the researcher uncovered five key factors

that have the capacity to effectively mitigate Black male underachievement in a public high school. Figure 5 presents a modified version of the conceptual framework (Figure 3). The modified model currently comprises the school-level factors that emerged from this study's findings. It demonstrates their interrelatedness as well as the important role that each identified factor plays in significantly impacting Black male high schoolers' graduation rates. Overall, the theory for what school-level factors raises achievement for Black male high school students is multidimensional and comprised of five themes: (a) hiring and retaining Black men on staff, (b) advocating for strong school relationships, (c) promoting involvement in extracurricular activities, (d) involving community partnerships in the school, and (e) delivering positive reinforcement and constructive feedback. These five themes indicate a mix of the successful leadership practices of public high school administrators, and together how they can help augment a school environment that can boost achievement for its Black male students.

As shown in Figure 5, the first seven components of the model are associated with the leadership actions of high school administrators, suggesting that high school administrators should optimize the identified school-level factors to work in conjunction with each other to provide the most appropriate level of support for Black male students. The next five components illustrate the effect that each school-level factor in conjunction with the nurturing of the males' academic self-efficacy beliefs can have on their school behaviors. The model suggests that the social cognitive behavioral changes is a result of the factors functioning effectively, simultaneously, within the high school setting. Finally, the last component of the model shows the predictable outcome as a result of a high school administrator taking action to effectively optimize the aforementioned school-level factors: producing quality school experiences for

Black male students that foster a positive change in their mindset towards high school, thereby impacting the rate in which they graduate from high school.

Figure 5

Model for Raising Black Male Achievement in High Schools



Note. This figure illustrates an interrelated school approach to raising Black male academic achievement in public high schools.

Discussion of the Findings in Context of the Literature

The findings of this qualitative research study are supported by the review of literature presented in Chapter 2. The five themes presented in the model for achievement indicate that high school administrators can create school environments that raise academic achievement for Black male students over time. The themes also show the significance of the type of school environment that must be established in addition to the type of support required to increase the rate at which Black male students graduate from high school. In this manner, the subsequent

sections discuss the five themes in detail, conveying the importance of education stakeholders preemptively allocating additional resources to school districts in such a way that this systemic particular public education problem is eventually eradicated in high schools across the U.S.

School-level Factors That Help Raise Black Male Achievement

While federal policies and top-down school reform efforts can have a certain effect on outcomes for Black male high school students, this research study shows that effective mitigation of underachievement for these students can happen more substantially at the level of high school administration. However, effective mitigation of underachievement for Black male high school students demands more than school leaders providing academic rigor in a traditional school setting. For instance, previous studies showed that the conventional quality of a high school—as measured by its structure, curriculum and instruction, the commitment of teachers, and professional development among other factors—can function to boost the academic success of students in general (Shannon & Bylsma, 2007). Rather, this study’s conclusions demonstrate that optimizing other educational practices such as hiring practices, school activities, community partnerships, and formal and informal methods of offering positive feedback were all key contributors to boosting academic achievement specifically for Black male high school students. Thus, these five factors which are distinctly discussed in the next sections, are shown to function with a dynamic dimension that can improve the rate at which the Black males graduate from high school.

Recruiting and Retaining Black Males

In general, emphasis on strong school relationships in this study is consistent with the literature that is associated with supportive school-based networks. However, this theme underscores how positive and supportive school relationships especially with the Black males on

staff can make a significant difference in preventing Black male high school students from dropping out of school. While Black males are shown to benefit considerably from having strong school relationships in general, in accordance with the study's findings and the literature, they are particularly impacted by having strong relationships with Black men who serve as role models and mentors in their schools. Other studies suggested that more Black male teachers and mentors are needed in schools, as suggested by Gamble-Hilton (2012) and Irving and Hudley (2008), to best support the academic success of Black male high school students. However, in the absence of having Black men on staff, high school administrators can choose to optimize a range of strong school relationships involving diverse individuals from the school, professional organizations, and the neighboring communities; then again, if administrators want to bolster the chances of their Black male students graduating on time as a result of positive school experiences and enhanced learning opportunities, they should work to ensure that these students have meaningful and consistent interactions with positive Black men who work in the school according to the study's findings.

