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## **Equitable Strategies: Teachers' Expectations and the Academic Achievement of African American Males**

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Danielle R. Green

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Walden University  
2023

Abstract

Equitable Strategies: Teachers' Expectations and the Academic Achievement of African  
American Males

by

Danielle R. Green

MS, Adelphi University, 2002

BA, Medgar Evers College, 1997

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2022

## Abstract

Many African American males in high school do not acquire the knowledge and information that can make them successful in their education goals. This study focused on African American male high school students regarding the instructional practices that could help them succeed academically, so that teachers can be more successful in their teaching of African American students. The purpose of the qualitative study was to explore teachers' perspectives on the curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices they believe most influence the academic achievement of African American males. The findings may provide insights into the educational practices that most contribute to African American males' academic success from the teachers' perspective. This study used culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy to focus on factors in public school settings that help African American males reach their academic potential. Seventeen participants engaged in in-depth interviews, and interview data were analyzed using a priori codes, open coding with thematic analysis, and axial coding. The results of this study may offer teachers and school leaders insights into the specific curriculum, instruction, and assessment constructs that help motivate African American males to invest in school and complete graduation requirements, which could bring about a positive social change for these students and their communities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this project study in memory of my father, James Green, my maternal grandparents, Benjamin D. Gamble and Gladys F. Gamble, my godfather, Robert J. Council, and my uncle, Roger W. Gamble. Thank you for all the love and light you have provided to me on this journey.

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“Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without it, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible.” ~ Dr. Mary McLeod Bethune

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

Since the beginning of national standardized assessments in 1964, there has been an achievement gap between African American males and their peers (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015a). The NCES (2015a) described that in major content areas such as reading and math African American males achieve lower proficiency than their peers. The latest available scores from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) identified that 12th-grade African American students taking the (NAEP) earned a reading scale average score of 266 out of 500 in 2015, while 12th-grade Caucasian students earned a reading scale average score of 295 out of 500 (Snyder et al., 2016).

Teachers have a crucial role in meeting and addressing the needs of their culturally diverse students and impacting social change for this population of students who have lacked success for generations (Corey, 2017). Understanding the multicultural concerns of teachers creates opportunities for teacher development programs and school systems to design professional learning opportunities for teachers that enhance their abilities to implement culturally relevant pedagogies (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). On average, African American students attend schools with higher African American populations, whereas Caucasian students attend schools with lower African American populations (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017). In both settings, Caucasian females are the majority of educators experienced by all student population groups within the United States (NCES, 2015a). Teachers will only be able to deliver high-quality instruction to all

students to succeed in today's 21<sup>st</sup>-century classrooms when they are prepared to address culturally and linguistically diverse student populations (Biag, 2016). Studying culturally responsive teaching and self-efficacy is important to inform best practices regarding culturally relevant and culturally responsive teaching to increase African American males' achievement in education (Knapp, 2018).

### **Background**

According to the Maryland State Department of Education (2016a), Maryland became one of several states to adopt the Partnership for Assessment of College and Careers (PARCC) in 2015. The Maryland State Department of Education (2016a) established a moratorium on Maryland State Assessment data this same year due to the transition from the former Maryland State Assessment (MSA) for Grades 3 to 8 to PARCC. Additionally, MSDE (2016a) reported that a part of the current graduating requirements for high school students, the High School Assessments (HSA) for algebra, biology, and English, experienced a moratorium due to the adoption of PARCC. High school students in Maryland must take PARCC for reading and math and content-specific HSAs.

The MSDE (2016b) noted a significant performance disparity between African American and Caucasian males on the HSAs. African American males consistently scored lower than their school peers from 2011 until 2014 for the Algebra I HSA and English 10 has (see Table 1). For instance, in 2011, only 67.7% of African American males received a passing score on the Algebra 1 HSA, making them the student subgroup with the lowest proficiency rate and second-largest tested subgroup, compared to

Caucasian males with 92.8% passing (MSDE, 2016b). During the same year, 92.8% of Caucasian males compared to 64.4% of African American males received a passing score in the English 10 HSA.

**Table 1**

*Maryland State Department of Education High School Assessment Success Rate*

Variable	Algebra		English	
	African American Males	Caucasian Males	African American Males	Caucasian Males
2011	67.7%	92.8%	64.4%	87.3%
2014	68.3%	92.9%	64.4%	88.7%

*Note.* Percentage of Successful Passing Rate of High School Assessment Exams

Since 2015, the Maryland State Department of Education (2016a) has administered the PARCC, where African American males continue to score lower than their peers consistently. African American males scored 14.7% proficient on the Algebra I assessment in 2016, and Caucasian males scored 50.7% proficient (MSDE, 2020). For the English 10 assessment in 2016, African American males scored 25.8% proficient while Caucasian males scored 64.8% (MSDE, 2020). In 2019, African American males scored 10.1% proficient on the Algebra I assessment, whereas Caucasian males scored 47.9% (MSDE, 2020). For the English 10 assessment, African American males scored 19.7% proficient in 2019, and Caucasian males scored 56.8% proficient (MSDE, 2020). Regardless of the assessment instrument, African American males have consistently demonstrated a lack of achievement in math and reading within the state of Maryland.

A school district leader, who served in the Office of Equity in a large, geographically diverse district located in a Mid-Atlantic state, established the context of

the local problem for this study. During the 2013–2014 school year, the large, geographically diverse district in a Mid-Atlantic state was the first district in Maryland to establish an equity board policy. The policy affirms that

disparities based on race, special education status, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, English language learner (ELL) status or socio-economic status are unacceptable and are directly at odds with the belief that all students can achieve. While complex societal and historical factors contribute to our students' inequalities, rather than perpetuating disparities, the school system must address and overcome inequality by providing all students with the opportunity to succeed.

