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Creating A Framework For Success For High School African American Males: A Policy Advocacy Document

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CREATING A FRAMEWORK FOR SUCCESS FOR HIGH SCHOOL AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES: A POLICY ADVOCACY DOCUMENT

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ABSTRACT

The policy advocacy document is an alternative to the traditional doctoral dissertation. This approach arose from the educational administration preparation reform agenda which calls for more thoughtful approaches to educational policy development, a concern that educational leadership express itself in a moral context, and a desire to develop reflective practices in administration. (Browder, 1995)

This document attempts to ensure public schools, high schools in particular, are providing African American males with the skills and knowledge necessary to be academically successful so that they are given the opportunity and support necessary to achieve economic and social advancements throughout life. The policy advocated proposes that a series of curriculum modifications and academic support systems be put in place to guide and support all aspects of the educational experience necessary for the academic achievement of African American males. In addition to the academic supports already in place for all students in Reserve High School District, these additional supports include: expanding double block math and literacy courses, as well as summer math enrichment and math tutoring opportunities, creating on-demand math instructional videos, revising the literacy course curriculum and identifying additional students to enroll in literacy courses, restructuring advisory periods, and providing training for all staff in culturally relevant teaching. The envisioned impact of implementing this policy is that it will not only lead to increased academic success for African American males but, ultimately, to students of all ethnicities and gender within the school and district.

DEDICATION

A special thank you to my mother, Lydia McKinley, for your continued love, support and encouragement throughout my life's journey. It is you who played the lead role in making me the man I am today. To my son, Ilandus Hampton, Jr., the opportunity to be your father inspired me to not only be your role-model in life, but also in education. As Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." To my family and friends, you have inspired and encouraged me to grow and reach for my goals. I am grateful for your love, friendship, and unwavering support. To all of the teachers who have educated me, cared for me, encouraged me, inspired me, believed in me, and challenged me, including Dr. Norm Weston, and the NLU professors, thank you. My love for learning, is a result of each and every single one of you.

Preface

"Harlem" by Langston Hughes (1991)

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore –

and then run?

Does it stink like rotten meat?

Or crust and sugar over –

like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags

Like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

According to the 14th Amendment of the *Constitution of the United States*, all are entitled to equal protection under the law, yet as Darling-Hammond (2004) points out, the realization of this ideal by many Americans, in particular African Americans, has required long struggle, not only simply to gain access to public institutions, such as schools, but access to an empowering form of education that can enable people to think critically and powerfully, to take control of the course of their own learning and, thus, to determine their own fate, rather than merely to follow dictates prescribed by others. John Dewey (1938) suggests that a good education should have both a societal purpose and

purpose for the individual student; therefore, educators are responsible for providing students with experiences that are immediately valuable and enable the students to contribute to society. This policy advocacy dissertation (PADD) attempts to ensure that public schools provide African American males with the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve their dreams of academic, and subsequently, societal and economic advancement. The intent of a PADD is to develop instructional delivery systems and policies using reflective practice and other devices as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education (Browder, 1995). The basis of a PADD rests on critical theory, which directly addresses the moral and ethical issues in both policy formulation and administrative decision-making. According to Browder, policy advocacy is a conceptual outgrowth of attempts to develop instructional delivery systems using reflective practice and other devices as a means for supporting and promoting programmatic reforms. The PADD format, therefore, emphasizes research-based arguments and reflective insights into policy analysis and related administrative requirements applied to the advocated policy (Browder).

As Browder (1995) explains, policy advocacy emphasizes three components of educational reform, ultimately responding to (1) a need for more thoughtful approaches to educational policy development, (2) a concern that educational leadership expresses itself in a moral context, and (3) a desire to develop reflective practices in administration. Through policy advocacy, a series of new leadership metaphors has emerged, presenting a fundamental belief that moral leadership in education today concerns itself with both pedagogy and values (Murphy, 1992). As a public school administrator, my goal is to provide, through my PADD, research and recommendations in regards to improving the

academic achievement of African American male students. The PADD format consists of six interlocking elements: (1) a vision statement for the policy being advocated, (2) a need for the policy through analysis, (3) an argument for the policy, (4) a statement for the policy, (5) a plan of action for the policy, and (6) a monitoring system to ensure implementation of and accountability for the policy.

In chapter one, I depict my journey as an African American male, which ultimately has shaped my vision and desire to address the unique educational needs of African American males. In chapter two, I convey a policy perspective through a needs analysis that speaks to the realities of how societal components have impacted the academic achievement of African American males. This section frames the demand for this policy, for which I present the argument in chapter three.

In chapter four, eight research questions are laid out to determine if the data is urgent and support the policy. Finally, in chapters five and six, I define the advocated policy, providing an account of how African American males within one high school district perform, outline a plan of action to support the policy, and provide a system for monitoring the policy. The conclusion of the dissertation is a personal reflection of my research, which has led to the development of this policy to assist educators improve the academic achievement of African American males in order to ensure that their dreams are no longer deferred but, instead, may explode with endless possibilities.

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CHAPTER ONE: VISION STATEMENT

Throughout my career in public education, I have heard a variety of excuses as to why some students are not achieving: either the student is being raised by a single parent, the student lives in poverty, the student is reading below grade level, the student cannot do arithmetic, the student's parents have limited education, the student needs special instruction, *or* the student cannot achieve because the student is a minority, more specifically, an African American male. Certainly, there should be no inequality between the education of a white male student and the education of an African American male student, but I have personally experienced this disparity.

As an African American male, I was raised in a single parent African American home with seven brothers and sisters near the end of the industrial age when factory jobs were still plentiful for all. My working mother did not have the opportunity to attend parent/teacher conferences or other school events. In fact, she could rarely even attend my sporting events. It is not that my mother did not believe in her children's education; she simply did not have the time to get closely involved with our schooling. Instead, my mother spent nearly every waking moment working in order to ensure that her children had the essentials of life: food, clothing, shelter, and a safe environment. As one can imagine, raising eight children in the second half of the 20th century as a single mother, on a single income, was a very daunting and difficult task, particularly as the industrial age ended and factories began closing in the 1970's and 1980's. During that time, many lost their jobs, including my mother who had worked as a secretary at a steel mill. As a result, my mother had to go on public assistance to care for my seven siblings and me.

By today's societal definition of poor, we were definitely poor; however, when I was a young boy, interestingly enough, we were not considered poor until my mother became unemployed. Prior to my mother losing her job, we had all of the essentials, and from time to time, we even enjoyed a surplus. I lived in an area where the schools had some of the best teachers. However, once the jobs were gone, our life changed immediately: we went from "having it all" to having "little or nothing." This was devastating for my family. Needless to say, times became very difficult. I could not bear to see my mother struggle, but her hardship became a motivating factor for me. My mother always told us that we had to learn how to read, write, and do arithmetic. She believed if we learned multiplication, we could do any math. Since I believed in my mother and I always wanted to please her, I learned my multiplication facts. In addition to learning my multiplication tables, at the age of five, I decided that I would be the best football player who ever lived because, like many other young African American males, I knew that athletics could be my ticket to attend college, in my case, my dream school: Penn State.

Unlike so many of my African American peers, I learned at an early age that in order for me to make it to Penn State, I had to earn good grades. I, therefore, pursued my dream by reading and doing arithmetic all the time, which resulted in me being placed in advanced and honor classes throughout grade school. When I entered high school, however, I experienced the harsh reality that I was no longer considered the best and would no longer be placed in advanced or honor classes. In fact, my entrance exam scores labeled me as "average," and I had to take remedial reading the first semester of my freshman year. Teachers learned quickly that I was a student who did

not perform well on standardized tests even though I had no problem with classroom work and assessments. Unfortunately, some of my teachers actually believed *and* said that I would never achieve or amount to anything. As an African American male, my dream of being successful was not only deferred by those teachers: it was nearly demolished.

Despite the teachers who believed and even said that I would not amount to anything, the redemptive power of my teachers who *did* believe in me restored my dream and helped shape all that I am today. Although these teachers did not have a lot to distribute as tangible rewards, they used positive affirmation and praise to show me how proud they were of my academic accomplishments in the classroom. These affirming teachers convinced me that it was not enough to be an athlete. Instead, they stressed the importance of being a *student-athlete.* Because of their belief in me, I wanted to be a great scholar so I would not let them down. My affirming teachers' encouragement empowered me and became food for my soul. Their on-going support allowed me to finish high school with a 'B' average and a respectable ACT score. Upon graduation, rather than Penn State, I headed to Morehouse College where I studied for two years before completing my bachelor's degree in finance at Chicago State University. Soon after, I earned a master's degree in education, which propelled me, ultimately, to pursue a doctoral degree in educational leadership. Currently, I am a central office administrator for a high school district.

Vision Statement

The genuine love and redemptive power of many of my high school teachers restored my motivation to reach well beyond my original dream of completing an

undergraduate degree. Because of my own success story, I believe all students, especially African American males, can achieve when teachers have the resources and innate compassion to motivate and support them. The purpose of this Policy Advocacy Dissertation, therefore, is to research patterns of African American male academic achievement, determine which educational practices best support African American males and, based on that information, formulate a policy that will result in this group's overall improved academic achievement.

Through my research, I hope to positively impact the lives of all African American males by providing school districts with a policy that will help to decrease the academic achievement gap between African American males and other student groups. According to Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003), there is no excuse for this gap. Thernstrom and Thernstrom state, "If we shut our eyes to this painful reality, the problem will never be fixed. Ignorance is often comfortable ground on which to stand, and yet this is a problem that requires the sort of radical reform that only discomfort and anger will inspire" (p. 271). In addition to being morally unacceptable, the academic achievement gap corrupts the fabric of American society and endangers our future in regards to the lives of African American males and their legacies. Thus, the implementation of a policy to enhance African American male academic achievement will help to close the gap as it provides greater educational equity, efficiency, choice, and excellence. As I have learned through my own experience, education is essential for success in life; therefore, implementing a policy to increase the educational achievements of African American males is my vision for making their deferred – or perhaps nearly destroyed – dreams a reality.

Statement of the Problem

In almost every benchmark, African American boys across the nation are falling behind academically (Tyre, 2006, 2008). For this reason, educators cannot continue to overlook the persistent achievement gap between African American males and their peers. One root cause appears to be the increasing rates of divorce and single motherhood, which have created a generation of fatherless boys. According to Tyre (2006), 40% of boys are being raised without their biological fathers. Even more alarming is the national statistic that single mothers are raising 85% of our African American males (Varlas, 2005). A second root cause seems to be low academic expectations for African American males. Reports from the American Council in Education, the Education Trust, and the Schott Foundation show that African American male students spend more time in special education, spend less time in honors and college prep courses, and receive more disciplinary suspensions and expulsions than any other group in U.S. schools today (Varlas). In fact, a 2004 study by the Schott Foundation for Public Education found that although African American males make up only 8.6% of public school enrollment, they represent 23% of school suspensions and 22% of school expulsions (Varlas). Additionally, elementary school boys are two times more likely than girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities and twice as likely to be placed in special education classes (Tyre, 2006, 2008). While some may think this problem is genetic, Kunjufu (1995, 2002) is adamant that the underachievement of African American males is systemic. The academic achievement gap, therefore, may be attributed to the misinterpretation and abuse of zero tolerance policies, negative peer pressure, inattention to gender learning styles,

and lack of commitment to creating a nurturing culture for our African American males. I personally experienced the debilitating combination of inadequate resources and low expectations, which exists in many schools that serve largely African American male populations.

When considering all the stereotypical excuses that are given as to why many African American males are not achieving today, I think of myself. If someone had taken my profile when I was much younger, they would have probably concluded that rather than making it in this world, I would wind up, at worst, dead and, at best, in jail. I constantly ask myself, "What made me different from so many of my peers who did not achieve their dreams? Why did I have the will to achieve rather than fail? Why didn't I fall into some of the same societal traps as others?" Perhaps witnessing my mother's struggle, combined with her determination to give her children the best, no matter what, contributed to my success. Or, perhaps, it was seeing some of the mistakes my brothers and sisters made. Maybe it was viewing the epic series *Roots* (Bird, n.d.) and making a promise to myself that I would have a desk job and use my hands for signing documents, rather for than manual labor. Or, maybe, it was the teachers who empowered me to be the best I could be, *or* the teachers who said I would *not* achieve. After much reflection, I believe it is a combination of all of the aforementioned. In light of my own experience, I wonder, what is still keeping many African American males from achieving at high levels?

I may be an African American male who beat the odds, but data show that a majority of our African American males are not achieving academically. According to The Schott Foundation for Public Education's "The Urgency of Now" report, 52%

of this population did not graduate from high school in 2010, as compared to 78% of white, non-Latino males who did earn a diploma (Jackson & Beaudry, 2012). Additionally, approximately three hundred and fifty of every 100,000 African American males under the age of eighteen are incarcerated, and more African American males receive their GED in prison than graduate from college (Varlas, 2005). As stated earlier, African American males are also being placed in special education at alarmingly disproportionate rates. As Varlas (2005) points out, studies have found that African American males nationally are nearly three times as likely as white males to be diagnosed as mentally retarded. In fact, in some metropolitan districts, as many as 30% of African American males are enrolled in special education classes (Varlas). Such dismal statistics portend a bleak future for many African American males. This national epidemic must be addressed before the dreams of these young men are forever deferred.

CHAPTER TWO: NEEDS ANALYSIS

According to Smith (2004), the United States government and its administrative apparatus allocates "values" to groups of people by enacting policies. Smith (2004) describes these "values" as the benefits, opportunities, responsibilities, costs, risks, and burdens conferred by the state on groups within it jurisdiction. Unfortunately, many of our government's policies involve costs, risks, and burdens that, according to the Schott Foundation's "The Urgency of Now" report, have contributed to the crisis situation currently faced by many African American males (Jackson & Beaudry, 2012). "The Urgency of Now" report explains that over the last 25 years, social, educational, and economic outcomes for African American males have been more systemically devastating than the outcomes for any other gender, racial, or ethnic group (Jackson & Beaudry). In fact, African American males are more chronically unemployed and under employed, are less healthy, have access to fewer healthcare resources, die much younger, and are many times more likely to be sent to jail for periods significantly greater than those experienced by males of other racial and ethnic groups (Jackson & Beaudry).

Perhaps the greatest costs, risks, and burdens contributing to the crisis of African American males can be attributed to American public education policies. African American males consistently attain low educational levels. According to the U.S. Department of Education's "Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 1972-2009" report, African American males comprise the greatest number of 16 – 24 year olds either not enrolled in high school or lacking high school credentials, (Chapman, Laird, Ifill, & KewalRamani, 2011). Additionally, according

to Nogeura (2003), although approximately 500,000 African American males are enrolled in college, another 800,000 are imprisoned. Lawrence (2014) contends that more juvenile prisons are being built to contend with what is not being addressed by our educational, social, economic, and political policies. With these facts in mind, it is not surprising that African American males, on average, are more likely to attend the most segregated and least resourced public schools in the nation (Jackson & Beaudry, 2012).

The poor conditions in which many African American males are forced to learn are exacerbated by the fact that boys, in general, are less interested in school because our classrooms are more geared towards the learning styles of girls and are largely taught by females (Gurian & Henley, 2002; Gurian & Stevens, 2004). Adding to African American males' crisis situation is the lack of male role models for many. In addition to being educated in largely feminized public school rooms, a large number of African American males are being raised by women. Cartwright and Henriksen (2012) report that approximately 25% of American children are being raised in homes led primarily by mothers and grandmothers. Additionally, according to Cartwright and Henriksen, only 50% of divorced fathers see their children, and even fewer never married fathers are in contact with their offspring. Overall, 69% of school-aged African American students live in fatherless homes (Cartwright and Henriksen).

Although these statistics are alarming, I am a *merchant of hope*: As an African American male who directly experienced injustices that should have never existed in an academic setting, I feel compelled to address every societal entity and system that almost caused my dreams to be deferred. Consequently, the remainder of this chapter

will analyze empirical evidence regarding the moral/ethical, educational, economic, and social/political implications of the marginalization of African American males.

Moral/Ethical Analysis

Dictionary.com defines "moral" as "of, pertaining to, or concerned with the principles or rules of right conduct or the distinction between right and wrong" (n.d.). "Ethical," as defined by *Dictionary.com*, means "pertaining to or dealing with morals or principals of morality; pertaining to right and wrong conduct" (n.d.). With these definitions in mind, I believe that our country is ethically and morally obligated to provide for the educational needs of all citizens. Referring to the 2002 iteration of the U. S. Department of Education's (n.d.) Elementary and Secondary Education Act, called No Child Left Behind, (Wood, 2004) asks:

> Who could object to a law that promises no child would be left behind when it comes to educating our youth? After all, is it not the great promise of our public school system – that all children, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, gender, creed, color, or disability will have equal access to an education that allows them to enjoy the freedoms and exercise the responsibility of citizenship in our democracy? (p. vii)

In response, I state firmly that no child should be left behind. It is American society's moral and ethical obligation to educate all students who enter the public schoolhouse.

Governmental policies over the past two decades, however have served to improve females' educational resources while neglecting males'. In 1990, Carol Gilligan announced to the world that America's adolescent girls were in crisis, stating, "'As the river of a girl's life flows into the sea of Western culture, she is in

danger of drowning or disappearing'" (Sommers, 2000, p.17). According to Sommers, Gilligan's statement piqued "the interest of the venerable and politically influential American Association University of Women (AAUW)…" (p. 20). This led to the AAUW spending over $150,000 just to promote Gilligan's study's findings. As a result, in 1994, the U.S. Congress passed the Gender Equity in Education Act (Title IX), which categorizes girls as an "under-served population" on par with other discriminated-against minorities (Sommers). Additionally, millions of dollars in grants were awarded to study the plight of girls and how to cope with institutionalized biases against them (Sommers). Thus, while the implementation of Title IX spotlighted females' educational plight, the school-related problems of other discriminated-against minorities, in particular African American males, have remained hidden in the shadows of societal disinterest and neglect.