One noticeable difference, in contrast to the literature, was how teachers, in general, were not cited as being sole contributors to raising Black male achievement in this study. While earlier research showed that teachers can certainly play a central role in the academic achievement of Black male students as associated with positive interactions in the classroom (Mercer et al., 2011; Strayhorn, 2008; Tyler & Boelter, 2008), emphasis was placed on all Black male staff, such as coaches, club advisors, security officers, and custodians, as being key contributors in helping the participating school's Black males have positive high school experiences and form realistic educational goals; this finding is aligned with other research studies. These types of relationships—especially with athletic coaches, as conveyed by the

administrators—are instrumental in contributing to an improvement in Black male students' attendance rates, social interactions in school, grades, and college and career choices because of how the coaches hold the males accountable while at school.

Promoting Involvement in Extracurricular Activities

The study's conclusions on promoting Black male involvement in extracurricular activities are aligned with the literature on providing adequate resources and facilities. Black male high school students are likely to achieve at greater levels in a high school environment where they can frequently engage in the school environment by taking part in extracurricular activities. Participation in extracurricular activities, according to the study's findings, helps increase Black male students' academic performance; because good grades are a requirement to join or remain in many of the clubs and sports offered at the participating schools, participation incentivized maintaining passing grades. This discovery is supported by the literature which suggested that there is a significant correlation between academic achievement and a student's level of extracurricular participation, evidenced by increases in a student's grades (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; McCarthy, 2000).

When Black males purposefully engage in school beyond reporting to their classes, as indicated by this study's findings, their academic achievement can be positively impacted as a consequence of the exposure and interactions with peers, coaches, and club advisors. For instance, this study found that optimizing engagement in extracurricular activities may lead to strengthening the males' interpersonal skills and even promote the fulfillment of educational goals such as postsecondary education because of academic and athletic scholarships. Feldman and Matjasko (2005) proposed that school activities such as school clubs and sports function to promote social responsibility, instill a sense of school pride, enhance peer-to-peer contacts, and

facilitate teamwork for students. Because of the potential impact that involvement in extracurricular activities can have on Black male engagement in school and their achievement, the researcher concludes that it is critical for high school administrators to remain proactive in offering a variety of interesting school activities as well as in accommodating Black male students who cannot stay after school to participate in extracurricular activities due to other personal commitments.

Involving Community Partnerships in the School

Involving community partnerships in the school can be used to help redirect Black male high school students from dropping out of school. The study's findings show that optimizing professional organizations, businesses, and even the school's alumni can be helpful for assisting the males in navigating their high school experiences as well as meeting their high school graduation requirements. Additionally, the participating school administrators were primarily shown to optimize the resources and support from professional Black men from the community as ways to sustain Black male engagement and accountability in school. As this study indicates, the strong school relationships that are established with Black men from the community can conceivably help address the disparity affecting Black male students' high school graduation rates and even postsecondary participation. Contacts with positive and professional Black men from the community can help Black male students improve their self-directedness, thus boosting their academic performance.

The literature stresses that Black men from the community are able to model the correct ways to manage challenging situations and show Black male students how to persevere during difficult circumstances (Gordon et al., 2009; Whiting, 2006). Because of the relationships the Black male students had with Black men in the participating schools, it is reasonable to suggest

that these partnerships help motivate a significant number of the males to graduate from high school, even influencing their aspirations to attend college. Consequently, when Black males receive this type of influence, they become determined to be productive and responsible members within the school community, as evidenced by improvements in their behaviors.

Delivering Positive Reinforcement and Constructive Feedback

High school administrators will have to create school cultures that continuously acknowledge Black male students for any level and kind of accomplishment. As the participating school administrators conveyed, it is important to optimize practices of positive reinforcement and constructive feedback in manners that will appropriately praise all Black males for a wide range of successes. The literature on school culture emphasized that the extent to which minority students experienced academic success was dependent upon a school culture that was positive, supportive, and culturally conscious (Haynes & Comer, 1993). This theme was distinctly emphasized in this study that some Black males needed considerable encouragement to help offset the negativity and complexities of life that many of them confront outside of the school environment.