The policy has been and continues to be implemented through a three-phase training plan for the district and school leaders and staff. The training includes: (a) developing and establishing shared language for discussing racial equity, (b) coaching for racial equity, and (c) putting equity into practice. Schools are required to examine the root causes of their achievement gap through an equity-focused School Progress Plan. In 2019, the MSDE (2020) instituted an equity guide for all its school systems that provides a road map to apply an equity lens to all aspects of their work. The MSDE guide utilizes the extensive, geographically diverse district's equity framework as a basis for its model.

**Problem on a national level.** There is a growing achievement gap between minority and non-minority students in the United States. Minority males, primarily African American, in public school environments exhibit the lowest graduation rates among all student populations (Ingersoll et al., 2019). One of the ongoing challenges in

addressing the achievement gap is the increasing cultural, racial, and economic diversity within classrooms, especially regarding teacher and curriculum development (Watkins et al., 2016). The problem is that African American males are not included or engaged in the conversations or discussions on the specific curriculum, instruction, assessment (CIA), and factors that motivate them to contribute towards their academic success (Marshall, 2016). Some initiatives, such as mentoring or summer school programs (Bartlett, 2017), produce positive results; however, implementation of most programs occurs without specific information (M. H. Woodland, 2016). African American males continue to perform significantly below their peers, fail to complete high school, and pursue secondary education endeavors (M. H. Woodland, 2016). Without succeeding academically and completing high school graduation requirements, there is a decrease in post-secondary education opportunities and job acquisition and a higher probability of incarceration and unemployment rates for this population (Stockmann, 2016). Some factors contributing to this problem include low teacher expectations, unfair discipline practices, the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, lack of culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy, and race and culture bias (Johnson, 2017).

**Research gap and relevance of study.** One of the proposed teaching methods and theories discussed as a solution to narrow the achievement gap is culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). But there is a lack of research on successfully educating African American males in America and equitable classroom strategies that influenced achievement and graduation (Bryant, 2017). Identifying successful and practical strategies that motivate African American male

students to improve their academic achievement and graduate high school is a significant struggle for school districts across the country (Bryant, 2017). School leaders in various settings across the country recognize the urgency of increasing academic outcomes and achievement for African American males. However, there is not a substantial body of research on specific programs, initiatives, or supports to improve teaching and learning for African American males (Khalifa et al., 2016). Program interventions, such as after-school programs and mentoring, are often implemented but are not theoretically grounded in their implementation (M. H. Woodland, 2016). This study of teachers who instruct African American males gained insight into instructional practices and beliefs that meet the needs of African American males and contribute to their academic success.

### **Rationale**

The examination of factors impacting the achievement of African American male students by researchers has occurred across the educational spectrum (Moon & Singh, 2015). Many possible factors contribute to this problem: low teacher expectations, unfair discipline practices, the overrepresentation of African American males in special education, lack culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy, race, and cultural bias (Johnson, 2017). There is a need for research and analysis of this pervasive issue so that successful instructional strategies for African American males can be identified and implemented (Johnson, 2017). Factors include low expectations, unchallenging classrooms, school boredom, and the lack of engagement; the research is scarce on the only school-related factors and supports that contributed to high academic achievement and graduation from

the public education system by African American male students (Vandavelde et al., 2017).

In pursuing equality, the objective should be to generate strategies that develop the core methods of education rather than implementing programs on foundations that are already broken (Németh et al., 2018). Teacher preparation correlates with teaching strategies that promote complex judgmental learning skills and strategies to understand students' demands and learning styles (Chan et al., 2019). These new standards and procedures would demand students to engage in self-examination and resilience (Confrey, 2018). Significant modifications in the curriculum and its resources are required to guarantee various learning opportunities, which should be commonplace in the classrooms of minority students and others (Howard, 2019). Teachers should be educated adequately on child growth and training; how diverse curriculum and instructional strategies can address each individual based on their environments in school, their classroom, and at home, which increases support, maturity, and accomplishment (Howard, 2019).

### **Purpose**

The lack of academic achievement severely impacts African American males (Kreisman & Stange, 2017). Without succeeding academically and completing high school graduation requirements, there is a decrease in post-secondary education opportunities and job acquisition and a higher probability of incarceration and unemployment rates for this population. Lower high school graduation rates and post-secondary opportunities negatively impact African American males and their ability to

earn a competitive wage in the United States (Moss, 2019). African American males needing assistance is one of the factors impacting their academic achievement, along with institutional racism and lower socioeconomic status (Dumas, 2016). African American males had a lower educational attainment rate, from elementary to post-secondary, when they experienced high levels of poverty as adolescents (Chambers, 2018). Along with these factors, low teacher expectations play a critical role in African American males' achievement, or the lack thereof (Johnson, 2017). African American males experience more significant results in educational settings with a focus on holistically assessing student and teacher performance (Walters, 2017; West, 2017). When teachers help African American students navigate the intersectionality of educational settings, African American males experience higher abilities within their academic environments (Thomas & Warren, 2017).

There is a need for researchers to examine how teachers use equitable strategies to view the academic skills of African American male secondary students that are required to enhance the intellectual strength of African American males (Harper & Newman, 2016). Statistics reflect that successfully educating the African American male requires additional research on a local and national scale (Gillborn et al., 2017). This study intends to survey teachers' experiences teaching African American males in high schools and the equitable strategies they use in their instructional practice that contribute to their academic success. This study expanded the scope of research regarding the methods to improve African American male learning.

### **Definition of Terms**

Special terms associated with the problem are defined and cited here.

*Black student density:* The percentage of African American students within a school or educational system (NCES, 2015a).

*Colorblindness:* The racial ideology that posits the best way to end discrimination is by treating individuals as equally as possible, without regard to race, culture, or ethnicity. This is a primary theoretical concept found in the literature: “colorblindness” functions as racial blindness, blinds us to our continuing inequality, and may perpetuate racism and other disadvantaged minorities (Evans, 2017).

*Cultural deficit perspective:* The pedagogical perspective comprises two parts: (a) the attribution of an individual’s achievement to cultural factors alone, without regard to individual characteristics, and (b) the attribution of failure to a cultural group. In other words, a cultural deficit perspective is a view that individuals from some cultural groups cannot achieve just because of their cultural background (Martin et al., 2017).