Many statistics point to the fact that boys appear to exist on the more fragile side of the gender gap. Sommers (2000) reports that although African American females rank lower on national tests than their white counterparts, they test significantly higher than African American boys. In fact, across the nation, according to Sommers, African American males rank last in all testing categories. Sommers also reports that the U.S. Department of Education documented in the eighties and nineties that a higher percentage of boys than girls reported they "usually" or "often" came to school without supplies or without having done their homework. Additionally, surveys of fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders show girls consistently reporting that they do more homework than boys, to the extent that by the twelfth grade, males are four times as likely as females to not complete their homework (Sommers).

Over the past two decades, there has been a steady accumulation of evidence that male and female brains work differently, which contributes to many boys' difficulty in the classroom. According to Gurian and Henley (2002), women use both sides of their brains more symmetrically than men, and women's hearing and sense of smell, in general, is much more sensitive. Additionally, as Brooks (2006) reports, boys and girls process colors differently. As a result, young girls gravitate towards an array of red, green, and orange crayons, whereas young boys generally stick to black, gray, and blue. Brooks also states that men enjoy taking risks more than women and are more prone to violence. Interestingly, males who have congenital adrenal hyperplasia, which leads to high male hormone secretions, are more likely to choose violent stories than females without the condition (Brooks). Gurian and Henley, along with Black (2006), cite research that points to male brains being more attuned to spacial, mechanical functioning, while female brains function more in the verbal sphere. As a result, the male brain, in general, appears to be better suited for symbols, abstractions, diagrams, pictures, and objects moving through space, as opposed to words – both written and spoken – which dominate our classrooms and, thus, favor girls' usually stronger verbal learning styles (Gurian & Henley; Black). Therefore, just as men's and women's brains generally process the world differently, it stands to reason that they learn differently as well. Nevertheless, despite some efforts on the part of educators to differentiate learning for boys and girls, in most classrooms, both genders are still taught the same way (Brooks).

In regards to educational problems general to all males, the plight especially deepens for African American males. According to research reviewed by Prince

(2006), a huge pool of poorly educated African American men is becoming even more disconnected from mainstream society, and to a far greater degree than white and Hispanic men. With the shift from factory to information jobs, unskilled workers of all races have lost ground, but none more so than African Americans. By 2004, for example, 50% of African American men in their 20's who lacked a college education were jobless, as were 72% of high school dropouts, more than double the rates for white and Hispanic men (Eckholm, 2006). However, in a society where higher education is vital to economic success, more programs must be implemented to assist African American men graduate from high school ready for college success.

Chicago's Urban Prep Charter Academy is one educational institution established to specifically address this need. According to Grossman (2006), Urban Prep Charter Academy was designed to help African American boys, who have only a one-in-four chance of graduating from a Chicago public school, find academic success. The academy's college prep curriculum provides its male students with an eight-hour school day that includes double periods of English, after school activities, required community service, and internship opportunities (Grossman). In addition to such secondary institutions as Urban Prep Charter Academy, mentoring programs are also being established to meet the specific needs of African American males. For example, in 2004, the United Way of Metropolitan Chicago teamed with ComEd and Exelon to create the "Stay in School" initiative, which resulted in 92% of its participating seniors graduating from Chicago Public Schools and 82% participating in ACT preparation and college-level courses (Edwards, 2013).

Although school and after school programs throughout the country are being implemented to address the needs of African American males, there are not yet nearly enough. The National Urban League warned in 1992 that African American males were being attacked by a series of forces that, if allowed to go unchecked, could create a "lost generation" (Kuykendall, 2004). When our African American males become convinced they will not succeed academically, when they become convinced they will not make it in "mainstream" America, or even be welcomed in mainstream America, regardless of their achievements, many take whatever skills and ingenuity they possess to travel the "low road" of life. Without the skills and motivation necessary for legitimate prosperity, even high school graduates are more than likely to turn to unproductive pursuits, becoming easy prey to those who can enlist them in criminal and even violent activity. Therefore, the challenge for educators is to help more of our African American youth travel legitimately along life's "high road" because if this lost generation is not addressed, the nation as a whole will suffer the consequences. Thus, the education of African American males must become a national priority.

Educational Analysis

American society must carefully consider this question: What is the ultimate goal and purpose of education, particularly for African American males? The United States Constitution states that all should be provided with a free public education through grade 12. Free education, however, does not mean quality education. As an African American male, I have observed many minority districts staffed with teachers who are less than "highly qualified," defined by the U. S. Department of Education

(2004) as teachers holding a bachelor's degree, having gained full state certification, and being able to "prove that they know each subject they teach" (¶ 14). Allowing less than highly qualified teachers to teach appears to contribute to the achievement gap. According to the Education Policy Center at Michigan State University, recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers to work in disadvantaged schools can be effectively addressed only by targeting needy schools, rather than by policies that aim to recruit and retain more teachers across the board (Keller, 2004). Policy makers, therefore, should improve incentives for teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools, as well as oversee improvements in hiring practices; otherwise, too many well-prepared new teachers and their experienced counterparts will continue to shun high-poverty schools (Keller). Without incentives and better hiring practices, the majority of African American students will continue to receive instruction in deteriorating school facilities from teachers who often lack the experience, motivation, resources, and/or enthusiasm to effectively engage students in the learning process (Kozol, 1985).

I believe that educators who, like me, have experienced sub-par public educations would agree that many schools with African American majority populations are dealing with not only students lagging in reading, writing, and arithmetic skills, but with students dealing with social problems as well, in particular mimicking negative behaviors they witness in society. Emdin (2012) explains:

> A wide array of black male images in the media…take characteristics of black culture, tie them to anti-school identities, violence, misogyny, and use them as forms of entertainment. This means the world is inundated with scenarios that

> leave a false perception of black males that these youths must deal with when they enter classrooms. (p. 14)

The result, according to Emdin, is African American boys often acting out and generally underperforming in school. Citing Lindsey's personal experience with a group of high school African American males, Lindsey and Mabie (2012) write, "Low expectations almost inevitably led individuals to resign themselves to mediocre performance" (p. 36). Thus, until boys' problems are acknowledged, they cannot be addressed, and until they are addressed, another educational disparity is likely to persist: far more girls than boys going on to college (Sommers, 2000).

Unfortunately, because it happened to me as an African American male, and because of statements like those of Lindsey and Mabie (2012), I believe our schools have become a place where our African American boys are often discouraged from achieving at the highest levels. Our schools claim to educate all but often lack the wherewithal to motivate and support the students who need it most. Since students spend most of their day in school, our African American boys should be exposed to positive male role models. This appears to be the impetus for the all-male Urban Prep Academy, which opened during the fall of 2007 against the backdrop of a nationwide concern over the widening achievement gap between African-American boys and other students (Briggs, 2007). Noguera (2012) says that "today, single-sex schools are spreading based on the idea that young men are best educated when they're separated from girls in public and charter schools" (p. 10). The Urban Prep model, however, is still an anomaly. Rather than being taught by African American males, our African American boys are most often taught by white women who may not understand the

value system of an African American child or his cultural traditions and, thus, cannot provide culturally relevant pedagogy. In fact, 83% of all elementary school teachers in the United States are white women, and less than 1% are African American men, (Varlas, 2005). According to Denbo (2002), culturally relevant pedagogy assists students both maintain cultural integrity and achieve academic excellence. Lindsey and Mabie, therefore, advise providing a curriculum to which students can relate; otherwise, they warn, "Students who are unable to identify or care about the work in front of them will become alienated from the process of learning altogether" (p. 35).

In addition to providing African American boys with more African American male teachers and culturally relevant curricula, Noguera (2012) points to research that advocates the building of strong relationships between students and their teachers, as well as providing "a personalized learning environment with mentors, counseling, and other supports that make it possible for schools to intervene early and effectively when problems arise" (p. 11). Morris and Adeyemo (2012) also advocate small class sizes, publicizing students' scholarly achievements, and providing summer enrichment opportunities to boost African American male achievement. As Emdin (2012) points out, many African American male students become behavior problems in school in response to social expectations. Additionally, classrooms dominated by pedagogy that favors female learning styles also contribute to the behavior difficulties of many African American male students (Gurian & Henley, 2002; Gurian & Stevens, 2004). African American boys are often active, hands-on learners who cannot always meet teachers' expectations to sit quietly and passively all day. As a result, they are

often seen by their teachers as lacking self-control and become labeled as disruptive or hyperactive. Armstrong (1995), a former special education teacher, states:

> The traits that are associated with ADD-hyperactivity, distractibility, and impulsiveness can result from a number of causes. For example, a child may be hyperactive or inattentive because of being bored with a lesson, anxious about a bully, upset about a divorce, allergic to milk, temperamental by nature, or a hundred other things. Research suggests, though, that once adults have labeled and medicated the child – and the medication works – these more complex questions are all too often forgotten. By rushing to drugs and labels, we may be leaving more difficult problems to fester under the surface. (p. 42)

Howard Gardner purports that people have a unique blend of many intelligences, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic (Smith, 2002, 2008), which should be taken into consideration when teaching all students, particularly African American males.

Linguistic Intelligence

According to Gardner, linguistic learners are sensitive to spoken and written language; they have the ability to learn languages and the capacity to use language to accomplish certain goals (Smith, 2002, 2008). Linguistic intelligence includes the ability to effectively use language to express oneself rhetorically or poetically, and to use language as a means to remember information. Journalists, writers, poets, lawyers, and speakers are among the professionals who may be considered linguistic learners. Therefore, as educators, we must be persistent in teaching our students how to communicate effectively. “Ebonics,” a language created by African Americans, is

defined at its most "literal level" as "'black speech' (a blend of the words ebony 'black' and phonics 'sounds')" (Rickford, n.d., ¶1). Ebonics, also known as Black English and African American English, has its roots in African languages. According to Rickford, the Oakland, California school board, in 1996, "recognized [Ebonics] as the 'primary language of its majority African American students' and resolved to take it into account in teaching them standard or academic English" (¶ 1). As an African American male, I urge educators to teach our African American students academic English while taking into account that, for many, Ebonics is their first language. Additionally, as Husband (2012) contends, teachers should provide their African American male students with more culturally relevant texts. Husband also urges schools to reconsider discipline policies that exclude students from classrooms rather than keeping them in school and, thus, allowing them to advance their reading, writing, and speaking skills.

Logical-mathematical Intelligence

Gardner explains that logical-mathematical learners have the aptitude to analyze problems logically, carry out mathematical operations, and investigate issues scientifically (Smith, 2002, 2008). In other words, logical-mathematical intelligence entails the ability to detect patterns, reason deductively, and think logically. According to Tate (n.d.), however, "[t]raditionally, schools have provided African American students with few opportunities to connect mathematics to their lives and experiences" (¶ 1). Thus, I agree with Tate's assertion that "failing to provide African American students with curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are centered on

their experiences, cultures and traditions is a major obstacle to providing them with an empowering mathematical experience" (¶ 30).

Musical Intelligence

Gardner attests that musical learners have an appreciation of musical patterns, performances, and the composition of music (Smith, 2002, 2008). They can compose musical pitches, tones, and rhythms. Gardner suggests that musical intelligence runs almost structurally parallel to linguistic intelligence. Thus, as educators, we must encourage our musically intelligent students to listen to and learn to appreciate a variety of music. Anderson and Campbell (2011) advocate "equity pedagogy" (p. 2): taking a multicultural approach to music appreciation that goes beyond the bounds of traditional Western European culture. Anderson and Campbell explain, "*Equity pedagogy* is an important means by which teachers modify their teaching in ways that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, and social class groups…" (p. 2). Therefore, teaching African American students about music from around the world, including such African American-inspired rich musical traditions as blues, jazz, soul, and hip-hop, will not only expand their awareness of various musical traditions, but also validate their own culture and background.

Spatial Intelligence

Spatial intelligence, as Gardner indicates, involves the potential to recognize and use patterns of wide space and more confined areas (Smith, 2002, 2008). In other words, some students learn best by using tangible objects or manipulatives to make sense of concepts. As the Director of Fiscal Services, I notice a lot of teachers submit requisitions for math manipulatives, and yet when I visit the classrooms to observe

the use of the resources they have ordered, they are often neatly tucked away. I, therefore, agree with Husband (2012) who advocates the implementation of "active teaching methods" (p. 26) to improve the achievement of often restless African American males.

Interpersonal Intelligence

Gardner underscores that interpersonal learners have the ability to understand the intentions, motivations, and desires of other people (Smith, 2002, 2008). They know how to work effectively with others. This type of intelligence is something that every student, especially an African American male, needs to develop in order to function well both in school and in society. According to Ashley and Burke (2009), schools that implement restorative justice programs as an alternative to suspension and expulsion, teach their students accountability and improve the students' competency in regards to problem solving, effectively using dialogue and negotiation to solve problems, and relationship building. As a result, restorative justice schools improve their safety climate and, ultimately, keep more students in school, thus, advancing student academic achievement (Ashley & Burke).

Intrapersonal Intelligence

As Gardner explains, intrapersonal learners have a strong sense of self. In other words, intrapersonal learners have self-esteem and strength of character that can be used to solve internal problems (Smith, 2002, 2008). As educators, it is imperative that we help all students, especially our African American males, develop a strong sense of intrapersonal intelligence. For me, as an African American male, constant praise, positive affirmations, and being set up for success contributed to the

development of my intrapersonal intelligence. Morris and Adeyemo (2012) stress that positive "recognition is essential for all students and particularly important for African American male students as a way to counter negative statistics and stereotypes about their academic and intellectual abilities" (p. 31).

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

Finally, according to Gardner, bodily-kinesthetic learners use their body or parts of the body to solve problems (Smith, 2002, 2008). This type of intelligence deals with the ability to use mental abilities to coordinate bodily movements. According to Gurian and Henley (2001), "Movement seems to help boys not only stimulate their brains but also manage and relieve impulsive behaviors" (p. 47). In my direct experience, however, not all teachers are aware of this research. For example, during my visit to one particular classroom, I noticed a student standing at his desk. I surmised there were enough chairs in the classroom; consequently, because I was concerned about the student's comfort, I asked the teacher, "Why is that young man always standing?" She explained that "Jonathan" learns best standing and humming. She further explained that she had to teach her other students how to adjust to him standing and humming. Observing the student in another classroom later that day, I heard the teacher constantly telling Jonathan to, "Sit down." In fact, this white female teacher told him to "sit down" at least three times within a thirty-minute period. Finally, she pointed to the door and strangely enough, Jonathan knew to go back to his homeroom teacher's class with his assignments. I then followed the student back to his homeroom teacher's class where he stood at a desk that appeared to have been designated for him. Not only did he complete his assignment, but he began helping

other students in the classroom as well. Obviously, the female African American homeroom teacher had taken the time to connect with this student, understand his learning style, and teach the entire class how to adjust to his differences and embrace his individual needs.

Afterwards, I had a conversation with the white female teacher to understand her perceptions of Jonathan's behavior. During our brief conversation, I sensed her frustration with the African American boy. She indicated that she and other teachers had met with Jonathan's parents and suggested that he may have some level of hyperactivity; therefore, the teacher team felt he might need to be medicated and placed in a special education program. According to the teacher, however, Jonathan's parents vehemently refused because they knew he was successful in his homeroom, which meant that the other teachers were doing something wrong. The parent/teacher meeting concluded with the decision that after Jonathan had been told three times to sit down, he would return to his homeroom teacher where a space would be designated for him to complete his work. I was grateful for the level of understanding and compassion the homeroom teacher had for Jonathan, as well as for his parents who would not allow their son to be medicated and moved into special education. I was extremely saddened, however, that the other teachers did not appear to understand Jonathan's preferred bodily-kinesthetic modality of learning. Certainly, other students share his need to move in order to attain academic success, including my own son who was also recommended for special education by a white female teacher because of his preferred bodily-kinesthetic learning style. I agree with Gurian and Henley (2001), therefore, who assert that teachers – even at the high school level

– should "[a]llow movement in the classroom, especially for those students who think better when they're moving around" (p. 308). In general, I believe that schools need to offer more professional development to teachers in the area of multiple intelligences.

Habits of Mind

Like Gardner, Costa and Kallick (2000) have explored the complexities of human thinking and behavior as they relate to learning. They suggest that there are sixteen ways in which humans display intelligent behavior, which they refer to as "habits of mind": persisting, managing impulsivity, listening with understanding and empathy, thinking flexibly, thinking about thinking, striving for accuracy, questioning and posing problems, applying past knowledge to new situations, thinking and communicating with clarity and precision, gathering data through all senses, creating, imagining, innovating, responding with wonderment and awe, taking responsible risks, finding humor, thinking interdependently, and remaining open to continuous learning.