As described by the participating high school administrators, optimizing positive reinforcement and constructive feedback could include holding friendly conversations during transitions, complimenting students whenever good behaviors are patterned, showing an interest in their undertakings outside of school, visiting classrooms and acknowledging their participation, and hosting special activities; these are important practices that align with the review of literature on school culture (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Toldson, et al., 2009). As Butler et al. (2011) pointed out, Black male achievement mostly occurred in schools that motivated them by offering incentives and rewards as well as equipping staff to motivate these students to

take responsibility for their own success. Toldson et al. (2009) also asserted that when a school environment promoted high expectations of students, this support may lead to higher than expected achievement gains. Therefore, although they don't always voice it, as mentioned by the participating administrators, Black male high school students really appreciate the positive reinforcement and constructive feedback, as revealed through a noticeable increase in their school performance overtime.

Nurturing Academic Self-efficacy Beliefs

The self-efficacy theory suggests that academic self-efficacy increases with positive feedback, in which a student will be motivated to perform better (Bandura, 1977; Usher & Pajares, 2009). Although the participating school administrators did not explicitly state how they optimized the school-level factors to nurture Black male students' academic self-efficacy beliefs, this study's findings show that the five school-level practices were consistent with practices that traditionally foster academic self-efficacy beliefs in students (Bandura, 1996). Additionally, it was not made clear by the participating school administrators if the Black male high school students displayed efficacious attitudes toward completing high school as a result of heightened engagement, motivation, and accountability in school. The social cognitive change emphasized in the model for achievement is a perceived change in school behaviors that would be expected to occur based on the self-efficacy and academic self-efficacy theories related to students (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Liem et al., 2008; Usher & Pajares, 2008, 2009).

Based on the academic self-efficacy theories (Usher & Pajares, 2008, 2009; Zimmerman, 2000), the leadership practices employed by the school administrators are functioning in ways that would nurture the males' academic self-efficacy beliefs. For instance, verbal persuasion was described as people offering oral praise to raise the confidence level of another person (Bandura,

1993), a definition that echoes positive reinforcement and constructive feedback, one of the key findings of this study. The literature further underscores how it is incumbent upon school administrators to create a school culture wherein the personal and academic success of the Black male students is expected and frequently celebrated (Butler et al., 2011; Toldson and Lemmons (2013). Therefore, high school administrators should ensure that Black male students are provided these experiences - verbal persuasion and vicarious – which are shown to boost Black male students' academic self-efficacy beliefs about their capabilities to finish high school (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Liem et al., 2008; Usher & Pajares, 2008, 2009).

In summary, the researcher concludes that the five school-level factors discovered in this study are inherently connected and if one is unaccounted for in the best practices of a high school that serves a large population of Black males, it is likely that the school will be limited in its ability to raise higher levels of achievement for its Black male students. In addition, the researcher believes that it is reasonable to conceptualize the five school-level factors, in conjunction with the direct nurturing of Black males' academic self-efficacy beliefs, as the enablers of a social cognitive change that can occur for these students and the social cognitive change as the psychological process through which the five school-level factors can effectively raise the males academic achievement, as evidenced by increased graduation rates.