*Culture:* Symbols and language used to share ways of thinking and living that are nonverbal and verbal; values of what is deemed right and wrong; knowledge and beliefs; norms that communicate how people are supposed to behave; and techniques (Biag, 2016; Burgoon et al., 2010).

*Culturally responsive teaching:* Lambeth and Smith (2016) explained this as using the knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and valuable for them. Recognizing the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning through the

behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values is culturally responsive teaching. Cultural differences are assets that are valued, and cultural knowledge is used to guide curriculum development, classroom climates, instructional strategies, and relationships with students that challenge racial and cultural stereotypes, prejudices, racism, and other forms of intolerance, injustice, and oppression (Dimitrov & Haque, 2016).

*Equitable strategies:* The implementation of resources (human; monetary; space, and time), treatment (student experiences), support (alignment of resources and treatment to expand possibilities for students), and access (teacher expectations) as instructional strategies that promote and support equity within the classroom (Aguilar, 2020; Savick & Logan-Washington, 2020; Singleton, 2015).

*School connectedness:* Students' belief about their sense of belonging to their school and their belief about the adults in their school caring for them individually and their achievement (Biag, 2016).

### **Significance of the Study**

School factors contribute to African American males' poor academic performance and low graduation rates (Vega et al., 2015). These factors include low expectations, unchallenging classrooms, school boredom, and the lack of engagement (Vandeveldt et al., 2017). But the research is scarce on the only school-related factors and supports that contributed to high academic achievement and graduation from the public education system by African American male students. There is a lack of research that contributed toward adding to the body of knowledge of successfully educating African American males in America and the need to isolate and identify equitable classroom strategies that

influenced achievement and graduation (Bryant, 2017). Identifying motivating school-based factors that influence the academic success of African American males can inform school and district teams on specific instructional approaches that improve achievement outcomes, increase high school graduation rates, and inspire aspirations toward college and other post-graduation learning opportunities (Shauer et al., 2014). Data from this study will add to existing knowledge about barriers that impact the performance of African American males in diverse communities and how learning about teacher expectations and equitable strategies support their improvement. The discoveries made through this study will help educate stakeholders with additional information about equitable classroom strategies that foster academic growth for African American males. Thus, the results of this study could produce published and available resources and tools for educational systems to train and develop their teachers to implement successful, equitable classroom strategies to improve academic outcomes for African American males.

### **Research Questions**

Identifying school-related causes and contributing factors that support and motivate African American males' success in educational settings requires capturing information using a qualitative approach directly through open-ended surveys, interviews, or discussions. The research questions that guided the study are:

1. How do high school teachers describe their experiences teaching African American males based on their use of culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching?

2. What are the expectations of high school teachers regarding the academic abilities of African American male students when equitable strategies are used?

The answers to the research questions can offer school leaders and educators information to inform academic planning, instructional delivery, assessment methods, selections, and school-based decision-making for efforts, resources, and other supports that can improve achievement for African American male students in diverse school communities.

Proficient instructors are essential for successfully implementing a rigorous curriculum (Anderson, 2019). Versed in the curriculum, administrators can implement pedagogy strategies that respond to their students' requirements and learning styles, promoting higher learning.

## **Review of the Literature**

### **Conceptual Framework**

**Intro info on OOE.** A school district leader, who served in the Office of Equity in a large, geographically diverse district located in a Mid-Atlantic state, established the context of the conceptual framework for this study. Within the large, geographically diverse school district, the Office of Equity (OOE) collaborates with stakeholders within and outside the community to create and enhance instructional environments that support academic rigor and access to cultural relevance and relationships. The mission of OOE is to build the capacity of leaders to create inclusive environments that prepare students to be globally competitive within a culturally rich society. OOE also monitors compliance with the MSDE's *Education That is Multicultural* regulation while providing a professional library for the large geographically diverse district staff related to issues of

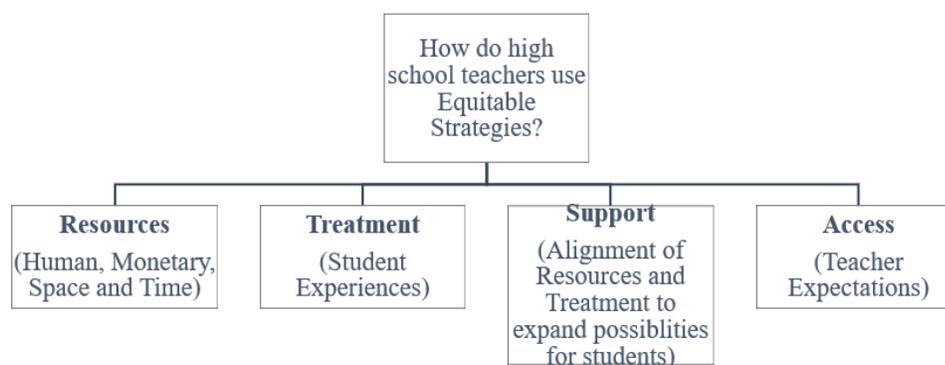
equity and access in schools, multicultural education, racial and cultural awareness, and diversity issues. The training plan facilitated by OOE for district and school leaders and staff includes: (a) developing and establishing shared language for discussing racial equity, (b) coaching for racial equity, and (c) putting equity into practice. The primary resources used by OOE to facilitate and conduct the training include Glenn Singleton's *Courageous Conversations About Race* and Elena Aguilar's *Coaching for Equity*.

**Summarizing phases of training by OOE.** Phase 1 of the training is called *Introduction to Leading for Equity*. This 2-day training provides tools to examine personal beliefs that affect staff members' work in serving the students and families of the large, geographically diverse school district. This training is a prerequisite for all systemic equity offerings, and participation in both consecutive days of these sessions is required. The tools provided in the training support participants to transition to a space of reflection and practice utilizing an equity lens regarding professional roles and responsibilities. Phase 2 of the training is called *Leading for Equity*. The training consists of approximately 35 hours of professional development. The training allows participants to examine their work within the system through the lens of equity and access. The model will enable schools and offices to lead their equity work in a way that is relevant to their objectives. The last phase is called *Theory to Practice*. This training focuses on the equity core values (interrogation and analysis, creativity and imagination, worth, justice, wholeness, investment, honor and humanity, and demonstrate capacity). The training occurs throughout a school year, consisting of 3-hour half-day sessions once a month.