Undoubtedly, these habits of mind provide a theoretical view of the many ways students can take in, process, and learn new information. In fact, they appear to honor the individual differences that so many of our African American boys possess by emphasizing broad character traits that are not tied to a single intelligence modality (Costa & Kallick). According to Costa and Kallick, when educators hold students accountable for intelligent behavior, students take it as a signal that educators think they are smart, and they come to accept this judgment. Lindsey and Mabie (2012) cite the effect of holding students to high expectations from Lindsey's own experience

teaching a class of 9th grade African American males. Lindsey and Mabie relate that many of the 9th graders felt their teachers never expected them to succeed. In contrast to the students' other teachers, however, Lindsey clearly articulated his high expectations for the students' intelligent behavior, and they "rose to those expectations" (p. 26). In fact, Lindsey and Mabie report that the average GPA of the class climbed from 1.6 to 3.0 in just one semester. Thus, holding high expectations for students' behavior and teaching them intelligent habits of mind can certainly close the achievement gap that exists between white and African American students. Quoting Perry, Steele, and Hilliard's 2004 text *Young, Black, and Gifted*, Lindsey and Mabie assert, "'The real gap is between African American males' typical performance and the criterion levels of excellence, which are well within their reach'" (p. 26).

Despite such success stories as those shared by Lindsey and Mabie (2012), however, African American boys are still the lowest achieving group among those being educated in the United States. The dropout rate for African American males is extremely high, with only 48% graduating, in comparison with the 78% white male graduation rate (Noguera, 2012). Perhaps even more alarming, while African American boys consist of less than 50% of the U.S. public school system population, they make up almost 75% of all special education classes (Thomas-El, 2003). In addition to the aforementioned, African American boys are three times as likely to be diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (Sommers, 2000).

Of course, special education has only been in existence for forty years. According to Pardini (2002), in 1975, Congress passed the Education for All

Handicapped Children Act, better known as Public Law 94-142, to provide a "'free, appropriate public education'" to students with "a broad range of disabilities – including physical handicaps; mental retardation; speech, vision and language problems; emotional and behavioral problems; and other learning disorders" (¶ 3). Certainly, much like the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that extended equal protection under the law to minorities, Public Law 94-142 was well intentioned; however, special education classrooms have become dumping grounds for many African American males. In fact, according to Kunjufu (2002), of the African American children placed in special education, almost 85% are boys, with most of them entering around the fourth grade. I question, if a student has a profound, noticeable disability, would it not have been noticed long before he entered the fourth grade? In light of wide-spread low expectations regarding African American males' intellect and aptitude, I challenge educators to consider the students' varied learning styles, as well as their culture and backgrounds, in order to design a differentiated curricula and pedagogy that will help them achieve academic success. If our African American males do not learn the way we teach, then it is imperative that we teach in a ways in which they learn.

Economic Analysis

Economically, it is crucial to address the education of African American males. Whereas only 7% of white families have lived in poor neighborhoods for at two or more generations, nearly half of all African American families have lived in impoverished circumstances for at least that long (Rothstein, 2014). Additionally, low-income families have seen their incomes grow far less than those of middle and

upper income families in recent years. In fact, the unemployment rate for African Americans is more than double the rate for whites (Rothstein, 2013). As a result, 66% of African American children – compared to only 6% of whites – are more likely to live in poverty today (Rothstein, 2014). This high poverty rate can be correlated to a similarly elevated school drop-rate for African American males, which in 2010 was as high as 47% (Noguera, 2012). Also disproportionally high for African American youth is its juvenile incarceration rate: more than three times than that of whites (Lawrence, 2014). In fact, one in three African American males will be incarcerated at some point during his life, and the rate is significantly higher for black men who do not finish high school (Lawrence). Many people are unaware of the link between illiteracy and prison. Lawrence relates that Correctional Corporations of America, a $35 million a year private prison, projects the number of prison beds it builds based, in part, on third grade reading scores; therefore, an African American boy who reads below grade level is more likely to receive a prison bed than a tutor, ultimately, due to the high poverty rates of African Americans.

According to Cosby and Poussaint (2007), because of what society portrays as acceptable, many African American children begin to believe negative African American stereotypes and start stereotyping themselves. Emdin (2012) agrees, stating, "[T]he world is inundated with scenarios that leave a false perception of black males…" (p. 14). Rather than being exposed to the high expectations of educational attainment and positive role models, our African American males are exposed to the low expectations associated with "[t]he social pathological issues of violence, crime, and imprisonment [that] are constructed and widely reported in the media" (Polite &

Davis, p. 5). As a result, according to Cosby and Poussaint, many African American males feel compelled to "fit in." Cosby and Poussaint further cite these startling statistics:

- Homicide is the number one cause of death for black men between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age and has been for decades;
- Of the roughly sixteen thousand homicides in this country each year, more than half are committed by black men;
- A black man is seven times more likely to commit a murder than a white man, and six times more likely to be murdered;
- Ninety-four percent of all black people who are murdered are murdered by other black people;
- The life expectancy at birth of black men is sixty-nine years compared to seventy-five years for white men, eighty for white women, and seventy-six for black women;
- In the past several decades, the suicide rate among young black men has increased more than 100%;
- In some cities, black males have high school dropout rates of more than 50%;
- Young black men are twice as likely to be unemployed as white, Hispanic, and Asian men;
- Although black people make up just 12% of the general population, they make up nearly 44% of the prison population;
- At any given time, as many as one in four of all young black men are in the criminal justice system – in prison or jail, on probation, or on parole;

- By the time they reach their mid thirties, six out of ten black high school dropouts have spent time in prison; and
- About one-third of the homeless are black men. (pp. 8 – 9)

Despite this discouraging data, Kuykendall (2004) continues to believe that public education is still the best hope and the most promising option we have for the education of all youth. While I do believe in the hope projected by Kuykendall, I am disturbed by the proliferation of prison companies that run *for profit*. I ask, "How do we begin to shift the paradigms of these prison companies so they will begin to understand that it is cheaper to educate and rehabilitate an individual than to incarcerate him?" Just as prison and income are negatively related, education and income are positively connected: the greater one's level of education, the higher one's lifetime income (Checchi, 2006). Therefore, it is imperative that we do whatever is required to educate our African American male community because if we do not, the statistics cited by Cosby and Poissaint will become even more alarming and harmful to our society.

According to the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund website, the "School to Prison Pipeline" (n.d.) is fed by schools' disciplinary measures of African American male students:

> In recent years, a disturbing shift has occurred in our education system. Rather than employ traditional disciplinary measures, such as counseling or detention when students misbehave, schools are becoming increasingly dependent on suspensions, expulsions, and law enforcement to punish students. Children are

> being arrested or removed from schools, even for minor indiscretions, at alarming rates around the country. (¶ 1)

Sturgeon (2005) reports that while the African American male student population amounts to only 8.6% of students nationwide, it accounts for 22% of expulsions and 23% of suspensions, leading to an overall higher dropout rate. In fact, the "School to Prison Pipeline" explicates that African-American students, overall, are now nearly three times as likely to be suspended as their white peers. Citing the American Psychological Association, the "School to Prison Pipeline" explains that these practices harm academic achievement for all students, while increasing the chances that those excluded will be held back, then dropout and, ultimately, become involved with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. According to the "School to Prison Pipeline," "This funneling of students out of school, into the streets and into the juvenile correction system perpetuates a cycle known the 'School to Prison Pipeline,' depriving children and youth of meaningful opportunities for education, future employment, and participation in our democracy" (¶ 5). This is a sad depiction of how our African American males have become a "for profit" prison commodity; however, because I am an African American male and a product of several teachers who served as my *merchants of hope,* I also have to believe, and encourage African American boys to know that being educated is one of their birthrights. To this end, we must teach our African American male students that being educated should not be treated as a privilege but, instead, as right that *must* be attained for their economic futures.

According to Cosby and Poussaint (2007), in the city of Baltimore where 70% of African American males were dropping out of school, several of the community members realized they could no longer wait for the school district to help their children. They, therefore, decided to stem the tide by starting their own Saturday school for African American boys. Apparently, Illinois Senator James Meeks shares this disposition to challenge the public education system. In 2008, he asked Chicago Public School students to skip the first day of school and, instead, go to the north suburbs to register for schools because the schools in the north suburbs receive more per pupil expenditures (Loury, 2008). As Biddle and Berliner (2002) point out that across the United States there is no equity amongst school districts. In fact, within the same state, per pupil expenditures can span from $4,000 to $15,000 (Biddle & Berliner). Loury reports that while Meeks' call to action did not improve Illinois' highly disparate district per pupil expenditures, it did catch the nation's attention to the problem. Even more importantly, perhaps, Loury asserts that as a society, we "can no longer question the heart and determination of parents and students on the city's [Chicago's] South and West sides" (¶ 2). Nevertheless, I agree with Loury who concludes:

> I hope the folks standing in opposition [to Meeks' actions] understand that people demanding more money for education aren't just looking for a stage on which they can grandstand, more money for salaries and pensions, or excuses for poor academic performance – what they are looking for is a high-quality education, the best money can buy. (¶ 12)

Certainly, we need to address the fact that many of the students who participated in Meeks' boycott lack the fundamental skills of reading, writing, and mathematical problem solving; therefore, regardless of funding reform efforts, educators should be focused on employing best practices to teach all students the way they learn best so they can eventually become productive citizens who contribute to our society.

Ultimately, a high return on education funding is essential for fueling the labor market and growing our economy. Checchi (2006) suggests that people will demand more schooling whenever family resources are high, borrowing rates are low, access to education is cheap, and expected returns are high. Checchi further explains that limited access to education contributes to persistent income inequality over generations. As an African American male, I have close friends for whom generational income inequality is a reality; therefore, I know from firsthand experience that we must provide an equitable education of our young African American men. As Checchi reminds us, when an individual is educated, not only does he improve his future employment prospects, salary, and job quality, but he also increases the probability that his offspring will be educated as well, benefitting both future generations and society as a whole.

Social Analysis

Many stunning social statistics point to the crisis situation of young African American males. For example, the African American family structure has been traditionally less stable than white Americans' in regards to having a greater number of female-headed households, out-of-wedlock births, extended families, and higher levels of role integration (Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard, 1994). In fact, the

percentage of African American families headed by married couples actually dropped from 68% in 1970 to only 50% in 1990 (Gordon, Gordon, & Nembhard). Additionally, as Grossman (2006) reports, nearly 90% of African American boys are being raised in single female households; therefore, many African American boys have no male role models either at home or at school, where the majority of their teachers are white women. The absence of many fathers in the African American community often results in African American boys being considered the head of their households at very young ages (Grossman).

Despite this elevated status at home, however, these same young African American males disproportionately do poorly in school as compared to their white peers. Harry and Anderson (1999) cite the dim statistic that African American males have been placed in Educable Mentally Retarded classrooms "at a rate at least twice that which would be expected..." (p. 35). Varlas (2005) reports, "Of black boys who enter special education, only 10 percent return to the mainstream classrooms and stay there, …and only 27 percent graduate" (¶ 5). Overall, African Americans disproportionately attend inferior schools in poor neighborhoods, which leads to poor academic performance (Hale, 2001). According to Thernstrom and Thernstrom (2003), however, it is not only low-income African American males who struggle academically: even African American children from more affluent families tend to do poorly in school. In concurrence, Noguera (2012) writes, "When compared to their white peers, middle-class African American and Latin males lag significantly in grade point average and on standardized tests" (p. 9).

This suggests that African Americans from across all incomes groups are failing. Even though the vast majority of teachers in the U.S. public school system have the best of intentions, research supports implicit school bias against African American males, largely because most teachers are white females. As Hall and Murphy (2008) point out, because teachers' cultural identities and experiences are often very different from those of their students of color, they often do not connect learning as closely as possible to students of varied cultural identities and experiences. Murrell (1999) emphasizes that "[c]lassroom learning is a social process requiring considerable communication, coordinated action, and common understanding"; however, "culturally mainstream teachers" have difficulty bridging the gaps between their own culture and that of their students of color, resulting in these students' "diminished academic success" (p. 84). As Murrell reminds us, therefore, the stakes are high in regards to providing students of color, particularly African American males, with teachers who can promote their learning, development, and intellectual growth.

In addition to our public schools failing many of our African American males, churches often seem to be dismissing them as well. Rather than venturing out into their communities to minister to their African American youth, African American church leaders and their members often remain before their altars behind closed doors. Editorialist and author John Fountain (2005) reflects my own thoughts: "I've wondered why churches or pastors have seldom taken a stand or ventured beyond the doors of their sanctuaries to bring healing and hope to the community – whether to stem the tide of violence and drugs, or to help cure poverty and homelessness, or any number of issues than envelop ailing black communities" (¶ 14). Fountain echoes Dr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963) who wrote over fifty years ago, "So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo" (¶ 32). Beyond often ignoring the needs of African American males outside of its congregations, according to (Kunjufu, 2002), 75% of the African American church is female, many of whom are single mothers; therefore, even for the African American boys who do attend church, adult male role models are nearly as rare as they are in their schools. In general, therefore, our churches appear to be failing our African American male youth.

Rather than turning to church, many poor African American males turn to crime, a movement fueled by the media's pervasive, negative images of young African American men as gangsters, drug dealers, and pimps, who continually commit crimes and misogynistic acts. As a result, African American males have become objects of fear to many in our society. Lowe (2000), for example, reports on the subtle but inexorable exhibit of fear that a group of ten white women displayed when they clutched their handbags close to their chests while passing a single, middle-aged, professional African American man under a construction canopy on Chicago's busy Michigan Avenue. Lowe describes the man: "His black face was enough to make [the women] panic" (¶ 1). Lowe continues:

> [T]he fear of black men is perpetuated by TV. Television news constantly shows black men as murderers and thieves. It's a steady diet of photographs of handcuffed black men with their heads down. It's an easy visual for the medium. After constantly seeing handcuffed black men, it's not unreasonable to see why a woman believes a black man is going to steal her purse. (¶ 15)

According to Oakland, California school board member Gregory Hodge, "'Part of building success for black boys will involve changing negative images popularized by the entertainment industry and the news media, which often depict them as criminal or anti-intellectual'" (Gewertz, 2004, ¶ 11). In order to alter the public perception about African American males, many of these biased and destructive images will need to be changed and replaced with a more balanced view (Varlas, 2005).

Achieving a more balanced view by society as a whole, however, is blocked not only by negative media images of African American males, but also by the fact that so many wind up in jail because they have turned to crime due to a lack of good educational opportunities and, thus, good jobs. Cartwright and Henriksen (2012) report that while nearly one-third of African American males have been incarcerated, that number doubles for those who have dropped out of high school. Even for those who are secondary school graduates, only 38% enroll in college (Cartwright and Henriksen). Therefore, getting a job for African American males – even those with an education – can be daunting. For example, research conducted by Bertrand and Mullainathan (2003) found a racial bias in many companies' hiring practices. From July 2001 to May 2002, the researchers sent fictitious resumes in response to 1,300 help-wanted ads listed in the *Boston Globe* and the *Chicago Tribune*. They found that applicants with white-sounding names, like Emily and Greg, were 50% more likely to get called for an initial interview than applicants with African American-sounding names, such as Lakisha and Jamal. In fact, applicants with the white-associated names received one callback for every ten resumes they submitted, while those with the African American-associated names had to send as many as fifteen resumes to

receive the same result (Bertrand and Mullainathan). Bertrand and Mullainathan conclude that this disparity may adversely affect African Americans' incentives to build better resumes. Even more disheartening is Bertrand and Mullainathan's finding that applicants with African American names were not rewarded with more callbacks for having better resumes than their white-named counterparts.

Overall, discriminatory job hiring practices; a lack of role models at home, at church, and in school; churches and schools that do not meet the needs of young African American males; and negative media representations that paint a frightening, stereotypical image of African American males add up to a society that is failing this critical segment of our population. As Varlas (2005) reports, societal leadership must face up to the dire state of African American males. Quoting Rosa A. Smith, president of the Schott Foundation's Black Boys Initiative Project, Varlas writes, "The downward trend for black boys in school and society will not end unless educators and community and business leaders make black boys 'the litmus test for personal leadership'…" (¶ 14). I agree with Smith who, according to Varlas, advocates that school leaders "bring together reciprocal layers of communication, data collection, early education, accountability and literacy instruction" (¶ 14). Until we directly address the educational needs of young African American boys, society will neglect its responsibility to raise them into responsible, law-abiding, employed, and productive American citizens.

Political Analysis

Young African American males are in crisis largely because few policymakers, educators, businesses, community leaders, and school boards talk specifically about

this group's educational calamity (Smith, 2005). Back in 1965, the United States government began providing federal funds for public schools though the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) to help meet this crisis as identified in President Johnson's War on Poverty; however, throughout its seven reauthorizations, the most recent being 2002's No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, federal education funds have done little to close the gap between the academic performance of African American students and their white peers (Federal Education Budget Project, 2014) .

As explained by the Federal Education Budget Project (2014), the intent of ESEA, throughout all of its iterations, has been "to improve educational equity for students from lower income families by providing federal funds to school districts serving poor students" (¶ 2). Early on, many politicians and educators were hopeful that NCLB would even the educational playing field between poor minority students and the generally more affluent white students. Darling-Hammond (2004) states,

> Many civil rights advocates initially hailed the Bush administration's major education bill, optimistically entitled No Child Left Behind, as a step forward in the long battle to improve education for those children traditionally left behind in American schools, in particular, students of color and students living in poverty, new English learners, and students with disabilities. (p. 3)

Early believers in NCLB seem to have agreed with English (2006) who asserts, "A public policy that values equity means that there are inequities in the distribution of, or access to, public resources that can be redressed through the redistributive power of government" (p. 43). The Harvard Civil Rights Project, along with other advocacy groups, however, warned soon after the passage of NCLB that rather than assisting

students of color, the law would actually increase their growing dropout and push-out rates (Sunderman and Kim, 2004). Elmore (2004) rightly predicted a decade ago that a tremendous number of urban schools serving largely minority populations would be labeled as failing due to the sanctions of No Child Left Behind. In fact, the larger and more culturally diverse a school is, the more it has been labeled as inadequate by NCLB. Darling-Hammond explains that a racially and economically homogeneous affluent suburban school has far fewer hurdles to overcome than a poor urban school with large populations of special education, immigrant, or low-income students. Overall, the Federal Education Budget Project explains that because "[s]chool districts serving lower income students often receive less state and local funding than those serving more affluent children" (¶2), ESEA federal funds have never bridged the educational gap between rich and poor. Thus, inequities between majority African American schools, which tend to be in low-income neighborhoods, and more affluent white majority schools persist.