School-level Factors Impact On Black Male Achievement

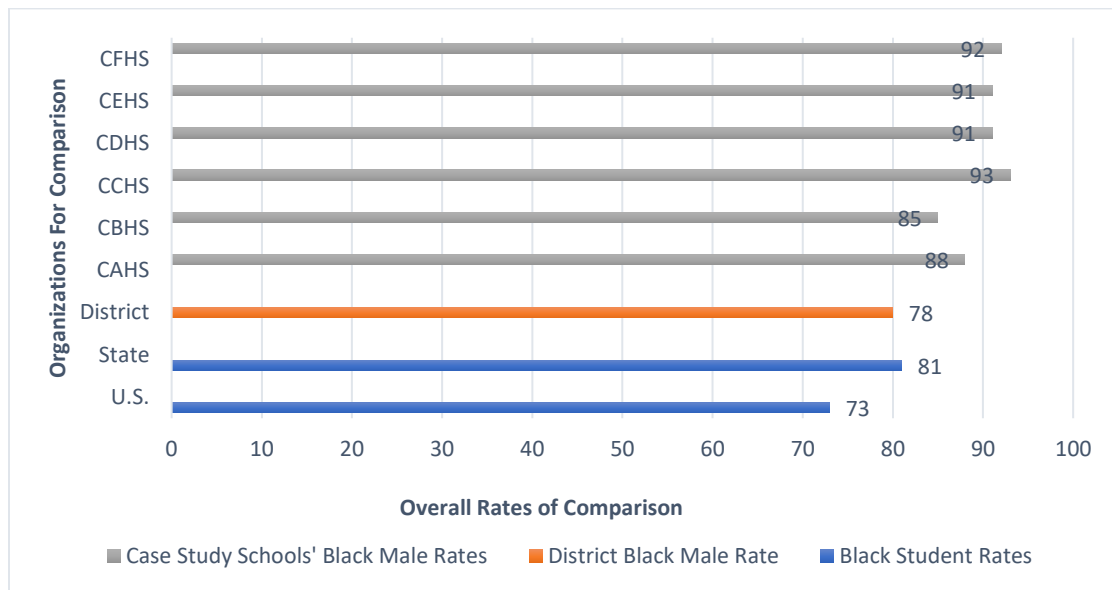
In accordance with the findings of this study, the researcher concluded that an uptrend in Black male graduation rates at the participating high schools is likely associated with the school administrators optimizing specific school-level factors to address the needs of the males. While effective use of the five school-level factors varied by high school, each of the themes were found to be major factors in helping to raise academic achievement for their Black male students.

In optimizing a combination or all of these school-level factors, each administrator is ensuring that their Black male students will graduate from high school on time.

As shown in Figure 6, the participating high schools are having an outsized impact on their Black male student populations as a result of optimizing specific school-level factors. Over the course of the 2015-2018 reporting years, the participating high school administrators were able to sustain their Black male graduation rates above 80%, besting both the 73% national graduation rate and 80% state graduation rate for Black students reported by the Department of Education as well as the 78% local graduation rate for Black male students reported by their school district.

Figure 6

Total Graduation Rate for Black Students and Black Male over four years, 2015-2018



Note. This figure compares national, state, and local overall graduation rates of both Black students and male students over a four-year period, for years 2015-2018.

From the data, it was apparent that the participating school administrators had equipped themselves with knowledge about the cultural differences that were creating barriers for their

Black male learners, and therefore worked to establish environments where their Black male students could feel safe, supported, and respected by the school leaders and staff. Because of their leadership actions, Black male high school students even those considered to be at-risk, were able to consistently meet high expectations and standards for academic achievement as a result of being backed by the most applicable school-based resources and supports. For instance, a significant number of males still graduated at higher rates when compared to the graduation rates reported for other public high schools. Therefore, the success of the participating high schools substantiates the conceptual framework—that public high schools can be transformed into organizations that progressively improve the rate at which Black males graduate from high school on time.

Implications for High School Administrators

Though limited in its scope, this study has clear implications for public high school administrators, particularly those who 1) lead high schools wherein Black male students make up at least 40% of the school's population, 2) lead high schools that demonstrate the need to raise Black male academic achievement, minimally meeting the national high school graduation rate of 80% or higher, and 3) lead high schools that are affected by poverty.

The findings of this research study suggest that it is important for high school administrators that serve large Black male populations, to reconceptualize the school environment and expand their leadership actions and school practices in such a manner as to proactively mitigate the underachievement of their Black male students. The researcher suggest that high school administrators should formulate school plans that would optimize the five school-level factors in conjunction with other student achievement strategies and initiatives. Therefore, what follows are four suggestions, derived from the study, of key school-based

practices that could yield higher levels of success for this population of students if optimized effectively.

Work Collaboratively with HR To Retain Black Male Educators

Research has shown the significant impact that Black male educators can have on a Black male students' educational outcome, marked by improvements in their motivation, attitudes, and achievement (Egalite et al., 2015; Jordan & Cooper, 2003). Findings from this study align with other studies suggesting that the presence of more Black men in high schools could significantly improve the educational outcomes and life opportunities of Black male students, as Black male teachers and other staff are more apt to motivate these students (Gordon, et al., 2009).