**Components of equity.** The four components of equity used within the large, geographically diverse district's equity plan were utilized as the conceptual framework model and definition for the concept of equitable strategies for this qualitative study (see Savick & Logan-Washington, 2020). The components include the implementation of resources (human; monetary; space, and time), treatment (student experiences), support (alignment of resources and treatment to expand possibilities for students), and access (teacher expectations) as instructional strategies that promote and support equity within the classroom (Savick & Logan-Washington, 2020). The literature supports these areas of focus through the topics of culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching (CRP/CRT) and resilience theory, which were used in this study as frameworks to help the equity model of the large, geographically diverse school district (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework Model*



**Intro to culturally relevant teaching model.** The culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching (CRP/CRT) provides a model for teachers to facilitate the

empowerment of their students intellectually, socially, and culturally and provides meaningful academic opportunities for African American males (Wright et al., 2015). The premise is that teachers must create a link between their students' school and home lives while simultaneously arriving at the demands of national, state, and district curriculum prerequisites (Williams, 2017). Culturally relevant teaching discerns students' diverse cultural backgrounds and proportionally adjusts the teaching methods to account for them; culturally competent teachers also empower their students to relate course content to their experience (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Culturally responsive teaching also includes appropriate professional development, reasonable discipline practices, culturally responsive family involvement, a multicultural curriculum, a wide-ranging school environment, recruiting/retaining efforts of teachers, and open discussions of matters allied to race and ethnicity (Wright & Ford, 2016).

**Culturally relevant teaching builds resiliency to address challenges African American students face.** Resiliency is a by-product of culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching (Harber, 2019). Students' resilience is critical in African American males' academic effort and attainment (Brooms, 2019). African American males living in urban and suburban environments and attending urban and suburban schools are confronted with obstacles in the form of push (school-related) and pull (non-school-related) factors that exceed their resilience levels and cause them to fail academically and drop out of school (Logan & Burdick-Will, 2017). Despite the barriers encountered, there is an internal or external factor that motivates individuals to overcome their obstacles and accomplish their goals, and culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching should be that external

school-related factor (Franklin, 2017). Resilience can be developed and nurtured through education and relationships (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Risks for African American males are mitigated through teacher–youth relationships and cultural curriculum, which are characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching (Alfaro, 2019; Anderson, 2019; Howard, 2019). Positive school-related factors can thus influence students to exercise the resiliency needed to navigate through the school barriers and complete school (Brooms, 2019).

### **Cultural Competency**

The population of ethnic and racial minority students in public schools is increasing yearly (Bischoff & Tach, 2018). Still, almost 83% of public educators are White and middle class (NCES, 2016; Norman, 2016). Because of the achievement gap with minority students, especially African American students (Reaedon et al., 2018), educators need training, support, and knowledge of beliefs that will assist with the growth and academic achievement of all children, especially those who have been severed historically (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020; Nojan, 2020). African American students are not only positively impacted by the knowledge, skills, and attitude of their teachers but are also impacted favorably when they are educated by at least one teacher who shares their knowledge of racial identity (Will, 2018). The perspective of race needs to be considered and how it affects instructional practices, student experiences, and positive academic outcomes for African American students (Crowley, 2019; Whitaker, 2019).

Educational research highlights the need for culturally competent educators (Lopes-Murphy & Murphy, 2016). There is a need for culturally relevant pedagogy and responsive teaching practices, especially among ethnically and racially diverse populations (Chen et al., 2018; Vanessa, 2018). There is a need for practical, culturally responsive, and equity-literate teaching practices and implementation (Gay, 2018; Gorski, 2016). Not only is there a need for these practices, but schools need to possess culturally proficient leaders (Clark, 2017; Wachira & Mburu, 2019), and the effective implementation of culturally proficient instructional practices and leadership will demonstrate promise in closing the achievement gap.

### **Review of the Broader Problem**

A literary analysis of the historical education progression of African American males is necessary to examine the concerns in public schooling experiences (Graves et al., 2017). Peer-reviewed articles and academic journals represent the majority of sources used to research and develop the literature review for the study. The literature review development occurred using primarily peer-reviewed academic journals on this topic. Several databases in EBSCO, such as Education Source, Education Research Complete, ERIC, and Education Research Starters, were used to accomplish this task. Additional topics explored within this section of the study include African American female educational success compared to African American males and school-related factors that support educating African American males.

### ***Educating African American Males in the United States***

There is a disparity in educational opportunities for groups of color compared to White groups within the United States public education system (Libassi, 2018). Researchers and policymakers noted a persistent gap between high school graduation rates for African American males and their Caucasian peers (Howard, 2019). The ratio of African American males who graduate from high school is only 25% compared to 75% of Caucasian male students (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016); hence, the dropout rate of African American males is three times higher than the rate of other demographic groups (Howard, 2019). Observations have been explanations for this inequity, including disproportionately tracking African American males in special education and teacher and administrator perceptions of educational disengagement. But social and environmental changes to make sense of this achievement gap have been unsuccessful in reducing the disparity between the two groups (Howard, 2019). Much work remains to be done in the United States to eliminate implicit racial policies and practices that have resulted in a caste system that has had devastating consequences for ethnic minority groups (West, 2017). The public school system, however, appears to be failing in making equal educational opportunity a reality for minority students (García & Weiss, 2017).