Just as the federal and state governments allocate values to groups of people by enacting policies, local school policies allocate values to particular groups within their schools (Smith, 2004). District school boards, regardless of state and federal mandates, therefore, must take responsibility for local accountability and school improvement, including directly addressing the needs of their African American male students. In particular, according to Varlas (2005), school boards should set policies based on the holistic, healthy development of African American males' intellectual, social, emotional, psychological, cultural, recreational, and spiritual growth. First, school boards should oversee broad curricular changes, such as providing to African

American male students texts that interest them and reading instruction that matches their learning styles (Hughes-Hassell, Rawson, McCracken, Leonard, Cunningham, Vance, & Boone, 2012). Additionally, as Hughes-Hassell, et al. advocate, school curricula should incorporate more African American figures and cultural references. Beyond curriculum revision, to create a more equitable learning environment for African American boys, Kunjufu (2002) advises school boards to create policies that accommodate gender-specific learning differences. In particular, Kunjufu (2002) suggests that instead of placing boys who lag behind girls academically in special education classes, school boards should allow for these natural differences or consider single-gender classrooms**.** Over twenty years ago, Hare and Hare (1991) reported on the growing nationwide trend of schools opening to serve African American boys:

> A potentially controversial approach now being advocated around the country, beginning in Milwaukee, Chicago, New York City, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, is the so-called all-black male immersion school. Developed for an all African American male population, these schools seek to provide their students with conventional black studies teaching knowledge of self and culture. (p. 53).

Where male-only schools or classrooms are not feasible, school boards should set policies that provide mentoring programs for the African American boys. As Morris and Adeyemo (2012) assert, "Society and the educational community should cultivate black male students' academic talents as vigorously as they prepare black males to become athletes" (p. 29).

In addition to mentoring African American students and providing learning environments tailored to their needs, school boards must implement policies that rely

on a variety of indicators to evaluate students' overall learning. As Darling-Hammond (2004) advocates, students' progress should be measured according to multiple measures, such as attendance, school progress and continuation, course passage, and classroom performance, utilizing assessments that go beyond multiple-choice tests. Furthermore, gains should be evaluated with "value added" measures showing how individual students improve over time, rather than school averages that are influenced by changes in who is assessed (Darling-Hammond). Finally, rather than micro-managing the day-to-day operations of their schools, effective school boards should oversee the development and implementation of policies and procedures that positively affect achievement of all students within their districts (Conley, 2003). Thus, local school authorities must ensure that all members of the school community – including parents, grandparents, extended family, faith institutions, and community-based organizations – understand, learn to embrace and, ultimately, spread the message of change, particularly in regards to the academic achievement of their African American male students (Varlas, 2005). In general, society cannot solely rely on the federal government to leave no child behind. It takes a concerted effort by agencies at all tiers of influence, but particularly at the local school board level, to meet the educational crisis of young African American males head-on and directly influence their positive transformation.

CHAPTER THREE: POLICY AGRUMENT

Over the past several decades, policy makers and educational reformers have continued to involve themselves with improving the educational system. According to Smith (2004), "In the 1980s, policy makers emphasized the need to reform schools as a way of enhancing the economy" (p. 7). Lusi (1997) reports that in response to viewing education through an economic lens, its reform has come in waves, with the first focus on raising standards. Petrie (1990) explains that in the 1980s schools were simply asked to "do more of the same, but just do it better" (p. 14). This vague directive led to piecemeal, disconnected results, with the fundamental nature of teaching and learning remaining unchanged (Cohen, 1988; Cuban, 1990; Cohen & Spillance, 1992; Firestone, 1989; Smith & O'Day, 1990). In response, the second wave a reform sought to redistribute power by decentralizing control of curriculum, budgets, and staffing (Murphy, 1992; Clune & White 1988), but again little change was made. Corporations, therefore, became the driving force behind education reform in the late 1990s, resulting in the No Child Left Behind Act's push towards the restructuring and ultimate privatization of schools (Smith, 2004). Rather than treating schools as the developers of economic resources, however, I believe that education reform should focus on what Mojkowski and Fleming (1988) recognize as the primary purpose of schools: developing human resources.

Certainly, education plays a powerful role in the development of our most precious human resource: our youth, yet our country's social, political, and economic institutions have poised the African American male to become an "endangered species" who has been systematically programmed for failure (Gibbs, 1988; Hare,

1987; Jordan & Cooper, 2003; Kunjufu, 1995, 2002). Cooper and Jordan (2005) assert, "Despite positive role models, such as Michael Jordan, Mohammed Ali, and Colin Powell, the majority of African American males, particularly those in urban centers, are categorized and stereotyped by the *five Ds: dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant,* and *disturbed*" (p. 4). Cooper and Jordan continue, "Although these words are seldom written or verbalized, they are often reflected in social policy and practice" (p. 4). In regards to practice, as Kuykendall (2004) points out, many teachers' low expectations for their African American male students often stems from their view of them as being at best disengaged, and at worst disruptive and disrespectful. Citing two more "d" words, however, Emdin (2012) clarifies, "Yes, African American males are different, but different is not deficient" (p. 13). Emdin explains that while their backgrounds, perspectives, communication modes, and ways of learning may vary from their teachers, African American male students' capacity for knowledge and understanding is as deep and complex as that of other students. However, because of NCLB's push towards privatization, our poorest public schools have been robbed of badly needed resources. As Smith (2004) asserts, therefore, our wealthiest schools with the largest number of white students continue to flourish, while our poorest schools with the largest number of African American and Latino students continue to flounder, often to the point of collapse.

As Case for Culturally Relevant, Single-Gender Education

Culturally relevant, single-gender education provides promise for helping our African American males stand tall and grow strong within a system that embraces,

rather than disdains, their differences, thus, developing, rather than endangering, them as a precious human resource.

Cultural Relevancy

Many teachers who work with children of color come from white, middle class backgrounds and, thus, are culturally disconnected with their students. Murrell (1999) states, "Educators are not likely to develop a pedagogical knowledge base of the critical aspects of class and culture for nonmainstream minority-group learners unless a theory is developed that addresses how these students make sense of the curriculum in the context of their unique racial, ethnic, cultural, and political identities" (p.82). As an African American male, I often felt culturally disconnected in my own high school classrooms where the teachers did not share my background. For example, one English assignment after returning from the summer break was to write about my family vacation. I found this assignment extremely difficult, not because I did not know how to write, but because my family, like other families in my neighborhood, could not afford a vacation. I, therefore, wrote about our family cookout, which inevitably ended up being a shorter essay than those who related stories of their multi-day or even multi-week vacation trips. As a result of my too-brief recounting, I earned a low grade on my paper. Thinking back on this experience, I often wondered if the teacher had been an African American, or at least more culturally aware, would the writing assignment have been the same, or would it have been more culturally relevant to African American students like me?

I now understand that what my high school English teacher lacked was what Ladson-Billings (1994) refers to as a culturally responsive approach, a pedagogy that

involves teachers using their students' culture as an important aspect of the students' education. Ladson-Billings argues that teachers create conditions for effective learning when they recognize the importance of culture and weave their students' cultures into their teaching. Without exhibiting such cultural sensitivity, students can often become resistant to learning (Foster, 1998; Hollins, 1996; Hudley, 1995). Gay (2000) explains that culturally responsive teaching accomplishes the following:

1. Acknowledges students' cultural heritage as it affects their dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning, and recognizes that it contains content worthy to be included in the curriculum;
2. Builds meaning between students' home and school experiences as well as "school stuff" and the students' lived realities;
3. Uses a wide variety of instructional strategies;
4. Teaches an appreciation of the students' own cultural heritage as well as that of others; and
5. Incorporates multicultural information, resources, and materials in all subjects and skills routinely taught in schools. (p. 28)

Foster and Peele (1999) cite research which argues that the general tendency of many teachers to misunderstand and fail to appreciate the cultural backgrounds, languages, values, home environments, and learning styles of African American students often contributes to African American male students' widespread academic failure. The primary issue for many teachers who work in poor urban communities is not the ability to teach a particular subject but, rather, the ability to teach that subject to a group of children who have experienced significant environmental and social

constraints (Foster & Peele). Simply knowing subject matter or being skilled in generic teaching strategies, therefore, will not equip teachers with the knowledge or skills necessary to work with poor, urban students (Foster & Peele). They must employ culturally responsive teaching that incorporates the affective domain. Foster and Peele quote Vanessa Siddle-Walker, who states, "'[T]he subjective relationship between pupils and teachers is influenced by, but not limited to, methods of instruction'" (p. 10). Thus, emphasis on teaching methodology can obscure the affective domain that takes prominence in effective teachers. According to Foster and Peele, research shows that successful teachers of African American males possess the emotional stamina, persistence, and resilience to negotiate the school bureaucracy, solve difficult problems, and help their students cope with day-to-day setbacks and misfortunes, as well as more serious hardships. Thus, as Murrell (1999) summarizes, "To teach more responsively to African American males, teachers must not only understand their curriculum, but the manner in which their enacted curriculum structures the culture of their classrooms and children's experience of the curriculum" (p. 95).

Single-Gender Education

While single-gender education is not universally touted (Patterson, 2012), it does offer hope and opportunities for African American males. Noguera (2012) reports, "More educators are embracing the idea that the educational and social challenges confronting African American and Latino males can be solved, or at least ameliorated, through single-sex education…" (p. 10). For example, Ron Walker, executive director of the Coalition of Schools Educating Boys of Color, asserts,

“‘Single-gender schools present a viable option and opportunity for boys and young men to learn’” (Patterson, p. 39). According to the Atlanta Public Schools (n.d.) report presented by the United States Department of Education, single-gender schools can positively impact student achievement in all subject areas and encourage students to have higher aspirations for post-secondary education and careers. To that end, boys’- and girls’-only education has grown since 1998 from only one single-gender public school in the U.S. – Malcolm X Academy in Detroit – to hundreds today (Noguera, 2012). In fact, over 500 public schools currently offer single-gender education (Patterson).

Many claim single-gender education works because of innate biological differences between males and females that affect the ways they learn. For example, Gurian and Henley (2002) cite variations between males and females in their hormonal dominance, as well as in their brain functioning – including maturation, chemistry, and the processing of emotions. Additionally, as Tyre (2006, 2008) reports, boys tend to be more active, hands-on leaners; therefore, the premium most teachers put on passive, linguistic-based learning in their classrooms disadvantages many African American male students, particularly at the elementary level. Family physician and psychologist Leonard Sax, founder of the National Association for Single-Sex Public Education, concludes that such differences between boys and girls lead to significant learning disparities that can often best be addressed through gender specific classrooms and schools (Tyre, 2008). In particular, Tyre (2008) suggests that the solution for underachieving boys is education that caters to their male neurobiology, including the following:

- Classes with a coherent structure that is clearly explained;
- Vibrant and fast teacher-pupil interaction;
- High levels of teacher input;
- Constant reinforcement of high expectations;
- Well-established baseline rules with known and enforced sanctions when the rules are broken;
- Short-term targets, public praise, the use of humor, informality, and topics the students can relate to; and
- An environment in which sexist comments and stereotypical behavior are challenged and not condoned. (p.174)

Classroom learning is a social process requiring considerable communication, coordinated action, and common understanding (McDermott, 1997); consequently, I believe that African American males should to be taught by teachers who have a true conceptual understanding of the way African Americans learn and interact. Chicago's Urban Prep Academy for Young Men provides such an educational environment with hopeful results. For example, only 4% of the school's first graduating class entered reading at grade level, while half of the other 96% of freshmen read at or below the sixth grade level. Nevertheless, four years later, every student graduated, and 96% enrolled in college (Patterson, 2012). According to Dugandzic (2008), although 50% of Chicago's African American males drop out of high school, in contrast, as Crocket (2014) reports, 100% of Urban Prep's graduates were accepted into four-year colleges and universities for five years in a row.

One key to the success of Urban Prep Academy is its emphasis on the mentorship of its students by African American men. Tyre (2006, 2008) reports that one of the most reliable predictors of whether a boy will succeed or fail in high school rests on a single question: Does he have a man he can look up to? Too often, the answer is no. Morris and Adeyemo (2012) explain that because fathers are "glaringly absent" in the lives of many African American male students (p. 31), the mentorship of teachers and coaches can be crucial to these students' academic success. Morris and Adeyemo assert, "[B]lack male students need teachers who have an expressed interest in teaching black male students who will affirm their identities as black males and prepare them to navigate the social and political messages regarding black people in general and black males in particular" (p. 32). A young man personally illustrated the power of mentorship to me when he shared that having a mentor created within him a desire for excellence because he knew his mentor believed in him. Perhaps more importantly, because his mentor had accomplished what the young man aspired to accomplish – earning a college diploma – the mentee confided that he felt empowered to overcome the feelings of hopelessness and insecurity instilled in him by his impoverished environment.

In order to provide our young African American males with mentors who can provide them not only with effective instruction but, also, with hope that they, too, can achieve and advance, we must groom expert teachers. Generally speaking, these teachers should be effective, persistent, and able and willing to solve complex problems centered on their role as a teacher of African American males. They should strive to develop productive relationships with their students as they engage them in

active learning and critical thinking. Foster and Peele (1999) provide this advice for effectively teaching African American males:

1. As a rule of thumb, treat every black male as you would treat your own son.
2. Set a tone for learning each day and remain consistent from day to day. Do not expect to accomplish anything without structure and discipline.
3. Learn to manage the classroom. Instead of taking time to correct inappropriate behaviors among black males, too often teachers, black and white, will move for suspension and expulsion.
4. Know that it becomes impossible to discipline or teach the black male unless the boy believes that you care.
5. Understand that African American males, from as early as second grade, are haunted by and have to overcome the negativity portrayals of who they are.
6. Believe that African American males are perfectly capable of performing at high academic levels. The one thing that the black male student does not need is a teacher who accepts the statement, "I can't do this."
7. Learn as much as possible about the community in which the black male lives. To the extent possible, attempt to relate course content to the real work of black males, but also assist them in their efforts to understand global issues.
8. Seek out ongoing career planning and in-service training with a clear focus on encouraging students to set career goals.

9. Aid black males in sorting through career options and help them to understand the importance of setting career objectives, specific achievement strategies, and a plan of action for fulfilling the course requirements needed to realize those goals. Students should review and adjust their goals and strategies annually under the direction of teachers and counselors.
10. Participate in a continuing education program. This program should provide the teachers with skills in multicultural learning, communication, culture, and social and learning styles, with an emphasis on African Americans.
11. Do not assume that every black male is a troublemaker.
12. Expect, regardless of your race, social class, background, or teacher preparation to struggle to finds ways to establish meaningful relationships with African American male students. Successful, effective teachers let African American males know that they care. (pp. 18 – 19)

Summary

With academic achievement at its lowest point in decades among African American males nationally, proponents say single-gender schools are being embraced in some urban education circles to provide African American boys with not only mentorship opportunities, but with more structure, smaller class sizes, and less distractions as well (Robinson-English, 2006). David Arnold, head of George Jackson Academy in the east Village in New York City, an all-boys independent school, asserts that it is important to catch African American boys at an early age if we do not

want to lose them forever (Robinson-English). Failing to do something about the crisis of our African American boys' achievement gap is unacceptable. For this reason, it is necessary to create policies that will truly reverse their trajectory to failure. As a merchant of hope, I believe we have an obligation and a responsibility to invest in our students and our schools. As President Obama stated in his 2008 acceptance speech, "Now is the time to finally meet our moral obligation to provide every child with a world-class education, because it will take nothing less to compete in the global economy" (¶ 77). Therefore, providing African American male students with single-gender learning environments staffed by teachers who serve as mentors throughout young African American males' school years promises to put them on the road of academic achievement with their ultimate destination being success in college, in career, and in life.

CHAPTER FOUR: POLICY STATEMENT

This chapter provides research findings comparing the math and reading achievement levels of Reserve High School District's African American males with the district's other student populations. The purpose of this research was to determine how the African American males' academic achievement compared with that of the other student populations. Student math and reading achievement levels were determined through the use of the EPAS: Educational Planning and Assessment System, which encompasses the 8th grade Explore assessment, the 9th grade Explore assessment, the 10th grade Plan assessment, and the 11th grade ACT assessment (ACT, Inc., 2015). Demographic information pertaining to Reserve High School District is presented, along with statistical data and an analysis using ethnic and gender groups, students receiving supplemental educational services, low-income (SES) students, students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and English Language Learners (ELL). The analysis of this data will provide focus the direction of the policy development.

Context and Illinois Report Card Data

Reserve High School District Student Demographics

Reserve High School District [a pseudonym], located 25 miles southwest of Chicago, Illinois, services 6,210 students in grades 9 through12. Two high schools comprise the district: Reserve North High School, which services 3,081 students, and Reserve South High School, which services 3,129 students. Table 1 compares Illinois student demographic data with Reserve High School District data in regards to students' ethnicity, income status, English proficiency (ELL), Special Education

status (IEP), homelessness, attendance, drop out rate, mobility, and graduation rate, as reported by the Illinois Board of Education's Illinois Report Card 2013-2014 (n.d.).

Table 1.