Therefore, high school administrators who need Black male staff in their schools should work closely with their human resources departments to increase the number of Black men that are recruited to fulfill different positions in their particular sites. In the event that there is a shortage of Black men available to recruit, hire and place at the particular sites, high school administrators should supplement those positions by increasing the number of Black male volunteers in the school, thereby generating more Black male role models for Black male students to frequently interact within school.

High school administrators should also consider collaborating with school district leadership to assist in promoting the retention of Black male staff. When necessary, school district leaders, together with the school administrators, should consider coordinating with teachers' unions to implement a formal policy to recruit Black male educators. However, this formal policy should offer incentives for Black men to pursue careers in education. The policy should also outline the support that Black male hires would be given in order to retain them at the school and in the school district.

Utilize Professional Development To Improve Relationships

Many research studies have demonstrated a significant correlation between cultural competence and diversifying pedagogical practices, marked by improvements in student outcomes (Bustamante & Nelson, 2007; Bustamante et al., 2009). As such, high school administrators can facilitate ongoing cultural competency trainings that will model for the faculty and staff how to properly relate to and develop professional relationships with Black male students in ways that will help improve their level of engagement and performance in the school. For instance, the professional development should assist the faculty and staff in understanding the importance of displaying professional behaviors that are culturally supportive, responsive, that stimulate discovery and inquisitiveness, and that allow for an abundance of vicarious and verbal persuasion experiences, because according to the findings of this study, these experiences will help nurture their academic self-efficacy beliefs.

Provide A Diverse Range of Extracurricular Activities

Providing a diverse range of extracurricular activities that would increase Black male participation in sports or student associations gives them a chance to engage in other positive aspects of the school community, and thus plays an important role in aiding in the development of their self-efficacy beliefs in general. According to the findings of this study, involvement in extracurricular activities is a key school factor that helps a significant number of Black males concentrate on their educational goals while also helping them escape the urge to take part in risky behaviors out of school. Therefore, to better support Black male students, it is suggested that high school administrators devise policies that: 1) ensure that all Black male students participate in some type of extracurricular activity, 2) offer other school activity alternatives that will fit in the scope of the regular school schedule to accommodate Black males that cannot

participate in activities after school, and 3) differentiate the type of extracurricular activities that are offered to broaden exposure beyond the school and surrounding community.

Build Appropriate Community Partnerships

High school administrators must be deliberate about creating strong community partnerships that are aimed at exclusively supporting the Black male student population. Black male students can benefit significantly from having positive interactions with Black men as role models and mentors based on the findings of this study and previous studies. For this purpose, mentorship should be embedded in the culture of the school environment. As shown by the literature, mentoring programs are shown to have a positive effect on a students' attitude about school, improve a students' chance at academic success as well as increase graduation rates (Bonner et al., 2008; Grantham, 2004; Noguera, 2003; Strayhorn, 2008). Thus, implementing mentoring programs in) high schools wherein Black male students make up at least 40% of the school's population, 2) high schools that demonstrate the need to raise Black male academic achievement, minimally meeting the national high school graduation rate of 80% or higher, and 3) high schools that are affected by poverty would assist a greater number of Black males in developing essential social and academic skills, helping to further promote academic achievement for this population of students (Strayhorn, 2008).

Furthermore, it is highly recommended that high school administrators optimize Black male professionals as volunteers to help Black male students plot a course for success. In many cases, school administrators will find that various local and national organizations such as the fraternities, 100 Black Men, My Brother Keepers programs are ready to support high schools in modeling for Black males, the skills needed to manage the complexities of an academic career,

such as finishing high school and pursuing postsecondary education. In exchange, Black male students are given opportunities to engage in life-enhancing experiences in the school.

Petition For Supplementary Funds

Discoveries made from this study suggest that high school administrators will need to engage collaboratively with district leadership in order for substantial change to occur around Black male academic achievement matters. In addition to effective collaboration, administrators should also proposition their district school leaders and local Board of Education to stipulate additional funding and resources that will enable them to improve on serving the needs of their Black male student populations such as enhancing professional development, increasing personnel, expanding the extracurricular program, and other related educational materials. According to a report produced by the Brookings Institution (2017), when schools are well-funded, the school is likely to experience improved outcomes, comprising higher student test scores, improved graduation rates, and other increased indicators of student achievement.