The current achievement gap between African American male students and their Caucasian counterparts is not a new phenomenon; there is a historical gap in education for African Americans in the United States, more than 60 years after the historic *Brown v. the Board of Education* ruling deemed equal educational rights for all American students (Mitchell, 2018). Rather than improving, the achievement gap has grown increasingly

more critical for African American males (García & Weiss, 2017). Federal laws and initiatives such as President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, President Barack Obama's Race To The Top program, and the current Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) are all aimed at improving the educational outcomes, opportunities, and futures for minority students (Saultz et al., 2017). These laws and initiatives require all public school districts to develop plans and programs and prioritize resources to improve student learning outcomes (Saultz et al., 2017). The institution of these laws reflects the recognition of the achievement gap between racial groups and the critical need to improve teaching, learning, and achievement for all students (García & Weiss, 2017).

Historical deficit-focused theories have attributed to the gap in achievement between African American and Caucasian males and between African American males and females (Roberts, 2017). Before dominant narratives or theories that explain the issue of educating African American males (Bouyer, 2017), the genetic deficiency theory—the idea that African Americans were genetically inferior and by nature were unable to learn complex skills and concepts—represented the overall belief of why investing in African American education was not a national priority and African Americans, especially males, needed to remain in lower-class jobs and not be expected to pursue higher learning (Snyder et al., 2016). African Americans' increasing recognition and contribution as scientists, inventors, mathematicians, innovators, debaters, and artists has shown that the genetic deficiency theory was inaccurate (Miller, 2018). This has led to

alternative perspectives or narratives to explain the achievement gap. Four distinct additional descriptions include:

1. **Absent and Wandering:** African American fathers are irresponsible and sexually delinquent. As a result, African American boys grow up fatherless and are delinquent.
2. **Impotent and Powerless:** Like the absent and wandering notion, African American males were powerless and emasculated because of their mother-centered homes because African American fathers were absent.
3. **Soulful and Adaptive:** African American males are unique, misunderstood, and adaptive to their conditions. Reflected a return to the deficit narratives and focused on African American males' assumed deficits and differences.
4. **Endangered and In Crisis:** Emerged in the 1980s and posits that African American males are endangered, in crisis, and on the verge of extinction. This theory is the contemporary national discourse. (Brokaw, n.d.)

Despite the suggestion that the role of male African American teachers as figures to imitate role models does not fix the lack of achievement among African American males (Coleman, 2019), the issues is that many of these students are fighting poverty, discrimination, lack of community resources, and the stigma of African American men being criminals outside school. The causes of the deficit in African American male graduation rates and lack of school success can be categorized into two groups—push factors and pull factors (Bryant, 2017).

### ***Push and Pull Factors that Influence Achievement***

Researchers have identified push and pull factors as factors that influence whether students drop out of high school or not. Pull factors are non-school-related factors that distract or detract a student from completing high school; thus, factors such as employment and family responsibilities that encourage a student to stop attending school (Atkins, 2018). Unlike pull factors, push factors occur when school or school-related issues cause students to disengage within the academic setting; with this theory, school-related factors, including leadership and staff perceptions or behaviors, cause student failure and subsequent dropout from school (Khan, 2017). The following sections of this literature review will explore the push factors and school-related issues that hinder African American males from completing high school and contribute to their dropout rate. Both push and pull factors test the resilience and perseverance African American males need to accomplish academic success to finish high school (Khan, 2017).

### ***Push Factors: School-Related Factors that Hinder Educating African American Males***

Johnson (2017, p. 564) stated, “It is well documented that urban and suburban schools are replete with problems, and the Black boys who attend these schools are destined for the principal’s office, special education classes, or to be pushed out altogether.” Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) discussed that African American males encounter teachers and staff who do not have the training or capacity to address African American males’ academic socialization, social skills in the classroom or the ability to incorporate instructional practices to work effectively with them (Howard, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2019). Darling-Hammond et al.

(2020) and Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) also reference teacher expectations as a significant contributing factor that impacts the achievement of African American males (Howard, 2019). Each issue outlined above represents school-related factors, push factors that hinder African American males from successfully attending school and completing graduation requirements.

***Lack of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy/Teaching: Race and Culture Bias***

Bouyer (2017) identified that cultural mistrust plays a significant role in student achievement or the lack thereof for African American males. Howard and Williams (2015, p. 1) stated, “In examining the crisis in education, there are just too few images of successful black males.” Student and adult conflicts arise for African American males if they make perceptions that their teachers do not accept them due to race (Anyon et al., 2018). The teachers’ perceptions have a more detrimental effect on African American males than any other group of students (Norman, 2016). Associated stereotypes connected with negative teacher perceptions of African American males have included a lack of academic engagement, laziness, and hostility that perceive African American males as having disciplinary problems in the classroom (Norman, 2016). Knowing what equitable strategies are most successful academically with African American males is critical in the effective and efficient engagement of this population within the classroom (Ransaw & Majors, 2016).

Johnson (2017, p. 564) stated, “numerous studies cite the black males’ apathy toward education, the role of undereducated parents, single-parent homes, and resistance to White middle-class ideologies promoted in schools as reasons black boys do poorly in

school and why their future is bleak.” Carter et al. (2017) disputed that teachers must suggest teaching minority children of color or ethnic backgrounds, learning their intelligence regarding their societies and customs, and cultivating significant relationships. Thompson and Shamberger (2015) recognized that to close the achievement gap for minority students, especially African American and Latino males in U.S. Public Schools, this approach is more accessible said than done but must gain traction.

Johnson (2017) reported that current school segregation based on race and class creates poor educational opportunities for African American males. Liou and Rotheram-Fuller (2016) stated that although studies suggest racial segregation has caused adverse psychological and health outcomes for African Americans, it is time to revisit these problems from the point of school reform. Regardless of teachers’ racial backgrounds, research has identified the teacher’s belief in Caucasian students’ intellectual superiority as the leading problem associated with the lack of confidence in the educability of African Americans and other students of color.