Reserve High School District 2013-2014 Demographic Data

Student Populations	State	District	North	South
Race/Ethnicity				
White	49.5%	27.8%	19.6%	36%
African American	17.5%	24.8%	23.6%	25.9%
Hispanic	24.6	43.4%	53.3%	33.5%
Asian	4.5%	1%	3%	1.6%
American Indian	.3%	.2%	.2%	.2%
2 or More Races	3.1%	2.8%	2.9%	2.8%
Low Income	51.5%	63.3%	74.7%	51.9%
ELL	9.5%	3.8%	5.3%	2.4%
IEP	13.7%	17.3%	18.3%	16.4%
Homeless	2.4%	2.7%	2.5%	2.8%
Attendance	94.5%	92.2%	91.9%	92.6%
Dropout	2.2%	4.7%	6%	3.4%
Truancy	8.7%	11%	14.9%	7%
Mobility	12.3%	11.6	12.7%	10.6%
Graduation				
All	86%	75.2%	69.1%	81.1%
Male	83.2%	70.9%	64.3%	77.5%
Female	88.9%	79.8%	74.4%	84.7%
White	90.1%	81.8%	75.8%	84.7%
African American	77.2%	74.7%	73.9%	75.4%
Hispanic	81.3%	70.8%	64.9%	81.6%
Asian	94.2%	91.7%	n/a	91.5%
2 or More Races	86%	71%	63.2%	83.3%

As reported in Table 1, Reserve District's largest ethnic/racial student group is Hispanic (43.4%), while its next largest ethnic/racial group is African American (24.8%), which is a greater percentage than the state's overall African American student population of 17.5%. Within the district, Reserve South has a slightly higher African American population (25.9%) than Reserve North (23.6%). Regarding its low-income student population, Reserve District's 63.3% is larger than the state's 51.5%. As for its two schools, Reserve North's low-income population of 74.7% is much greater than Reserve South's 51.9%. The state's ELL population of 9.5% is higher than the district's 3.8%, while Reserve North's ELL population of 5.3% is greater than Reserve South's 2.4%.

When comparing the percentage of students with IEPs, Reserve District's average, again, is higher than the state's (17.3% as compared to 13.7%), and Reserve North's average is somewhat higher than Reserve South's (18.3% as compared to 16.4%). While both Reserve North and Reserve South have strong attendance rates (91.9% and 92.6% respectively), the pattern of North students having more challenges than South students continues, with North's dropout rate being much higher than South's (6% as opposed to 3.4%), and both being higher than the state's 2.2% dropout average.

Finally, in regards to the four-year graduation rate, once again, Reserve District's 75.2% rate is lower than the state's 86%. Additionally, the pattern of North students being worse off than South students holds: While 81.1% of Reserve South students graduate in four years, only 69.1% of Reserve North students do the same. Similarly, Reserve North's males have only a 64.3% four-year graduation rate as opposed to

Reserve South's males, who have a 77.5% four-year graduation rate. In regards to the district's African American students, Reserve North's African American population has a slightly lower four-year graduation rate than Reserve South's: 73.9% versus 75.4%.

Overall, Reserve High School District, as compared to the state of Illinois, has a higher percentage of African American students, low-income students, and students with IEPs. Conversely, the district has a lower four-year graduation rate than the state. When comparing the Reserve District's two schools, North has fewer African American students than South, but it has far more low-income students. Additionally, Reserve North has more students with IEPs and a higher dropout rate than Reserve South. Finally, Reserve North has a lower four-year graduation rate than Reserve South. In particular, Reserve North's male and African American students dropout in greater numbers than do Reserve South students. Thus, Reserve High School District faces greater challenges, particularly in regards to its low-income population, than the state of Illinois, and its North campus students appear to face more challenges than its South campus students.

Reserve High School District Teacher Demographics

As reported by the Illinois Board of Education's Illinois Report Card 2013-2014 (n.d.), Reserve High School District employs 342 certified teachers, the majority of whom are female (63%) and white (89.3%). The racial/ethnic makeup of the other 10.7% of the district's teacher population is 5.3% African American, 4.4% Hispanic, .6% Asian, .3% two or more races, and .1% unknown. In regards to educational attainment, 26.2% of the teaching staff possess bachelor's degrees, 72.1% have

earned master's degrees or higher, and .9% of teachers hold emergency or provisional credentials. While the vast majority of Reserve's teachers are highly qualified, .3% of the district's classes are not taught by highly qualified teachers. Overall, Reserve High School District has a teacher retention rate of 91.9%, and a ratio of 23:1 high school students per teacher. Thus, Reserve High School District's teachers – who like other Illinois teachers are largely highly educated, tenured, white, and female – teach classes just above the 2013-2014 Illinois average of 21 students per class (Illinois Board of Education, n.d.).

The Reserve High School District Budget

The greatest portion of Reserve High School District's $97,000,000 budget comes from local funding (77.6%). The rest of the district's revenue stems from two sources: state funds (16.4%) and federal funds (6%). The largest portion of the district's budget (45%) is spent on instruction, while 34.1% goes to supporting services, 6.1% to general administration, and 14.7% to other expenditures. The district's average teacher salary has been $71,690 over the past five years, and the overall per pupil operating expenditure is $15,370, of which $8,039 is spent on instruction per pupil. Instructional expenditures include only costs used directly for student instruction and facilitating interaction between teachers and students. The remaining $7,331 per pupil operating expenditure is spent on such costs as transportation, food service, buildings and grounds, and technology. Overall, in 2014-2014 Reserve's teachers made, on average, $9,255 more than the Illinois state average (Illinois Board of Education, n.d.). Additionally, while the district's instructional expenses exceeded the state's 2013-2014 average by $945, its

operational expenses lagged behind the state's average by $4,714 (Illinois Board of Education).

Assessments and Testing

Reserve High School District assesses all students with ACT, Inc.'s EPAS: Educational Planning and Assessment System (2015), a series of three tests – Explore, Plan, and ACT – used to measure students' college readiness in English, math, reading, and science as they move through high school.

Explore, Plan, and ACT Exam Data Usage

During the fall of their eighth grade year, incoming Reserve High School District freshmen are required to take the Explore exam. In addition to students' scores being used to determine their 9th grade course placement, the district employs the scores to determine each student's college readiness baseline. From students' baseline scores, the district can project students' subsequent Plan and ACT scores, and track their progress towards meeting or exceeding those expected scores (See Table 2) (ACT, Inc., College Readiness Benchmarks, 2015). For example, the benchmark score for the 8th grade Explore math test is 17, which means that students who score 17 on this exam are projected, when they take the ACT math exam as juniors, to score a 22, the ACT college and career readiness benchmark. In addition to using grade eight Explore scores for ninth grade placement and college and career readiness predictions, Reserve High School District utilizes these scores to identify students in need of extra academic support.

Table 2.

EPAS College Readiness Benchmark Scores for Reading and Math

	Math	Reading
8th Grade Explore	17	16
9th Grade Explore	18	17
10th Grade Plan	19	18
11th Grade ACT	22	22

During the spring of ninth grade, students sit for the Explore a second time. The resulting scores are then used to measure students' growth since taking their eighth grade Explore test and determine their current level of college readiness. Future score projections are adjusted as needed, and students in further need of academic support are also identified. The same process is true of the Plan test, which Reserve District's tenth graders take during the spring of their sophomore year. Finally, the district's eleventh graders sit for the ACT exam, the final test in the EPAS series, during spring of their junior year. In addition to the district measuring students' continued academic growth and current levels of college readiness, the guidance counselors also consider the students' ACT scores when helping their seniors select and apply for college admission.

Research Questions and Test Data

The statistical data that follows consists of four years of EPAS testing results gathered from four cohorts of Reserve High School students: the classes of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 respectively. The data includes, for each cohort, all four EPAS

exams: the eight grade Explore, the ninth grade Explore, the tenth grade Plan, and the eleventh grade ACT. Data analysis includes an ANOVA and Regression, using ethnic and gender groups, students receiving Supplemental Educational Services, low-income (SES) students, students with an Individual Education Plan (IEP), and English Language Learners (ELL) as the independent variables.

The following research questions are addressed using the four cohorts' EPAS testing data:

1. Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 8 Explore reading scores?
2. Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 9 Explore reading scores?
3. Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to Plan Reading scores?
4. Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to ACT Reading scores?
5. Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 8 Explore math scores?
6. Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 9 Explore math scores?
7. Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to Plan math scores?
8. Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to ACT math scores?

Research Question 1: Is There a Relationship of Ethnicity-Gender to Grade 8 Explore Reading Scores?

Table 3

Means and standard deviations for grade 8 Explore reading

Ethnicity	Gender	Mean	SD	N
African Amer.	Male	12.13	2.83	354
	Female	13.57	2.98	391
Hispanic	Male	13.60	3.31	682
	Female	13.89	3.14	736
Asian	Male	14.68	3.77	19
	Female	16.87	5.08	15
White	Male	14.77	3.54	590
	Female	15.43	3.55	626

Table 3 depicts the means and standard deviations for all ethnic-gender groups regarding question 1, "Is there a relationship between ethnicity-gender to Explore grade 8 reading scores?" The highest mean Explore reading score is for Asians females (M =16.87, SD =5.08), and the lowest is for African Americans males (M =12.13, SD =2.83). The mean difference between African American males and other male groups is 1.47 among Hispanic males, 2.55 among Asian males, and 2.64 among white males. While white students were the highest performing male group, Asian females perform highest overall with a mean of 16.87, 4.74 points higher than African American males. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on

eighth grade Explore reading scores was found to be significant, F (7, 3405) = 41.987, $p < .001$, which means there are statistically significant differences among the groups.

Table 4

Tukey's HSD for relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 8 Explore reading

Group (i)	Group (i)	Mean Diff.	*t*	*p*
	African Amer. Female	-1.433	-5.987	0.00l
	Hispanic Male	-1.467	-6.791	0.00l
	Hispanic Female	-1.716	-8.267	0.00l
African Amer. Male	Asian Male	-2.554	-3.295	0.022
	Asian Female	-4.737	-5.463	0.00l
	White Male	-2.638	-11.936	0.00l
	White Female	-3.305	-15.091	0.00l

As shown in Table 4, Tukey's post hoc test indicates which groups are significantly different from each other. In particular, African American males post significantly lower eighth grade Explore reading scores as compared to all other ethnic-gender groups. The largest gap is between African American males and Asian females, with a difference of -4.737, and the smallest is with African American females, with a difference of -1.433. Overall, Tukey's post hoc procedure shows significant differences between African American males and all other ethnic-gender groups.

Research Question 2: Is There a Relationship of Ethnicity-Gender to Grade 9 Explore Reading Scores?

Table 5

Means and standard deviations for grade 9 Explore reading

Ethnicity	Gender	Mean	SD	N
African Amer.	Male	13.67	3.84	354
	Female	14.87	3.38	391
Hispanic	Male	14.91	3.59	682
	Female	15.39	3.52	736
Asian	Male	16.79	3.77	19
	Female	19.53	4.19	15
White	Male	16.40	3.77	590
	Female	16.97	3.85	626

Table 5 depicts the means and standard deviations for all ethnic-gender groups regarding research question 2, "Is there a relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 9 Explore reading scores?" The highest mean ninth grade Explore reading score is for Asians females (M=19.53, SD=4.19), and lowest is for African Americans males (M=13.67 SD=3.84). The mean Explore reading score of African American males is lower than that of all other groups. The mean difference between African American males and other male groups is 1.24 among Hispanic males, 3.12 among Asian males, and 2.73 among white males. While Asian males were the highest performing male group, Asian females perform highest overall with a mean of 19.53, 5.86 points

greater than African American males. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on ninth grade Explore reading was found to be significant F (7, 3405) = 40.097, $p < .001$, which means there are statistically significant differences between these groups.

Table 6

Tukey's HSD for relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 9 Explore reading

Group (i)	Group (i)	Mean Diff.	*t*	*p*
	African Amer. Female	-1.197	-4.5	0.00l
	Hispanic Male	-1.241	-5.241	0.00l
	Hispanic Female	-1.716	-7.302	0.00l
African Amer. Male	Asian Male	-3.117	-3.649	0.006
	Asian Female	-5.861	-6.13	0.00l
	White Male	-2.729	-11.143	0.00l
	White Female	-3.302	-13.701	0.00l

As shown in Table 6, Tukey's post hoc test indicates which groups are significantly different from each other. In particular, African American males post significantly lower ninth grade Explore reading scores as compared to all other ethnic-gender groups. The largest disparity is with Asian females, with a difference of -5.861, while the smallest is with African American females, with a difference of -1.197. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on ninth grade Explore reading was found to be significant, F (7, 3405) = 41.987, $p < .001$, with the mean reading score being highest for Asians females (M =19.53, SD = 4.19), and the

lowest for African Americans males (*M*=13.67 *SD*=3.84). Overall, Tukey's post hoc procedure shows significant differences between African American males and all other ethnic-gender groups.

Research Question 3: Is There a Relationship of Ethnicity-Gender to Plan Reading Scores?

Table 7

Means and standard deviations for Plan reading

Ethnicity	Gender	Mean	SD	N
African Amer.	Male	14.74	3.60	354
	Female	16.25	3.79	391
Hispanic	Male	16.20	3.88	682
	Female	16.52	3.64	736
Asian	Male	18.95	4.05	19
	Female	20.07	4.45	15
White	Male	18.27	4.46	590
	Female	18.93	4.40	626

Table 7 depicts the means and standard deviations for all ethnic-gender groups regarding research question 3, "Is there an effect of ethnicity-gender on Plan reading scores?" The highest mean tenth grade Plan reading score is for Asians females (*M*=20.07, *SD*=4.45), and the lowest is for African Americans males (*M* = 14.74 *SD* =3.60). The mean Plan reading score of African American males is lower than all other groups. The mean difference between African American males and other male groups is 1.46 among Hispanic males, 4.21 among Asian males, and 3.53

among white males. While Asian males were the highest performing male group, Asian females perform highest overall with a mean of 20.07, 5.33 points higher than African American males. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on Plan reading was found to be significant, F (7, 3405) = 54.804, $p < .001$, which means there are statistically significant differences among the groups.

Table 8

Tukey's HSD for relationship of ethnicity-gender to Plan reading

Group (i)	Group (i)	Mean Diff.	*t*	*p*
	African Amer. Female	-1.508	-5.146	0.00l
	Hispanic Male	-1.458	-5.564	0.00l
	Hispanic Female	-1.778	-6.864	0.00l
African Amer. Male	Asian Male	-4.207	-4.466	0.001
	Asian Female	-5.327	-5.054	0.00l
	White Male	-3.529	-13.118	0.00l
	White Female	-4.191	-15.755	0.00l

As shown in Table 8, Tukey's post hoc test indicates which groups are significantly different from each other. In particular, African American males post significantly lower Plan reading scores as compared to all other ethnic-gender groups. The largest discrepancy is with Asian females, with a difference of -5.327. The smallest gap is with Hispanic males, with a difference of -1.458. Overall, Tukey's post hoc procedure shows significant differences between African American males and all other ethnic-gender groups.

Research Question 4: Is There a Relationship of Ethnicity-Gender to ACT Reading Scores?

Table 9

Means and standard deviations for ACT reading

Ethnicity	Gender	Mean	SD	N
African Amer.	Male	15.93	4.45	354
	Female	17.12	4..89	391
Hispanic	Male	17.56	5.06	682
	Female	17.82	4.67	736
Asian	Male	21.16	6.58	19
	Female	23.33	7.84	15
White	Male	20.53	5.56	590
	Female	21.39	5.76	626

Table 9 depicts the means and standard deviations for all ethnic-gender groups regarding research question 4, "Is there an effect of ethnicity-gender on ACT reading scores?" The highest mean ACT reading score is for Asians females (*M*=23.33, *SD*=7.84), and the lowest is for African Americans males (*M*= 15.93, *SD*=4.45). The mean ACT reading score of African American males is lower than all other groups. The mean difference between African American males and other male groups is1.63 among Hispanic males, 5.23 among Asian males, and 4.60 among white males. While Asian males are the highest performing male group, Asian females perform highest overall with a mean of 23.33, 7.40 points higher than African

American males. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on ACT Reading was found to be significant, F (7, 3405) = 65.124, $p < .001$, which means there are statistically significant differences among the groups.

Table 10

Tukey's HSD for relationship of ethnicity-gender to ACT reading

Group (i)	Group (i)	Mean Diff.	*t*	*p*
	African Amer. Female	-1.186	-3.137	0.037
	Hispanic Male	-1.631	-4.839	0.00l
	Hispanic Female	-1.889	-5.672	0.00l
African Amer. Male	Asian Male	-5.229	-4.31	0.001
	Asian Female	-7.404	-5.452	0.00l
	White Male	-4.596	-13.283	0.00l
	White Female	-5.464	-15.93	0.00l

As shown in Table 10, Tukey's post hoc test indicates which groups are significantly different from each other. In particular, African American males post significantly lower ACT reading scores as compared to all other ethnic-gender groups. The largest discrepancy is with Asian females, with a difference of -7.404. The smallest gap is with African American females, with a difference of -1.186. Overall, Tukey's post hoc procedure shows significant differences between African American males and all other ethnic-gender groups.

Research Question 5: Is There a Relationship of Ethnicity-Gender to Grade 8 Explore Math Scores?