Recommendations for Future Research

There remains an urgent need for research relating to raising Black male academic achievement, especially during this era of ESSA. It is therefore important for future researchers to consider replicating this qualitative study, as doing so may enhance the generalizability of the findings for widespread practice in public high schools across the United States. In order to achieve this objective, the researcher suggests that future studies should explore:

1. Expanding the current study in high-poverty public high schools that are successfully raising Black male academic achievement. Researchers could examine the leadership actions of those school administrators and determine if they are optimizing similar or other unidentified school-level factors to help raise Black male academic

- achievement. For instance, further research studies could reveal how culturally sensitive these school leaders are in responding to the challenges of their Black male high school students.
2. Replicating the study to explore the experiences of twelfth grade Black male students and the school-level factors they feel have been key to raising their academic achievement levels. Surveying the attitudes and opinions of Black male high school seniors about their high school experiences and the effect these experiences had on their academic success could provide insight into in-school motivations; information of this sort is central to effectively addressing the Black male dropout crisis.
 3. Replicating this study in charter public high schools across several states to gather greater insight into the five school-level factors that were identified. It is important to conduct research in charter public high schools that have large Black male populations comparable to the populations that were described in this study. Thus, replication can more accurately characterize the school-level factors, which is necessary to address the academic achievement issue that exists for Black males.
 4. Conducting research on the short and long-term potential effects of the five school-level factors on Black male academic achievement. For example, researchers could examine the immediate potential outcomes for consideration—as measured by graduation and college enrollment rates—while further study could examine the lasting potential outcomes for consideration, such as the impact of higher self-efficacy levels for Black males on their academic performance in college.

In closing, the underachievement of Black male high school students is systemic throughout the United States, and consequently, it is essential that educators confront this urgent

public education issue with improved top-down federal policies and reform efforts, resources, and practices which are most appropriate to increasing graduation rates for Black male high school students.

Personal Reflection

As described in detail in Chapter 3, a qualitative research method was employed to gather data on the perceptions of high school administrators' concerning school-level factors which best supported the academic success of Black male students' (Creswell, 2013). I deemed this an appropriate method to carry out the research project because according to Creswell (2013), this method provided for an in-depth probe into a phenomenon of personal and professional concern. Based upon my recent experience, I still agree that the qualitative research methodology was most suitable for this research topic because I was able to get a better understanding about some of the underlying reasons given for Black male underachievement in addition to understanding how to best mitigate this systemic problem. In addition, the qualitative research methodology equipped me with the insights to develop a realistic and credible conceptual framework for effectively raising Black male academic achievement in public high schools.

However, out of my recent experience I can also attest to one key challenge that this method of research presents – the inability to efficiently manipulate the data collection process. The timeline earmarked for this project was drastically hindered by the data collection process; however, upon reflection I don't believe I would change the collection methods. The challenges and delays I encountered do not compensate for my study being accepted by a large school district as an external researcher. In the end, I wouldn't exchange the years it took to obtain this doctoral degree plus all the challenges encountered as I am certain that the character

development which transpired during the process will certainly and forever impact my personal and professional life.

Overall, the guidance and decisions that have been associated with determining the research topic, questions, methodology, analysis process, case studies, advisor, and committee members made for a rewarding doctoral experience which energizes me to replicate this study as a professional practice. Additionally, successfully undertaking of this process brings me to believe that I am equipped to continue conducting qualitative research as well as to help guide future doctoral students in: 1) forming relevant research questions, 2) designing an appropriate research methodology, 3) selecting the appropriate data collection tools, and 4) analyzing data and relating the findings to the literature. Moreover, the insights gained from the interviews, merely demonstrated the need for greater literature to be produced as underachievement is likely a systemic public high school problem for other male students of color. For this reason, I desire to continue conducting relevant education research related to this topic.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Sample Email Invitation to the School Administrators

Dear Mr./Mrs. (blank):

My name is Sharon L. Jones, and I am a doctoral student in Virginia Tech's Educational Leadership and Policy Studies program. I am writing to request your involvement in a qualitative research study titled: *School-level Factors in Public High Schools that Help Raise Academic Achievement for Black Male Students*. Involvement in the study consists of participation in a one hour taped interview, at a time and day convenient to you.