### ***Low Teacher Expectations***

Cherng (2017) identified that if students think they can, that factor will determine successful academic outcomes for students and enable high teacher expectations. Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) explained that teachers’ expectations are outlined for instructional practices. Educators present individual opinions, characteristics, or biases and provide formal evaluations of the student as predictors for their prospective educational achievement. Teachers not only need to develop and deliver a high-quality

curriculum to students by catering to their learning styles, but they also need to establish high expectations for their students academically (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016).

Teachers' low expectations have affected African American students academically compared to their peers (Lomotey & Lowery, 2015). According to Liou and Rotheram-Fuller (2016), national trends showed insistent disproportionality in the push-out rates, disciplinary actions, inappropriate assessment, and special education referrals for minority students, especially African American males, each because of low-teacher expectations. Cherng (2017) also identified that students try to meet those standards when teachers set and maintain high expectations.

Teachers who present low expectations establish a culture of low achievement for their students (Cherng, 2017). School reform efforts focusing on raising expectations and improving academic performance in urban communities are often ineffective. According to Wiggan and Watson (2016), teacher expectations have fostered unsuccessful academic experiences for African American students, especially males, as noted through educational research that highlights an overrepresentation of African American students who have been affected by inappropriate assessments, discipline policies, special education placement, and remedial programs. Johnson (2017, p. 564) stated, "Research reflects that there are structural barriers in schools contributing to the overall failure of black males. Black males are placed in lower tracked and remedial classes due to low expectations of their teachers." Past reform efforts have concentrated on presumed student deficits instead of addressing school and societal beliefs that cause differential expectations within the classroom (Liou & Rotheram-Fuller, 2016).

### ***Overrepresentation of African American Males in Special Education***

Howard (2019) asserted that African American males are overrepresented in the special education spectrum and are more often considered by teachers and school leaders as disengaged in the learning process. As Lee and Bierman (2015, p. 395) reported, “black males are often misdiagnosed and overrepresented in special education compared to their same-race peers.” Unnecessary placement in special education classrooms often decreases self-efficacy, lowers self-esteem for African American students, and increases frustration and behavioral issues, especially for African American males (Taylor, 2017).

A review of students’ special education records revealed that teachers referred students of color more often, primarily African American males, for special education for behavioral rather than academic issues; this indicates that African American students were not intellectually inferior or in need of academic support, but teachers lacked the skills, strategies, or comprehension of culture or learning styles for their minority students, primarily African American males (Marsh, & Noguera, 2017). Ransaw and Majors (2016) explained that males of color, especially African American males, prefer a kinesthetic learning style in other ways.

Learners who cater to this learning style do not like to sit still for long periods. Ransaw and Majors (2016) asserted that African American males prefer information and learning presented to them in a manner that is meaningful and relatable to the world. Understanding how males learn, especially African American males, is critical to ensure their successful navigation through the public school system and beyond.

### ***School-Related Factors that Support Educating African American Males***

Brooms (2019) noted that school environment, culture, and programming play an essential role in how students perceive their place in the learning environment and academic achievement outcomes; therefore, mutual respect and rapport, and positive relationships between school staff and students generate a culture of achievement that promotes educational growth and performance. School leaders and staff who recognize their students' cultural, social-emotional, and academic needs create learning environments where all students thrive and increase the resiliency within students that assures their success (Fisher et al., 2016). Mentoring programs, extra-curricular programs, student-adult relationships, and academic interventions are general school-based initiatives identified in public as strategies to support student development and academic achievement; these will be briefly explored for their prevalence in the research and as anticipated responses from participants of this proposed qualitative study.

### ***Student-Adult Relationships***

Lee and Bierman (2015) researched that schools become an optimal learning environment when teachers and students engage in positive relationships, even when students are faced with factors outside of school that could negatively impact their educational outcomes. Positive interactions among teachers and students, Darling-Hammond (2015) explained, come from teachers supporting the development of students academically, behaviorally, and culturally among teachers and their peers; when teachers engage in a strong relationship with students. Leaders have observed that teachers who have strong relationships and positive interactions with students are motivated and

committed to spending additional time and resources that promote student academic success (Howard, 2019). Relationship quality among students with negative external factors and teachers is a crucial predictor of a student's educational outcome, even after controlling for teacher perceptions of a student's behavior or academic ability (Fisher et al., 2016).

Fisher et al. (2016) examined how students with developmental strengths (resilience) moderate the influence of their risk factors (externalizing behavior) on their developmental outcomes (teacher-student relationships). This study will investigate how adaptability, social skills, and study skills help to establish teacher relationships. Fisher et al. (2016) also noted that a student's temperament is a vital component that affects their ability to formulate positive teacher relations. When students display appropriate social skills, it supports the development of teacher-student relationships, especially between externalizing behaviors. Additionally, a student's ability to engage with staff and access instructional resources within their classroom increases the quality of relationships between students and teachers. Lee and Bierman (2015) promoted a theory of teachers and leaders as seed bearers. The seed bearer's theory posited that educating low-income students of color requires an approach that views the children and the educators as *'seed people'* responsible for tilling the soil and cultivating student potential. The seed-bearing perspective requires schoolteachers and leaders to remain hopeful and optimistic about the students they teach and establish nurturing relationships that maximize their growth and academic performance (Vandavelde et al., 2017).

### *Academic Interventions*

Substantial research speaks to the barriers and hindrances that minority students encounter throughout their educational journey, especially African American males living in urban and suburban communities, which are plagued by a multitude of pull and push factors that deter interest and investment in school and graduation, alternative programs, curricula, and venues have gained traction in recent years to accommodate students identified as over-aged and under-credited (Brown, n.d.). With accountability high for school districts to increase graduation rates for all students, online credit recovery programs surged across the country as an alternative method to provide failing students or those with excessive absenteeism rates an opportunity to participate virtually in classes or complete web-based programs and meet graduation credit requirements (Carstens, 2016).