Table 11

Means and standard deviations for grade 8 Explore math

Ethnicity	Gender	Mean	SD	N
African Amer.	Male	13.44	3.31	354
	Female	14.17	3.17	391
Hispanic	Male	15.37	3.35	682
	Female	15.06	3.09	736
Asian	Male	16.58	4.41	19
	Female	17.53	3.56	15
White	Male	16.43	3.30	590
	Female	16.11	3.26	626

Table 11 depicts the means and standard deviations for all ethnic-gender groups regarding research question 5, "Is there an effect of ethnicity-gender on grade 8 Explore math scores?" The highest mean 8th grade Explore math score is for Asians females (*M*=17.53, *SD*=3.56), and lowest is for African Americans males (*M*= 13.44, *SD* =3.31). The mean eighth grade Explore math score of African American males is lower than all other groups. The mean difference between African American males and other male groups is 1.93 among Hispanic males, 3.14 among Asian males, and 2.99 among white males. While Asian males are the highest performing male group, Asian females perform highest overall with a mean of 17.53, 4.09 points higher than

African American males. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on the eighth grade Explore math scores was found to be significant, F (7, 3405) = 41.046, $p < .001$, which means there are statistically significant differences between the groups.

Table 12

Tukey's HSD for relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 8 Explore math

Group (i)	Group (i)	Mean Diff.	*t*	*p*
	African Amer. Female	-0.731	-3.058	0.046
	Hispanic Male	-1.932	-9.07	0.00l
	Hispanic Female	-1.625	-7.738	0.00l
African Amer. Male	Asian Male	-3.144	-4.104	0.001
	Asian Female	-4.098	-4.776	0.00l
	White Male	-2.990	-13.652	0.00l
	White Female	-2.674	-12.379	0.00l

As shown in Table 12, Tukey's post hoc test indicates which groups are significantly different from each other. In particular, African American males post significantly lower eighth grade Explore math scores as compared to all other ethnic-gender groups. The largest discrepancy is with Asian females, with a difference of -4.098. The smallest gap is with African American females, with a difference of -.0731. Overall, Tukey's post hoc procedure shows significant differences between African American males and all other ethnic-gender groups.

Research Question 6: Is There a Relationship of Ethnicity-Gender to Grade 9 Explore Math Scores?

Table 13

Means and standard deviations for grade 9 Explore math

Ethnicity	Gender	Mean	SD	N
African Amer.	Male	14.06	3.61	354
	Female	14.68	3.47	391
Hispanic	Male	16.20	3.53	682
	Female	15.76	3.06	736
Asian	Male	18.37	3.76	19
	Female	18.73	3.49	15
White	Male	17.55	3.76	590
	Female	17.14	3.54	626

Table 13 depicts the means and standard deviations for all ethnic groups regarding research question 6, "Is there an effect of ethnicity-gender on grade 9 math scores?" The highest mean ninth grade Explore math score is for Asians females (M=18.73, SD=3.49), and the lowest is for African Americans males (M= 14.06, SD =3.61). The mean ninth grade Explore math score of African American males is lower than all other groups. The mean difference between African American males and other male groups is 2.14 among Hispanic males, 4.31 among Asian males, and 3.49 among white males. While Asian males are the highest performing male group, Asian females perform highest overall with a mean of 18.74, 4.67 points higher than

African American males. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on 9th grade Explore math scores was found to be significant, F (7, 3405) = 52.637, p < .001, which means there are statistically significant differences among the groups.

Table 14

Tukey's HSD for relationship of ethnicity-gender to grade 9 Explore math

Group (i)	Group (i)	Mean Diff.	*t*	*p*
	African Amer. Female	-0.613	-2.403	0.242
	Hispanic Male	-2.133	-9.355	0.00l
	Hispanic Female	-1.695	-7.533	0.00l
African Amer. Male	Asian Male	-4.303	-5.247	0.001
	Asian Female	-4.668	-5.084	0.00l
	White Male	-3.489	-14.91	0.00l
	White Female	-3.072	-13.241	0.00l

As shown in Table 14, Tukey's post hoc test indicates which groups are significantly different from each other. In particular, African American males post significantly lower ninth grade Explore math scores as compared to all other ethnic-gender groups, except African American Females. The largest discrepancy is with Asian females, with a difference of

-4.668. The smallest gap is with African American females, with a difference of -.0613. Overall, Tukey's post hoc procedure shows significant differences between African American males all other ethnic-gender groups, except African American females.

Research Question 7: Is There a Relationship of Ethnicity-Gender to Plan Math Scores?

Table 15

Means and standard deviations for Plan math

Ethnicity	Gender	Mean	SD	N
African Amer.	Male	15.59	3.36	354
	Female	16.05	3.45	391
Hispanic	Male	17.52	4.08	682
	Female	17.21	3.64	736
Asian	Male	20.47	5.59	19
	Female	21.07	3.83	15
White	Male	19.37	4.83	590
	Female	19.06	4.26	626

Table 15 depicts the means and standard deviations for all ethnic-gender groups regarding research question 7, "Is there an effect of ethnicity-gender on Plan math scores?" The highest mean Plan math score is for Asians females (*M*=21.07, *SD*=3.83), and is lowest for African Americans males (*M*= 15.59, *SD* =3.36). The mean Plan math score of African American males is lower than all other groups. The mean difference between African American males and other male groups is 1.93 among Hispanic males, 4.88 among Asian males, and 3.78 among white males. While Asian males are the highest performing male group, Asian

females perform highest overall with a mean of 21.07, 5.48 points higher than African American males. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on Plan math scores was found to be significant, F (7, 3405) = 52.176, $p < .001$, which means there are statistically significant differences among the groups.

Table 16

Tukey's HSD for relationship of ethnicity-gender to Plan math

Group (i)	Group (i)	Mean Diff.	*t*	*p*
	African Amer. Female	-0.456	-1.54	0.786
	Hispanic Male	-1.93	-7.31	0.00l
	Hispanic Female	-1.619	-6.203	0.00l
African Amer. Male	Asian Male	-4.883	-5.134	0.001
	Asian Female	-5.476	-5.146	0.00l
	White Male	-3.776	-13.933	0.00l
	White Female	-3.467	-12.936	0.00l

As shown in Table 16, Tukey's post hoc test indicates which groups are significantly different from each other. In particular, African American males have significantly lower test scores compared to all of the other groups, except African American females. The largest discrepancy is with Asian females, with a difference of -5.476. The smallest gap is with African American females, with a difference of -.456. Overall, Tukey's post hoc procedure shows significant differences between African American males all ethnic-gender groups, except African American females.

Research Question 8: Is There a Relationship of Ethnicity-Gender to ACT Math Scores?

Table 17

Means and standard deviations for ACT Math

Ethnicity	Gender	Mean	SD	N
African Amer.	Male	16.92	3.21	354
	Female	17.19	3.40	391
Hispanic	Male	18.41	4.04	682
	Female	17.92	3.47	736
Asian	Male	23.21	5.72	19
	Female	21.40	4.45	15
White	Male	20.59	4.53	590
	Female	20.08	4.53	626

Table 17 depicts means and standard deviations for all ethnic groups regarding research question 8, "Is there an effect of ethnicity-gender on ACT math scores?" The highest mean math score is for Asians males (M=23.21, SD=5.72), and the lowest is for African Americans males (M=16.92, SD=3.21). The mean ACT math score of African American males is lower than all other groups. The mean difference between African American males and other male groups is 1.49 among Hispanic males, 6.29 among Asian males, and 3.67 among white males. Asian males are the highest performing male group and perform highest overall with a mean of 23.21, 6.29 points

higher than African American males. The omnibus test for the main effect of ethnicity-gender on ACT math scores was found to be significant, F (7, 3405) = 56.948, $p < .001$, which means there are statistically significant differences among the groups.

Table 18

Tukey's HSD for relationship of ethnicity-gender to ACT math

Group (i)	Group (i)	Mean Diff.	*t*	*p*
	African Amer. Female	-0.269	-0.9212	0.984
	Hispanic Male	-1.497	-5.735	0.00l
	Hispanic Female	-1.000	-3.891	0.00l
African Amer. Male	Asian Male	-6.292	-6.715	0.001
	Asian Female	-4.482	-4.272	0.00l
	White Male	-3.668	-13.737	0.00l
	White Female	-3.163	-11.935	0.00l

As shown in Table 18, Tukey's post hoc test indicates which groups are significantly different from each other. In particular, African American males have significantly lower test scores compared to all of the other groups, except African American females. The largest discrepancy is with Asian males, with a difference of -6.292, while the smallest is with African American females, with a difference of -.269. Tukey's post hoc procedure shows significant differences between African American males and all ethnic groups, except African American females.

Further Data Analysis of Student Characteristics Beyond Ethnicity-Gender

Overall, the data depicted in Tables 3 through 18 indicates that Reserve High School District's African American males, as compared with other ethnic-gender groups, tend to post the lowest math and reading scores as measured by the Explore, Plan, and ACT exams. However, the question remains as to whether these documented score discrepancies are still present when taking into account students' other characteristics beyond race. Since the main focus of this Policy Advocacy is on African American male students, a linear multiple regression analysis was conducted to develop a model that would predict the EPAS reading and math exam scores of Reserve High School District's classes of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 (See Appendix A). This analysis combined the students' ethnicity and gender. African American, the reference group, was compared to Hispanic, Asian and white in regards to low-income status (SES), special education status (IEP), English proficiency status (ELL), and students of both genders (Gender).

Regression 2 Analysis of Grade 8 Explore Reading Scores

A linear multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting eighth grade Explore reading scores (See Table 19).

Table 19

Grade 8 Explore reading scores regression coefficients (N=3412)

Model	β	T	P
Constant	13.302	69.88	.001
Afr. Amer. Females	1.22	5.247	.001
Asian Male	1.707	2.291	.022
Asian Female	3.8	4.553	.001
Hisp. Male	1.191	5.717	.001
Hisp. Female	1.466	7.106	.001
White Male	1.901	8.671	.001
White Female	2.568	11.876	.001
SES (free and reduced lunch)	-0.882	-7.34	.001
IEP	-2.774	-14.045	.001
ELL	-3.43	-4.703	.001

Dependent variable: grade 8 Explore reading

As depicted in Table 19, each of the predictor variables had a significant ($p < .05$) relationship with eighth grade Explore reading scores. The ten predictor model was able to account for 15% of the variance in eighth grade Explore reading scores, $F(10,3412) = 61.672$, $p < .001$. Table 19 shows that African American males have significantly lower scores than all other ethnic-gender groups of students. Asian females score 3.8 points higher than the African American males when taking into

account other background characteristics. Compared to other male groups, African American males score 1.707 lower than the Asian males, 1.191 lower than the Hispanic males, and 1.901 lower than the white males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Upon further review, it has been determined that students on free and reduced priced lunch score 0.882 points lower than those students not on free and reduced priced lunch. Additionally, students on IEPs score 2.8 points lower than those not on IEPs. Also, ELL students score 3.4 points lower than non-ELL students.

Regression 2 Analysis of Grade 9 Explore Reading Scores

A linear multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting ninth grade Explore reading scores (See Table 20).

Table 20

Grade 9 Explore reading scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	t	p
Constant	14.970	71.850	.001
AA Females	.99	3.581	.001
Asian Male	2.143	2.627	.001
Asian Female	4.798	5.252	.001
Hisp Male	.899	3.945	.001
Hisp Female	1.343	5.946	.001
White Male	1.909	7.957	.001
White Female	2.472	10.447	.001
SES (free and reduced priced lunch)	-.877	-6.673	.001
IEP	-3.415	-15.798	.001
ELL	-4.142	-5.189	.001

Dependent variable: grade 9 Explore reading

As depicted in Table 20, each of the predictor variables had a significant ($p < .01$) relationship with ninth grade Explore reading scores. The ten predictor model was able to account for 16% of the variance in ninth grade Explore reading scores, $F(10,3412) = 65.613$, $p < .001$. Table 20 shows that African American males have significantly lower scores than all other ethnic-gender groups of students. Asian females score 4.798 points higher than the African American males when taking into

account other background characteristics. Compared to other male groups, African American males score 2.143 lower than the Asian males, .899 lower than the Hispanic males, and 1.909 lower than the white males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Upon further review, it has been determined that students on free and reduced priced lunch score .877 points lower than those students not on free and reduced priced lunch. Additionally, students on IEPs score 3.415 points lower than those not on IEPs. Also, ELL students score 4.142 points lower than non-ELL students

Regression 2 Analysis of Plan Reading Scores

A linear multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting Plan reading scores (See Table 21).

Table 21

Plan reading scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	t	p
Constant	16.108	69.502	.001
Afr. Amer. Females	1.238	4.370	.001
Asian Male	3.209	3.536	.001
Asian Female	4.226	4.159	.001
Hisp. Male	1.128	4.447	.001
Hisp. Female	1.423	5.664	.001
White Male	2.668	12.640	.001
White Female	3.327	10.447	.001
SES (free and reduced lunch)	-1.003	-6.856	.001
IEP	-3.331	-13.851	.001
ELL	-4.277	-4.817	.001

Dependent variable: Plan reading

As depicted in Table 21, each of the predictor variables had a significant ($p < .01$) relationship with tenth grade Plan reading scores. The ten predictor model was able to account for 17% of the variance in tenth grade Plan reading scores, $F(10,3412) = 70.024$, $p < .001$. Table 21 shows that African American males have significantly lower scores than all other ethnic-gender groups of students. Asian females score 4.226 points higher than the African American males when accounting for additional

background characteristics. Compared to other male groups, African American males score 3.209 lower than the Asian males, 1.128 lower than the Hispanic males, and 2.668 lower than the white males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Upon further review, it has been determined that students on free and reduced priced lunch score 1.003 points lower than those students not on free and reduced priced lunch. Additionally, students on IEPs score 3.331 points lower than those not on IEPs. Also, ELL students score 4.277 points lower than non-ELL students

Regression 2 Analysis of ACT Reading Scores

A linear multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting ACT reading scores (See Table 22).

Table 22

ACT reading scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	t	p
Constant	17.852	59.851	.001
Afr. Amer. Females	.865	2.372	.001
Asian Male	3.880	3.321	.001
Asian Female	5.896	4.509	.001
Hisp. Male	1.209	3.703	.001
Hisp. Female	1.446	4.471	.001
White Male	3.391	9.873	.001
White Female	4.268	12.599	.001
SES (free and reduced lunch)	-1.558	-8.275	.001
IEP	-4.178	-13.466	.001
ELL	-4.450	-3.894	.001

Dependent Variable: ACT Reading

As depicted in Table 22, each of the predictor variables had a significant ($p < .01$) relationship with eleventh grade ACT reading scores. The ten predictor model was able to account for 19% of the variance in eleventh grade ACT reading scores, $F(10,3412) = 78.351$, $p < .001$. Table 22 shows that African American males have significantly lower scores than all other ethnic-gender groups of students. Asian females score 5.896 points higher than the African American males when accounting

for additional background characteristics. Compared to other male groups, African American males score 3.880 lower than the Asian males, 1.209 lower than the Hispanic males, and 3.391 lower than the white males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Upon further review, it has been determined that students on free and reduced priced lunch score 1.558 points lower than those students not on free and reduced priced lunch. Additionally, students on IEPs score 4.168 points lower than those not on IEPs. Also, ELL students score 4.450 points lower than non-ELL students

Regression 2 Analysis of Grade 8 Explore Math Scores

A linear multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting eighth grade Explore math scores (See Table 23).

Table 23

Grade 8 Explore math scores regression coefficients (N=3412)

Model	β	t	p
Constant	14.535	79.108	.001
AA Females	.388	1.727	.084
Asian Male	2.224	3.092	.002
Asian Female	3.129	3.884	.001
Hisp Male	1.551	7.714	.001
Hisp Female	1.191	5.980	.001
White Male	2.284	10.793	.001
White Female	1.934	9.267	.001
SES (free and reduced lunch)	-.490	-4.225	.001
IEP	-3.780	-19.825	.001
ELL	-4.576	-6.501	.001

Dependent variable: grade 8 Explore math

As depicted in Table 23, each of the predictor variables had a significant ($p < .01$) relationship with eighth grade Explore math scores, except African American females. The ten predictor model was able to account for 19% of the variance in eighth grade Explore math scores, $F(10,3412) = 80.766$, $p < .001$. Table 23 shows that African American males have significantly lower scores than all other ethnic-gender groups of students, except African American females. Asian females score

3.129 points higher than the African American males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Compared to other male groups, African American males score 2.224 lower than the Asian males, 1.551 lower than the Hispanic males, and 2.284 lower than the white males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Upon further review, it has been determined that students on free and reduced priced lunch score .490 points lower than those students not on free and reduced priced lunch. Additionally, students on IEPs score 3.780 points lower than those not on IEPs. Also, ELL students score 4.576 points lower than non-ELL students.

Regression 2 Analysis of Grade 9 Explore Math Scores

A linear multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting ninth grade Explore math scores (See Table 24).

Table 24

Grade 9 Explore math scores regression coefficients (N=3412)

Model	β	t	p
Constant	15.341	78.668	.001
AA Females	.212	.892	.373
Asian Male	3.235	4.237	.001
Asian Female	3.543	4.143	.001
Hisp Male	1.669	7.822	.001
Hisp Female	1.166	5.513	.001
White Male	2.669	11.886	.001
White Female	2.211	9.981	.001
SES (free and reduced lunch)	-.564	-4.585	.001
IEP	-4.400	-21.742	.001
ELL	-3.560	-4.765	.001

Dependent variable: grade 9 Explore math

As depicted in Table 24, each of the predictor variables had a significant ($p < .01$) relationship with ninth grade Explore math scores, except the coefficient for African American females. The ten predictor model was able to account for 22% of the variance in ninth grade Explore math scores, $F(10,3412) = 97.147$, $p < .001$. Table 24 shows that African American males have significantly lower scores than all other ethnic-gender groups of students, except African American females. Asian females

score 3.543 points higher than the African American males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Compared to other male groups, African American males score 3.235 lower than the Asian males, 1.669 lower than the Hispanic males, and 2.669 lower than the white males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Upon further review, it has been determined that students on free and reduced priced lunch score .564 points lower than those students not on free and reduced priced lunch. Additionally, students on IEPs score 4.400 points lower than those not on IEPs. Also, ELL students score 3.560 points lower than non-ELL students

Regression 2 Analysis of Plan Math Scores

A linear multiple regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting Plan math scores (See Table 25).