This qualitative research study will concentrate on the perceptions of high school administrators who have successfully raised academic achievement of their Black male students. You were identified as potential participant because of the progress your school has made in increasing the number of Black males who graduate from high school on time. To that end, I invite you to read the attached consent form carefully for a deeper understanding of the research study.

If you would like to get involved in this research study, please read, sign, and return the attached consent form. Following receipt of your signed consent form, you will receive a call or email to:

- confirm your participation in the study
- ensure clarity around your involvement
- to address questions or concerns
- to schedule your phone or video conference interview

However, if you are not interested in participating or are unavailable, please express this via email as well.

Thanks in advance for considering involvement in this qualitative research study. Your contribution will prove beneficial in disclosing school-level factors that other high school administrators can replicate to raise academic achievement for their Black male students.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Sharon L. Jones, Co-Principal Investigator

Appendix B

Research Study Consent Form

We are asking you to participate in a research study titled - *School-level Factors in Public High Schools that Help Raise Academic Achievement for Black Male Students*. We will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. This study is led by both Dr. William Glenn, Associate Professor in the School of Education at Virginia Tech and Sharon Jones, Virginia Tech doctoral candidate.

The primary objective of this study is to identify specific school-level factors they optimize to raise achievement for Black male students. Such an exploration from the school leaders' perspective is essential to classifying school-level factors, including any efficacy-nurturing practices, that most effectively produce successful outcomes for the Black males and proliferating these best practices throughout the educational and policy landscape.

Why am I being asked to participate in a research study?

We invite you to get involved in this research study because you are a school administrator who has shown evidence of raising Black male student academic achievement levels (e.g. showing growth and gains in their graduation rankings over a four-year period).

Purposive sampling was used to stipulate specific characteristics about the schools that are consistent with the phenomenon of significance and the population that is being studied. A select number of ABC Public School System that met the minimum criteria outlined below were considered for participation in the study. Selection indicators included:

1. Student enrollments over 700
2. Black student populations that made up over half of the overall student population and Black male populations that made up at least 40% of the Black student population
3. Black male students graduating at a rate above 75% over four consecutive years
4. Black male student graduation rates that outpaced the 4-year graduation rates for both Black students and Black male students at the national, state, and regional levels

How many people will be studied?

School administrators from other states may be included in the study. However, we plan to include at least six high school administrators from your school district.

What must I understand regarding this research study?

The study will focus on the perceptions and practices of high school administrators who are successful at educating Black males. Research is limited in this area; thus, this study will build upon the current literature and provide evidence of effective practices that can serve as a foundation for future research in public high schools. Given the purpose of this study, the research questions for investigation are:

1. What school-level factors are high school administrators optimizing to raise Black male academic achievement?
2. How are the identified school-level factors optimized in order to raise Black male academic achievement?
3. To what extent are the school-level practices consistent with practices that promote academic self-efficacy in students?

These questions focus on identifying existing practices in high schools that present evidence of effectiveness for Black male students and the findings are intended to inform the development of school-level factors and efficacy-nurturing practices that other administrators can use to encourage high achievement among their Black male students.

What will we ask you to do?

We are asking you to participate in a one-hour tape-recorded phone or in-person interview, on a day and time scheduled at your convenience. In addition, you will have the option to review your interview transcript once the data is transliterated.

What are the advantages of my participation in this study?

Information from this study may benefit other high school administrators who serve similar students and face similar educational challenges nationwide. In addition, by presenting a set of successful strategies and practices, such insights could guide the development of education policies and refine high school practices that are aligned with the vision of raising Black male achievement and closing the achievement gap.

What is going to happen if I say yes, I wish to be in this research?

- You will be contacted by the co-Principal Investigator, Sharon Jones, who will address any other questions, comments or concern you might have.
- You are agreeing to participate in a one-hour tape-recorded phone or in-person interview, at a time and day convenient to you.

Is there any way that being in this research might be a risk for me?