Rangel (2019) identified that credit recovery programs have equal supporters and critics regarding effectiveness and preparation for students; sizeable urban school districts have adopted and embraced credit recovery programs to meet the needs of their struggling student population, particularly minority students. Carstens (2016) researched that online credit recovery programs have surged since 2008, with large urban districts such as New York and Chicago recently rolling out programs. Additionally, the pressure from state and federal accountability systems to increase graduation rates fueled the increased use of these programs. While schools across the country are rushing to adopt online credit recovery programs, critics argue that these programs require stricter content reviews to ensure rigor, are being used to replace personal contact with minority students,

and fail to prepare minority students for the demands of post-graduation education learning experiences (Nourse, 2017). Davis (2015) urged an overhaul of online credit recovery programs, citing a lack of rigor and evidence of similar preparation of students.

Too many credit-recovery programs are out there, pushing students to the finish line on graduation with low rigor or just flexible pacing (Gemin et al., 2018). However, without skills development, more considerable attention focuses on seat time rather than content mastery (Gemin et al., 2018). These programs should incorporate face-face teacher support and build in better accountability measures to make sure students who earn course credits are showing learning gains; despite the critics, urban school districts are planning and incorporating online credit-recovery programs into the educational program as an academic intervention for poor-performing students (Carstens, 2016).

### ***Culturally Responsive Teaching and Pedagogy***

The metaphor highlighting the principles of culturally responsive and academic challenges can be very helpful. The three images that are used include a mirror, a window, and a doorway; thus, the first two principles, the mirror, and the window, specifically focus on a reciprocal relationship between the teacher and students, while the third principle, the doorway, focuses on the role of the school (Jarvis, 2015). Specifically, metaphors can be adopted as a blueprint for culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy, precisely as it relates to literacy instruction and the use of culturally relevant text within the classroom to support and promote the academic success of students of color, in particular, African American males (Rainey, 2017).

Classrooms are supposed to provide their students with a mirror that allows them to see themselves personally and culturally among the topics they are exploring (Wormeli, 2018). Classrooms are also supposed to provide a window that will enable students to see the perspectives and experiences of others, especially those that differ from them (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). The reciprocal relationship between the mirror and the window demonstrates the connection of self-knowledge fostering the desire to know about others, and learning about others promotes a desire to know more about self (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Ultimately, schools are supposed to provide a doorway. This doorway ensures that all students have the skills and abilities needed to succeed in school and beyond that is promoted by a culture of hope and support that leads to academic success (Gillis et al., 2016).

From a literary perspective, culturally relevant teachers ensure that the mirrors they provide for their students allow them to see themselves and the commonalities and differences experienced by others (Connors, 2017). Students who have practical literacy skills can critically, verbally, and in written form communicate perspectives about themselves and others and implement quality analysis and decision-making; also, culturally relevant educators ensure that the windows they provide creative opportunities for students to explore the world from multiple perspectives while creating a culture of appreciation for diversity (Goldman et al., 2016). Students in culturally responsive classrooms experience opportunities to explore and investigate local and global issues that provide students the opportunity to impact their communities and the communities of others (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). The most important of the three

metaphors is the doorway; schools must provide hope and ensure that all students have access to a curriculum and instruction that is rigorous and academically appropriate (Elbaz, 2018).

Culturally responsive teachers utilize literacy as the medium to ensure that students have multiple, frequent and consistent levels of engagement and skill attainment in reading, writing, speaking, and listening so that students possess the skills to be highly functioning literate members of society (Goldman et al., 2016). All three metaphors must exist within a culturally responsive classroom and school (Thibaut et al., 2015).

Culturally proficiency and academic rigor must co-exist; therefore, if students are not self-aware, they cannot have empathy for others, and classrooms that are not hubs of rigorous literacy learning close the doorway of opportunities for students in school and beyond (Thibaut et al., 2015).

Strategies are used in the classroom to support and facilitate student learning. Methods such as reciprocal peer tutoring allow students to collaborate and engage together as they accomplish the goal of education (Law et al., 2017). Students' academic abilities are supported and strengthened when equitable strategies are used (Law et al., 2017). Equitable strategies use the vehicle of culture to connect and validate students' learning experiences (Emdin, 2016). Meeting all students' needs requires teachers to engage their students culturally and equitably through their instructional practice (Emdin, 2016).

## **Implications**

Strayhorn (2018) looked at identifying effective strategies, as determined by successful African American male students, which creates authenticity and informs school and district leaders of improvement efforts for this student population. Thus, this study acquired insight and experience from teachers regarding the role of CRT/CRP practices in school-based factors that increased student resilience and attributed to their perseverance toward academic achievement and graduation, as Johnson (2017) reported. Johnson (2017) also stressed the need and direction for research regarding closing the achievement gap for African American males. Although several studies describe the prevailing situation of African American adolescents and the difficulties they endure in their pursuit of educational attainment, more investigation is required on how to enhance their instructional practice in schools. Most current research focuses on strategies or interventions to reform African American males rather than proactively and purposefully planning for their academic achievement (Gregory et al., 2017).

Brooms (2019) contended that solutions-focused research is needed to capture African American males' roles in developing their own school experiences and opportunities for achievement. This contention from Brooms (2019) aligns with the purpose of this proposed study. Dell' Angelo (2016, p. 2) believed that while school staff and leaders cannot control the pull factors that plague African American males and deter them from school, school staff and leaders "must think broadly about where they have power." This proposed qualitative study allows participants to outline how CRT/CRP

practices identify the school-based factors controlled by school staff and leaders to improve learning outcomes for African American males in suburban and urban schools.

### **Summary**

Research studies have identified problems and causes for the achievement gap of African American males but have lacked solutions for addressing this crisis (Musu-Gillette et al., 2016). African American males have been failing at alarming rates for decades since data collection regarding this issue began in the 1960s. Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) and Darling-Hammond and Gardner (2017) discovered that factors such as the over-representation in special education, low academic expectations, and stricter discipline decisions represent just a few barriers to academic and social success that contribute to the low achievement of African American students in urban and suburban communities, especially males (Howard, 2019). Despite the numerous challenges, African American males demonstrate resilience and perseverance, successfully navigating the public school system and accomplishing academic and social goals to complete high school (Hill, 2015).