Table 25

Plan math scores regression coefficients (N=3412)

Model	β	t	p
Constant	16.927	73.086	.001
AA Females	.283	.330	.741
Asian Male	3.817	4.209	.001
Asian Female	4.335	4.270	.001
Hisp Male	1.503	5.932	.001
Hisp Female	1.140	4.540	.001
White Male	2.923	10.960	.001
White Female	2.586	9.830	.001
SES (free and reduced priced lunch)	-.734	-5.022	.001
IEP	-4.110	-17.104	.001
ELL	-3.798	-4.281	.001

Dependent variable: Plan math

As depicted in Table 25, each of the predictor variables had a significant ($p < .01$) relationship with tenth grade Plan math scores, except African American females. The ten predictor model was able to account for 18% of the variance in tenth grade Plan math scores, $F(10,3412) = 76.154$, $p < .001$. Table 25 shows that African American males have significantly lower scores than all other ethnic-gender groups

of students, except African American females. Asian females score 4.335 points higher than the African American males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Compared to other male groups, African American males score 3.817 lower than the Asian males, 1.503 lower than the Hispanic males, and 2.923 lower than the white males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Upon further review, it has been determined that students on free and reduced priced lunch score .734 points lower than those students not on free and reduced priced lunch. Additionally, students on IEPs score 4.110 points lower than those not on IEPs. Also, ELL students score 3.798 points lower than non-ELL students

Regression 2 Analysis of ACT Math Scores

A linear regression analysis was used to develop a model for predicting ACT math scores (See Table 26).

Table 26

ACT math scores regression coefficients (N=3412)

Model	β	t	p
Constant	18.124	78.344	.001
AA Females	-.024	-.084	.933
Asian Male	5.362	5.919	.001
Asian Female	3.475	3.426	.001
Hisp Male	1.146	4.526	.001
Hisp Female	.612	2.438	.015
White Male	2.903	10.896	.001
White Female	2.381	9.061	.001
SES (free and reduced priced lunch)	-.749	-5.128	.001
IEP	-3.409	-14.201	.001
ELL	-3.324	-3.750	.001

Dependent variable: ACT math

As depicted in Table 26, each of the predictor variables had a significant ($p < .01$) relationship with eleventh grade ACT math scores, except African American females. The ten predictor model was able to account for 17% of the variance in eleventh grade ACT math scores, $F(10,3412) = 68.852$, $p < .001$. Table 26 shows that African American males have significantly lower scores than all other ethnic-gender groups

of students, except African American females. Asian females score 3.475 points higher than the African American males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Compared to other male groups, African American males score 5.362 lower than the Asian males, 1.146 lower than the Hispanic males, and 2.903 lower than the white males when accounting for additional background characteristics. Upon further review, it has been determined that students on free and reduced priced lunch score .749 points lower than those students not on free and reduced priced lunch. Additionally, students on IEPs score 3.409 points lower than those not on IEPs. Also, ELL students score 3.324 points lower than non-ELL students

Summary

The data represented in the 24 statistically significant analysis tables previously shown, conclude that the African American male population of Reserve High School District is the lowest performing group in reading and math, based on gender and ethnicity, as measured by the eighth grade and ninth grade Explore tests, the tenth grade Plan test, and the eleventh grade ACT. In fact, African American males test the lowest of all ethnic-gender groups on the EPAS reading and math tests that are administered to them eighth through eleventh grade. Based on the results of these findings, I believe we should develop a policy that consists of a variety of interventions, including continued standards alignment, student supports in reading and math, a restructured student advisory period, and professional development in culturally responsive teaching for all Reserve High School District staff members, with the ultimate aim of improving the reading and math achievement of the district's African American males, as measured by the Explore, Plan, and ACT.

CHAPTER FIVE: POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

In an effort to increase the academic achievement of the African American males enrolled in Reserve High School District, it is necessary to expand on current supportive programs within the district, as well as create new programs that specifically address these students' areas of need. Current supportive programs in Reserve High School District include alignment of the curriculum to the Common Core State Standards (2015), double-block Algebra 1 for freshman, math tutoring, an extra period for freshman to receive additional math and literacy support, freshman- and sophomore-level literacy courses, a 25-minute daily advisory period, and staff professional development related to cultural and racial sensitivity.

In addition to continuing the supports currently in place at Reserve High School District, I believe it is imperative to expand some of those supports, as well as to create others to further meet the needs of the district's African American males. First, to improve their performance in math, I propose adding sophomore- and junior-level double block math courses, a summer math enrichment program, instructional math on-demand videos, and expanded math tutoring. Next, to increase the African American males' ability to process written and oral information, I propose expanding student enrollment in the district's required literacy course and to revise the course's curriculum. Finally, to expand the African American males' overall academic performance, I propose restructuring the existing advisory period and enhancing the district's cultural competency training to include instruction in culturally responsive

teaching. Utilizing existing supports, along with implementing these new and expanded supports, should narrow the current achievement gap that exists between African American males and the other students in the Reserve High School District.

Alignment to the Common Core State Standards

During the 2013-2014 school year, Reserve High School District began aligning its curriculum to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (2015) which were adopted by the state of Illinois in 2010 (Illinois State Board of Education, 2013). According to the Illinois State Board of Education (2013), the development of CCSS was a collaborative effort between teachers, school administrators, and education experts from across the United States "to establish a single set of clear educational standards for English-language arts and mathematics that states [could] share and voluntarily adopt" (Illinois State Board of Education, 2013, ¶ 8). The CCSS's ultimate aim is to prepare students, from kindergarten through the twelfth grade, to "graduate from high school able to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing academic college courses and in workforce training programs" (Illinois State Board of Education, 2013, ¶ 2).

Reserve High School District began its alignment to the math CCSS with Algebra 1 in 2013-2014, followed in successive school years by Geometry, Algebra 2/Trigonometry, and Advanced Algebra. The district's highest level math courses, Pre. Calculus 2 and Probability and Statistics, should be aligned to the CCSS by the end of the 2016-2017 school year. The district began aligning to the CCSS English/language arts standards in 2011, completing that process by the spring of 2012. Thus, Reserve High School District's alignment to the math and

English/language arts CCSS is providing a curriculum of greater instructional rigor as teachers gain "a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn" in order to be prepared for success after graduation (Illinois State Board of Education, 2013, ¶ 3).

Math Supports

Double Block Math Classes

Prior to the 2015 – 2016 school year, Reserve High School District students with grade 8 Explore math scores of 13 and below were provided one hour of additional math support during an added eighth period. These students were enrolled in a summer math bridge program, as well. According to ACT College Readiness Benchmarks, however, the grade 8 Explore math benchmark for predicting college and career readiness is 17, much higher than the score of 13 that was being used by Reserve (ACT, Inc., College Readiness Benchmarks, 2015). As a result, the district decided to expand math support to a wider group of freshman: Beginning with Reserve's incoming class of 2019, students scoring at or below a scale score of 15 on the math portion of the grade 8 Explore test were enrolled in double block Algebra 1.

Providing struggling students with additional time to learn can bolster their success, as reported in the results of a study by Jez and Wassmer (2011):

> [W]e found a statistically significant and positive relationship between the number of instructional minutes in an academic year and school-site standardized test scores. More specifically, about 15 more minutes of school a day (or about an additional week of classes over an academic year) relates to an increase in average overall academic achievement of about 1.0 %, and a 1.5

> % increase in average achievement for disadvantaged students, even after controlling for student and school characteristics. This same increase in learning time yields an expected 37 % gain in the average growth of socioeconomically disadvantage achievement from the previous academic year. (p. 2)

Such research emphasizes the positive effects an extra period of math can have on students; therefore, I propose expanding Reserve's double block math class offerings beyond Algebra 1 to sophomore-level Geometry and junior-level Algebra 2/Trigonometry. Adding additional time for teaching and learning will provide Reserve students who have not yet met the ACT College Readiness math benchmarks the opportunity to master the skills necessary to improve their mathematical performance, both in the classroom and on standardized exams.

Summer Math Enrichment

In addition to improving academic achievement by adding more instructional time during the school year, summer academic programs can have positive effects on student learning, as well. According to Warger, Eavy & Associates (2009), students who attend summer bridge programs between the eighth and ninth grades are more enthusiastic about school, cause fewer discipline problems and, perhaps most importantly, improve their academic skills and, thus, their passing rates. In line with this research, Reserve High School District currently offers a summer math bridge program for incoming freshman whose grade 8 Explore math scores fall below the benchmark of 17. During this four-week program, students are provided instruction in their deficit skill areas, as identified by their Explore results.

The need for a summer math program for older Reserve students who do not meet the ACT math benchmarks is evident as well. As quoted by Raulerson (2013), RAND Corporation researcher Catherine Augustine asserts, "'We know from decades of research that students come back in the fall about one month behind where they were in the spring…'" (¶ 3). Regarding math knowledge, the National Summer Learning Association (2009) reports, "Most students lose about two months of grade level equivalency in mathematical computation skills over the summer months" (¶ 5). In light of these findings about the reality of the summer "brain drain," I propose expanding Reserve's summer math program to rising sophomores and juniors. In particular, to better prepare students for success in their Geometry and Algebra 2/Trigonometry classes, I recommend running a two-hour-a-day, two-week-long summer math bridge program prior to the start of the new school year. This program would be offered to rising sophomores whose grade 9 Explore math scores fall below the ACT college readiness benchmark of 18, as well as to rising juniors whose grade 10 Plan math scores fall below the benchmark of 19.

Instructional Math Videos

According to O'Sullivan, Chen, and Fish (2014), for middle and high school students, homework is "an effective supplement to in-school learning…" (p. 166); however, as Smith (2006) reports, "rates of parental involvement are lower in low-income communities than in higher income schools" (p. 44). As a result, Smith (2006) concludes, "low-income children, with less involved parents, often experience fewer of the academic benefits [of parental homework help] than children coming from higher income homes" (p.44). To compensate for many of Reserve students'

lack of parental homework assistance, I propose that the district's math teachers work in curricular teams to create videos providing step-by-step instruction of particular mathematical concepts, which students can access from the district website to help them not only complete homework, but also review prior to quizzes and tests. Because the district has provided all students with their own laptops, all have the ability to access the Internet either from home or, if necessary, from a public space with wireless access. In order to create math instructional videos, teachers will require training on their production and online posting. This support can be provided through the district's technology services department.

Math Tutoring

Another method for improving students' math learning outside of the classroom is through tutoring. According to a study by the University of Chicago's Urban Education Lab, math tutoring for high school students can "improve math performance by more than half a letter grade, reduce math course failures by more than 50 percent, and reduce overall course failures by more than one quarter" (Ingmire, 2015, ¶ 2). In line with this research, Reserve High School District currently offers math tutoring to sophomores and juniors enrolled in Geometry and Algebra 2/Trigonometry, based on teacher recommendation or parent request. I propose that math tutoring be expanded to all of Reserve's math students, accessible on an as needed basis, before and after school, on weekends, and during the evenings prior to semester final exams, at the times listed in Table 27.

Table 27

Proposed Reserve High School District math tutoring schedule

DAYS	TIMES
Monday – Friday	7:15 AM – 8:00 AM
Monday – Friday	3:15 PM – 4:15 PM
Saturdays	12:00 PM – 2:00 PM
Sundays	2:00 PM – 4:00 PM
Evenings Prior to Final Exams	6:00 PM – 10:00 PM

Literacy Supports

Expansion of Literacy Course Enrollment

Ten years ago, Reserve High School District added an eighth period to the school day to provide freshmen with literacy support. Today, the district additionally offers a literacy course for all students. Currently, its curriculum consists solely of Achieve 3000 (2015), an online program that offers differentiated literacy instruction through interactive lessons tailored to address individual students' specific skill deficits. This course, required for all freshmen scoring at or below a scale score of 12 on the grade 8 Explore reading exam, is taken in addition to the students' required English course, replacing an elective. Sophomores, juniors, and seniors who are not reading at grade level – as measured by either their Lexile (MetaMetrics, 2015) reading score or EPAS reading score – are also enrolled in this course. Teachers may recommend students for this literacy course as well.

In order to ensure that all Reserve High School District students have the literacy skills necessary for college and career success, I propose adjusting the EPAS reading benchmark scores for the required literacy class to the following: students entering their freshman year with a grade 8 Explore reading scale score of 14 or below, students entering their sophomore year with a grade 9 Explore reading scale score of 15 or below, students entering their junior year with a Plan reading scale score of 16 or below, and students entering their senior year with an ACT reading scale score of 20 or below (See Table 28).

Table 28

EPAS reading benchmark scores for required literacy course enrollment

Grade Level Tested	EPAS Reading Test	Test Administration Date	Benchmark Score	Required Literacy Class Cut Score
8th Grade	Grade 8 Explore	Fall 8th Grade	16	14 & Below
9th Grade	Grade 9 Explore	Spring 9th Grade	17	15 & Below
10th Grade	Plan	Spring 10th Grade	18	16 & Below
11th Grade	ACT	Spring 11th Grade	22	20 & Below

Literacy Course Curriculum Revision

In addition to expanding the number of students taking a literacy course, I propose revising the curriculum so that in addition to receiving targeted skill instruction through Achieve 3000, students will be taught to employ information processing strategies, which are vital to increasing their reading achievement. As Conley (2008) argues, cognitive strategy instruction can improve students' ability to read and comprehend information in all content areas. In particular, therefore, I advocate that the literacy course teachers be trained in Gretchen Courtney & Associates' (2015) research-based literacy strategy framework. Additionally, I recommend the adoption of challenging, culturally relevant texts for whole-group instruction. According to Larson and Marsh (2005), students who read texts that are relevant to their lives and cultural backgrounds are able to make connections between their lives both in and out of school. These connections, as Gay (2000) asserts, "improve students' mastery of academic skills as well as other dimensions of learning, such as interest, motivation, and time-on-task" (p. 118). In order to effectively incorporate literacy strategy instruction and culturally relevant texts into the literacy course curriculum, teachers will need to be provided with either release time or curriculum pay.

General Academic Supports

Student Advisory Restructuring

When surveyed several years ago, Reserve High School District staff members overwhelmingly supported the proposal for a mentoring program, which would

connect all students with an adult in the district. As Jucovy (2008) reports, school mentoring programs can result in a variety of positive outcomes. Jucovy states:

> Recent research into school-based mentoring outcomes indicates that these programs can:
>
> - Improve academic performance, in general, with significant improvements demonstrated in the subjects of science and written and oral language
> - Improve the quality of classwork
> - Increase the number of homework and in-class assignments turned in
> - Reduce serious school infractions, such as disciplinary referrals, fighting, and suspension
> - Increase students' perceptions of scholastic competence
> - Reduce skipping classes (p. 5)

In response to Reserve staff members' wide-spread support of a mentoring program, the district implemented a 25-minute daily advisory period, led by teachers whose responsibilities include monitoring student grades, assisting students with the development of an Individual Career Plan (ICP), and delivering a portion of the guidance curriculum. Perhaps most importantly, however, is the advisory teachers' charge to build relationships with their advisory students. Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, and McMaken (2007) report, "[A] critical component [of mentorship] is the relationship that develops between the child and the mentor. When a supportive adult consistently spends time with a child, a mutually trusting relationship forms. Through this relationship, the child begins to feel more socially accepted and supported" (p. 3).

Reserve's current advisory structure, however, makes forming strong, trusting mentor-student relationships more difficult because students do not remain with the same advisor over their four years of high school. Additionally, advisory teachers' assignments change every year, as do the makeup of the students within each advisory. To improve the advisors' ability to create strong bonds with their students, I recommend that Reserve High School District's advisory period be restructured so the same teacher works with the same group of students from their freshman through their senior years. Additionally, because of gender learning differences (Gurian & Henley, 2002; Brooks, 2006; Black, 2006), I propose the advisories be divided into male and female sections led, respectively, by male and female advisors. Table 29 overviews my proposed weekly advisory curriculum.

Table 29

Proposed Reserve High School District Advisory weekly scope and sequence

Day	Focus	Related Activities
Monday & Tuesday	Motivation/Mentoring	• Expectations • Cultural awareness • Organization • Grade monitoring • Self-advocacy strategies • Personal relationship development • Problem solving and support • School support awareness • Character building
Wednesday	Gender specific topics	• Perception vs. reality • Behavior • Etiquette

Thursday	Team building competitions and projects to expand school involvement and community awareness	• Round robin intramurals
		  ➢ Tug of War
		  ➢ Dodge ball
		  ➢ Kick ball
		• Fantasy football/basketball
		• Extracurricular involvement
		• Food/clothing/toy drives
		• Fundraisers
		• Community service projects

Friday	Academic Support	• Assistance from advisor • Assistance from peers within advisory

To enhance the advisory teachers' effectiveness, I additionally propose that all advisors receive training in both mentoring skills as well as gender specific

instructional methods. These trainings could be developed and facilitated by Reserve guidance counselors. In addition, the guidance counseling staff can provide on-going support for advisors as they encounter unique and/or disconcerting situations with students.