Confidentiality of the study's participants is central to ethical research practice and is an obligation to the researchers. The researchers do not anticipate any risks from participating in this research. Therefore, your identity will be kept anonymous and controlled, in accordance with the ethical standards and protocols established by the school districts, the schools, and the Virginia Tech

Institutional Review Board. All participants will be de-identified by pseudonyms in the findings and discussion sections of the dissertation.

What happens to the information collected for the research?

The results of this research study will be presented in summary form to the participating school administrators/school district and as part of a dissertation.

Who should I contact before, during and after the research study?

Sharon L. Jones, Co-Principal Researcher
 Cell: (704) 578-3606
 Email: Sharonlj12@gmail.com or sljones2@vt.edu

Statement of Consent

We kindly ask you to sign your name below if you're willing to have this interview taped. You can still take part in this study if you are not prepared to have the interview taped. Though, it is highly recommended that the interview be tape-recorded to gather the most precise responses for relevant transcription.

- I do not wish to have this interview recorded.**
- I am prepared to have this interview recorded.**

I have read through the information described above and have obtained responses to any inquiries I asked. I consent to playing a role in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

Signature of person obtaining consent

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Your signature will serve as your consent to get involved in this research. We shall provide you with a signed copy for your records.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol Guide

Please allow me the opportunity to read the following information before we start the taped interview session:

1. Your time is very much appreciated today. The purpose of this study is to investigate how high schools leverage various school-level factors in their efforts to raise academic achievement for their Black male populations. Such an exploration is essential to identifying the factors, including any efficacy-nurturing practices, that most effectively produce successful outcomes for the Black males.
2. You were selected to participate in this study because your school shows evidence of optimizing academic achievement for Black male students – (blank percent) have graduated on time in the past four years.
3. You will undergo a one-hour interview that will be tape recorded, responding to six interview questions. If I find it necessary during the interview, I will politely signal you to move to the next question to complete the interview in a timely manner. Additionally, I may record notes, during the interview, which are related to your responses and comments.
4. I assure you that you and the school's identity will be held in strictest confidence with the use of assigned pseudo names. Field notes and interview recordings will be secured in a safe place, kept in my possession.
5. Remember that your participation is voluntary, and you may stop participating any time without penalty from me or your school district.
6. What questions might you have before we start the tape-recorded interview?
7. Do I have your permission to begin and record the interview?

I will now define the following terms as they are defined for this research study:

- **Academic Achievement.** Refers to the proportion of Black male students finishing high school on time at high rates.
- **School-level Factors.** Aspects of the school environment such as curriculum, instruction, facilities, resources, teachers, support staff, and the climate, among others, that communicates the school's character, principles, perceptions, beliefs, practices, and rules which influence student outcomes (Keefe, Kelley, & Miller, 1985).

- **Academic Self-efficacy.** Refers to a student's way of perceiving oneself relative to their academic performance in school (Schunk & Pajares, 2002).

Do you have any questions or comments regarding the terms I just defined? (pause) We will now begin with the interview questions:

Interview Questions:

1. Why is your school so successful or progressing at elevated levels?
2. Why are the Black male students at your school so successful and/or progressing at elevated levels?
3. Tell me about the challenges and obstacles faced while working to optimize academic achievement for your Black male students?
4. What specific school-level factors are helping to optimize academic achievement for your Black male students?
5. Why do these school-level factors work to optimize academic achievement for your Black male students?
6. What other comments would you like to share for the benefit of this study and this interview? Is there anything else I should know about the success of your school?

Appendix D

Document Review Template

Document Review Questions	Yes	No	Supporting Evidence/ Observations
1. School Climate – is there evidence of factors specifically directed at engaging and making Black male students feel safe at school?			
2. Quality Teaching & Learning –is there evidence, in the instructional program, of factors specifically directed at optimizing Black male students standardized test performance and graduation?			
3. Supportive School-based Networks – is there evidence of staff specifically assigned to address Black males’ graduation from high school? College and career readiness?			
4. Adequate Resources and Facilities –is there evidence of school resources and/or aspects of the facilities geared toward stimulating Black males’ engagement in school?			
5. Academic Efficacy – is there evidence of practices specifically directed at nurturing Black males’ academic efficacy?			