Professional Development in Culturally Responsive Teaching

In school year 2010-2011, Reserve High School District provided professional development related to cultural and racial sensitivity. The year following, the district held further cultural staff training related to Ruby Payne's *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (2005). According to study by French (2009), "teacher development in the field of cross-cultural communication will improve the cross-cultural bridge building skills of teachers" (p. 83). I feel, however, that because Reserve's multi-cultural, multi-racial student body is taught by a largely white staff, the teachers need training in culturally responsive teaching. Defined by Gay (2002), "culturally responsive teaching" employs "the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). Gay (2002) continues, "It is based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly" (p. 106). I, therefore, propose professional develop in culturally responsive teaching for all Reserve High School District teachers. This training could be conducted through New York University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and Transformation in Schools (2015), which provides "a series of Cultural Responsiveness Professional Development

modules" that "address achievement gaps across ethnic groups and disproportionate representation in special education for students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds" (¶ 1).

Budget

The implementation of this recommended policy will come at a price to the district. The estimated costs are $641,104.00 for math supports, $446,943.00 for literacy supports, and $64,963.00 for general academic supports, for a total of $1,153,010.00 (See Appendix B). This policy can be sustained through Title 1 funds – for tutoring, professional development and mentoring – as well as district funds. To relieve financial pressure on the district, I recommend introducing these supports over a three to five year period.

Summary

Reserve High School District provides a vast array of exceptional supports for students. Beyond the district's current offerings, however, I recommend expanding double block math and literacy courses, as well as summer math enrichment and math tutoring opportunities. Additionally, I propose creating on-demand math instructional videos, revising the literacy course curriculum, and providing training for all staff in culturally relevant teaching. These new and additional supports should result in the improved academic achievement of all Reserve High School District students, particularly its African American male population.

CHAPTER SIX: POLICY ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this chapter is to answer the question: How do we know if the proposed policy once implemented is working? A substantial variety of support programs are available to the students of Reserve High School District. Nevertheless, in order to narrow the achievement gap between the district's African American males and its other students, I believe it is necessary to bolster Reserve's math, literacy, and general academic supports. In particular, to improve the African American males' math performance, I recommend that the district expand its double block math offerings, its summer math enrichment program, and its math tutoring opportunities, as well as create a series of instructional on-demand math instructional videos. Additionally, to increase African American males' literacy skills, I advocate expanding the enrollment of the district's literacy course, as well as revamping the course's curriculum. Finally, I recommend restructuring the district's advisory period, along with providing professional development for all staff in culturally responsive teaching. Each of these supports must be monitored and assessed in order to determine the support's effectiveness and make adjustments as needed.

Math Supports

Double Block Math Classes

To assess the effectiveness of the double block Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2/Trigonometry classes, two methods can be used. First, records of all double block math students' EPAS scale scores should be tracked from their eighth grade Explore math exam through their junior year ACT math test to gauge each student's progress towards meeting the ACT college readiness math scale score benchmark of

22 (ACT, Inc., College Readiness Benchmarks, 2015). Regression models can be developed to indicate math skill growth from the grade 8 Explore to the grade 9 Explore, the grade 9 Explore to Plan, and Plan to ACT. In addition, the pass rates of students enrolled in double block math classes should be compared to those enrolled in the single period class counterparts over a multiyear period.

Summer Math Enrichment

The efficacy of the summer math enrichment program can be assessed through pre- and post-testing students on the essential skills they will need to be successful in their respective double block math courses the following school year. These foundational skills will be reviewed and reinforced throughout the summer enrichment Preparation for Algebra 1, Geometry, and Algebra 2/Trigonometry classes. In addition, summer enrichment students' math grades during the regular school year should be compared to the grades of students who did not participate in the summer program, both those enrolled in the double block and the single period math classes.

Instructional Math Videos

Student usage of the on-demand instructional math videos can be tracked through a district's website log of video downloads. The resulting frequency-of-usage figures can be compared to students' self-reported usage through student surveys. In addition to asking the students to share which videos they have accessed during the quarter, the surveys can also ask the students to report on why they accessed the videos, for example, to complete homework or to study for a test, as well as to rate each video's helpfulness and provide suggestions for improvement. Another measure of the

videos' effectiveness can be made by teachers tracking students' homework completion and test scores on a unit-by-unit basis, and comparing their findings to average homework completion rates and grades prior to the development of the instructional videos.

Math Tutoring

To determine the number of students accessing math tutoring, as well as to know when they are accessing it, students should be required to sign in with their ID numbers. This will enable queries to be run to determine which math classes the students are currently taking, as well as the math grades they are earning. The tutoring students' grades can be compared to students' math grades prior to the expansion of math tutoring. Also, the information generated by the query can be checked against a quarterly student survey that, in addition to asking when and how many times students have come in for tutoring, can determine the type of math tutoring they have sought, such as assistance with homework or studying for a test, and how useful they rate the assistance they have received.

Literacy Supports

Expansion of Literacy Class Enrollment

Similar to the method of assessing the effectiveness of the double block math classes, the efficacy of the expanded literacy course can be determined by tracking student progress towards meeting the ACT college readiness reading scale score benchmark of 22 (ACT, Inc., College Readiness Benchmarks, 2015). Regression models can be developed to indicate reading skill growth from the grade 8 Explore to the grade 9 Explore, the grade 9 Explore to Plan, and Plan to ACT. Additionally,

students' progress towards meeting college and career reading readiness, as measured by The Lexile Framework for Reading (MetaMetrics, 2015), can be tracked through semester Achieve 3000 (2015) testing in the literacy classes.

Literacy Course Curriculum Revision

To gauge the overall value of the literacy course curricular revisions, students' understanding and ability to employ the literacy skills taught in the course can be evaluated through comprehensive quarterly exams aligned to instructional objectives. In addition to collecting quarterly exam data to determine students' levels of mastery of specific skills, literacy course enrollment numbers can be tracked: The more effective the curriculum, the lower the enrollment numbers should become as students progress from the ninth through the twelfth grade.

General Academic Supports

Student Advisory Restructuring

In an effort to determine the overall effectiveness of the restructuring of advisory, students and staff can participate in a survey. Administered at the end of each semester, this survey can ask students and staff to reflect on the overall advantages and disadvantages of the advisory structure and curriculum, as well as allow them the opportunity to make suggestions for improvement. Additionally, student failure rates in their core courses of English, math, science, and social science can be compared to those of previous years, and discipline data can be analyzed, as well, to determine if infractions have decreased.

Professional Development in Culturally Responsive Teaching

Professional development in culturally responsive teaching can be assessed through formal teacher observations, as well as informal classroom walk-throughs. Evaluators should collect evidence of teachers' awareness and understanding of the active nature of student learning, along with their ability to purposely seek knowledge regarding students' backgrounds, cultures, and language. The teachers can be surveyed, as well, regarding their opinion of the effectiveness of the training, and a another survey can be developed to track their changing attitudes towards and understandings of the students they teach.

Summary

The assessment of Reserve High School District's expanded and added student supports should gauge their effects on all of the students who utilize them at each grade level. The gathered assessment data, however, should be broken down further by ethnicity and gender to determine each support's impact on each of the following students groups: Asian males, Asian females, Hispanic males, Hispanic females, white males, white females, African American males, and African American females. Of course, the district wants all of its students to succeed academically, but as this policy advocates, it is particularly focused on measuring the influence of the various supports on the math and literacy achievement of its African American males. Ultimately, the analysis can lead to revisions and adjustments to the supports, as the district deems necessary.

SECTION SEVEN: SUMMARY IMPACT STATEMENT

As I reflect on my lengthy academic journey of researching, compiling, analyzing, synthesizing, composing and, ultimately, defending this policy advocacy dissertation, I continue to think back on my personal journey as an African American male – moving from childhood, through adolescence, to adulthood. Growing up with seven siblings in a single parent, low-income household has made me thankful for the personal experiences, formal education, and life lessons that have combined to make me into the man I am today. Based on African American male statistics, I could very well be in jail, addicted to drugs, or even dead (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007; Lawrence, 2014; Noguera, 2012; Rothstein, 2013; Rothstein, 2014; Sturgeon, 2005). What made me different from so many other males of my race? A large part of the answer to that question is, quite simply, my mother, who provided me with all she could. Although the material provisions she gave were minimal in comparison to more prosperous parents, her love and support were more than ample, and the roof she put over my head was the one I called home. Our household was not lavish or extraordinary; it was just home, my safe and secure home.

In addition to my mom, I owe my current success to those teachers along my educational path who believed in me – regardless of their own race or socioeconomic status – as they encouraged, guided, and supported me, both academically and emotionally. These outstanding educators, like my mom, repeatedly reminded me of the importance of perseverance, particularly in the most difficult of times. One of my most vivid memories is of my elementary school principal, Mr. Winston Johnson,

who taught us our school's theme song: "You Can Do It, If You Just Stick to It" (Anonymous). Because of Mr. Johnson's true belief in this motto, we all "stuck to it." This song empowered our teachers who, in turn, empowered us students, providing each of us with affirmations and counter-narratives to the negative pressures of our neighborhood and society at large. Mr. Johnson and my caring teachers helped me build the foundation of my ever-growing knowledge, providing me with both the academic and personal skills to become successful not only in school, but also in life.

Finally, beyond my mom and the astounding educators I encountered through grade school and high school, I firmly believe my own internal drive and determination helped me to persevere. As a result, I never have given up on my dreams and goals, despite life's inevitable adversities. Failure in my mother's eyes, failure in my teachers' eyes, failure in my own eyes, failure in society's eyes, failure in life – none is acceptable to me. I have refused to have any of my dreams deferred.

My research reflects my own experience. Culturally sensitive teachers who believe in their students' ability to reach the high expectations they set for them inspire their students to reach those expectations – despite the students' ethnicity, gender, or socioeconomic status (Costa & Kallick, 2000; Lindsey & Mabie, 2012; Noguera, 2012). Young African American males who, like me, have such teachers, come from supportive homes, and possess strong self-determination can experience both academic and personal success. However, as statistics reveal, many do not have the supports necessary to propel them past the pitfalls of poverty, low academic achievement, poor job prospects, drug addiction, jail, or even early death (Cosby & Poussaint, 2007; Lawrence, 2014; Noguera, 2012; Rothstein, 2013; Rothstein, 2014;

Sturgeon, 2005). Thus, it is extremely important for young African American males to interact with male role models that look like them; to see, hear, and read about other African American males' accomplishments; and to develop an awareness and understanding of their own culture (Cartwright & Henriksen, 2006; Grossman, 2006; Kunjufu, 2002; Lindsey & Mabie, 2012; Noguera, 2012; Tate, n.d.).

While we cannot control students' home situations, the communities they come from, or the greater society as a whole, our public schools can provide young African American males with caring teachers; positive role models; a rigorous, culturally sensitive curriculum; and a system of academic supports. Working in tandem, these essential academic elements can propel young African American males– from the day they enter kindergarten through their high school graduation day – to college and career readiness.

This policy advocacy dissertation attempts to ensure that all public schools provide African American males with the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve their dreams of academic and, subsequently, economic and societal advancement. Though my research has focused on African American males, many students from a variety of races, ethnicities, and genders also face the challenge of low academic achievement. Therefore, the recommendations within this policy can be applied to all students who struggle academically, as it attempts to put into place practices that will assist with narrowing the achievement gap between various racial and gender groups. In addition to being obligated to adequately educate our young African American males, I believe we must also commit to educating all students, of all ethnicities. As President Obama (2008) asserted in his first inaugural address, "Every young person

in America deserves a world-class education. We've got an obligation to give it to them." Yes, President Obama, I concur: No child deserves to have his or her dreams deferred.

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APPENDIX A

Table 1A

Grade 8 Explore reading scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	13.611	86.955	.001
Hispanic	.695	4.819	.001
Asian	2.040	3.661	.001
White	1.608	10.292	.001
SES	-.880	-7.314	.001
IEP	-2.805	-14.209	.001
ELL	-3.437	-4.707	.001
Gender	.638	5.867	.001

Dependent variable: grade 8 Explore reading

Table 2A

Grade 9 Explore reading scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	15.131	88.419	.001
Hispanic	.654	4.148	.001
Asian	2.884	4.734	.001
White	1.725	10.096	.001
SES	-.879	-6.682	.001
IEP	-3.431	-15.892	.001
ELL	-4.147	-5.193	.001
Gender	.610	5.129	.001

Dependent variable: grade 9 Explore reading

Table 3A

Plan reading scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	16.426	86.256	.001
Hispanic	.633	3.609	.001
Asian	3.058	4.511	.001
White	2.363	12.430	.001
SES	-.999	-6.826	.001
IEP	-3.364	-14.006	.001
ELL	-4.284	-4.822	.001
Gender	.636	4.812	.001

Dependent variable: Plan reading

Table 4A

ACT reading scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	17.982	73.409	.001
Hispanic	.881	3.904	.001
Asian	4.366	5.007	.001
White	3.395	13.882	.001
SES	-1.558	-8.274	.001
IEP	-4.179	-13.525	.001
ELL	-4.455	-3.898	.001
Gender	.170	3.640	.001

Dependent variable: ACT reading

Table 5A

Grade 8 Explore math scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	14.837	98.250	.001
Hispanic	1.157	8.322	.001
Asian	2.401	4.466	.001
White	1.896	12.580	.001
SES	-.488	-4.205	.001
IEP	-3.812	-20.009	.001
ELL	-4.583	-6.504	.001
Gender	-.182	-1.735	.083

Dependent variable: grade 8 Explore math

Table 6A

Grade 9 Explore math scores regression coefficients (N=3412)

Model	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	15.626	97.526	.001
Hispanic	1.292	8.757	.001
Asian	3.229	5.661	.001
White	2.317	14.486	.001
SES	-.562	-4.562	.001
IEP	-4.430	-21.919	.001
ELL	-3.566	-4.770	.001
Gender	-.325	-2.916	.004

Dependent variable: grade 9 Explore Math

Table 7A

Plan math scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	17.107	89.967	.001
Hispanic	1.263	7.211	.001
Asian	3.974	5.870	.001
White	2.697	14.207	.001
SES	-.733	-5.017	.001
IEP	-4.129	-17.215	.001
ELL	-3.802	-4.286	.001
Gender	-.246	-1.866	.062

Dependent variable: Plan math

Table 8A

ACT math scores regression coefficients (N=3412).

Model	β	*t*	*p*
Constant	18.339	96.531	.001
Hispanic	.877	5.010	.001
Asian	4.505	6.661	.001
White	2.642	13.933	.001
SES	-.743	-5.092	.001
IEP	-3.434	-14.328	.001
ELL	-3.327	-3.753	.001
Gender	-.433	-3.281	.001

Dependent variable: ACT math

APPENDIX B

Table 1B

Math supports estimated budget

MATH SUPPORTS	BUDGETARY NEEDS	ESTIMATED COSTS
Double Block Geometry & Algebra 2/Trigonometry: Teachers	8 teachers to service an estimated 392 sophomores and 473 juniors	8 teachers @ $70,000.00/teacher = $560,000.00
Double Block Geometry & Algebra 2/Trigonometry: Curriculum development	6 teachers to write the curriculum for both courses	6 teachers for 5 days @ $28.50/per hour = $5,985.00
Summer math enrichment program: Teachers	8 teachers to service an estimated 100 rising sophomores and 100 rising juniors	8 teachers for 5 days @ 28.50 per hour = $18,944.00
Summer math enrichment program: Curriculum development	2 teachers to write the curriculum	2 teachers for 3 days @ $28.50 per hour = $1,197.00
Instructional math videos	In-house training provided by the Instructional Technologists staff	9 teachers for 5 days @ $28.50 per hour = $8,978.00
Math tutoring available for all students	6 teachers for before school, after school and weekend tutoring, plus 2 teachers for evening tutoring before final exams	2 teachers @ $5,000.00/teacher for before and after school tutoring = $10,000.00 4 teachers @ $3,000.00/teacher for weekend tutoring = $12,000.00 4 teachers @ $250.00/teacher = $1,000.00 Per campus tutoring cost: $23,000.00 Total tutoring cost: $46,000.00
		Total Math Supports Estimated Cost = **$641,104.00**

Table 2B

Literacy supports estimated budget

LITERACY SUPPORTS	BUDGETARY NEEDS	ESTIMATED COSTS
Expansion of literacy course enrollment	5 teachers to service an estimated 218 freshman, 263 sophomores, 239 juniors, and 127 seniors.	5 teachers @ $70,000/teacher = $350,000.00
Literacy course curriculum revision: Additional texts	Purchase of 1 consumable workbook per student enrolled in a literacy class 468 freshman, 438 sophomores, 239 junior and 127 seniors	1,272 books @ $11.00/book = $14,000.00
Literacy course curriculum revision: Teacher training	Gretchen Courtney information processing strategy training for literacy teachers	7 day training = $40,000
Literacy course curriculum revision: Curriculum development	2 teachers to write the curriculum for 4 literacy courses	8 teachers for 5 days @ $28.50 per hour = $7,980.00
		Total Literacy Supports Estimated Cost = **$446,943.00**

Table 3B

General academic supports estimated budget

GENERAL ACADEMIC SUPPORTS	BUDGETARY NEEDS	ESTIMATED COSTS
Student advisory restructuring: Teacher training	18 guidance counselors to train 398 teachers	n/a; training will occur on school improvement days and institute days
Student advisory restructuring: Curriculum development	15 teachers to write the student advisory curriculum	15 teachers for 5 days @ $28.50 per hour = $14,963.00
Culturally responsive teaching training	New York University's Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and Transformation in Schools: Cultural Responsiveness PD for ___ teachers	3 day training = $50,000
		Total General Academic Supports Cost = **$64,963.00**