Research studies identified positive school relationships and CRT/CRP as examples of positive factors that support the achievement of African American males; unfortunately, these studies did not focus solely on identifying the specific causes for performance amongst African American males, and even less existed that gauged African American males for their perceptions of school initiatives that work (Fisher et al., 2016). This study sought to assist school leaders and staff in making curriculum, instruction, and assessment decisions or creating school-provided programming that appeals to and

engages African American males and builds the resiliency to participate in their learning fully and graduate from high school.

In Section One of the study, the identification of the problem investigated was present; the significance of the problem, the nature of the study, research rationale, definition of key terms, research questions, assumptions, limitations, a defined scope, and delimitations were provided. Included in this section were a literature review and implications for further research. Section Two of this study discusses the research design, approach for addressing the research questions, and methodology for the study. Interviews were utilized to gather teachers' expectations regarding the abilities of African American males and the use of equitable strategies used to promote the achievement of African American males.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Research Design and Approach**

This section includes the rationale for implementing the qualitative research approach, the research design, and the data collection tool description. The data collection methods and data analysis procedures are also detailed. The results of this qualitative study provided recommendations for curriculum, instruction, and assessment (CIA) that improve academic performance for African American males in high school settings. This section comprises the Methodology, which includes the Participants, Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Summary.

#### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

Both quantitative and qualitative research methods were considered in determining the best approach to address the study (Fang & Wang, 2017). But quantitative data collection was unnecessary to meet the study's purpose or answer the research questions. Quantitative methods require researchers to quantify participant responses and make interpretations and decisions. Additionally, quantitative research focuses on proving or disproving a hypothesis based on significant participant responses and attempts to uncover single measurable, observable, and provable truths (Ridder, 2017). Contrary to quantitative approaches, qualitative researchers attempt to understand the phenomenon formed by the meaning people determine from their experiences and use methods such as observations and interviews (Kumar, 2019). To fulfill the implications of the research and fully gauge participant perceptions require qualitative methods such as open-ended interview questioning facilitated by the researcher to acquire and capture

authentic and meaningful details. The following are the assumptions of qualitative designs :

1. The concerns for qualitative researchers are primarily with the process rather than outcomes or products.
2. The interests of qualitative researchers are in meaning how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and world structures.
3. Rather than inventories, questionnaires, or machines, data are mediated through the qualitative researcher.
4. Fieldwork is involved qualitative research. The researcher observes or records behavior in its natural setting by physically going to the people, setting, site, or institution.
5. The researcher is interested in the process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures, which makes qualitative research descriptive.
6. The researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details, making qualitative research inductive. (Ary et al., 2018)

The purpose of this study was for teachers of African American males to describe their experiences teaching this student population, their expectations, and the equitable strategies they use to contribute to their academic success. Qualitative designs are appropriate when the researcher wants to answer a descriptive question (what happened?) or explanatory question (how or why did something happen?; Kumar, 2019). Qualitative approaches also address the need of a particular population (Jenkins, 2016; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) by examining real-life situations in a naturally occurring setting (Babbie,

2017; Yin, 2013a). When qualitative studies are conducted, the researcher engages with the participants to understand their culture or lived phenomena (Howard, 2019). Researchers use time-sensitive data collection methods such as interviews and observations to collect data from participants (Afdal & Spernes, 2018). To explain the participants' responses to a study, researchers search for themes when analyzing data (Kumar, 2019). In this qualitative study, I discussed with teachers their teaching experiences and expectations of African American male students and included the equitable strategies they use when teaching African American male students (Ridder, 2017). A basic qualitative design was selected to investigate the participants' perceptions. This basic qualitative design approach allowed me to interpret data collected through a social constructivism lens.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection of Participants**

A large, geographically diverse district located in a Mid-Atlantic state served as the setting of this study; this is considered one of the nation's 25 largest school systems (Ksinan et al., 2019). This school system serves students from rural, suburban, and urban communities. Seventeen teachers from high schools located within the school system were recruited to participate in the study. I used purposeful sampling to select participants (Yin, 2013a). Participants were high school teachers who participated in both phases of equity training offered by the system regardless of the content area, grade level, or ability to focus on teaching assignments.

### **Justification for the Number of Participants**

In qualitative studies, the participants are purposefully selected and are usually fewer in number than in quantitative samples. When a phenomenon is under investigation in qualitative studies and participants give their unique perceptions, opinions, or explanations of a lived experience, qualitative studies usually have smaller participant numbers than quantitative studies (Ellis, 2019). Sample sizes for qualitative studies range from one participant to 30 or more (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Qualitative studies can be carried out with a single participant or as many as 70 participants; however, qualitative research often deals with small, purposive samples (Flick, 2018). For this study, the sample size consisted of 17 teachers who teach within one of the three zones of the school system. Deep and intense investigation can occur with each participant when a study is composed of small sample sizes (Boddy, 2016). The recommended number of participants is considered a sufficient sample size to address the saturation needed to answer the research questions sufficiently.

### **Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants**

After approval to proceed with the study was granted from Walden University's IRB (approval no. 08-26-21-0270566), an application was submitted to the Department of Research, Assessment, and Accountability within the school system seeking permission to conduct the study. Once approved by the school system, potential participants were invited to participate in the study via email. The correspondence explained the purpose of the study, the research methodology, and a link to the consent form to give ethical consideration to the study (Cooper, 2015). The consent form

described participants' rights throughout the study, their right to withdraw from the study, and their protection regarding confidentiality. The following steps were used to access potential participants of the study:

1. Acquired teacher email addresses from school websites.
2. Sent invitation emails to participants, including a link to the consent form for them to complete to participate in the study.
3. Teachers who completed the consent form were sent a follow-up email to schedule their interview. Participants could select dates and times provided by the interviewer via a link embedded within the follow-up email.
4. Participants had the option to conduct in-person or virtual interviews due to COVID-19. All participants selected for their interviews to be done virtually.
5. Interviews were conducted during a time of day that did not impact or conflict with the participants' required work schedule as required by the school system (Vasileiou et al., 2018).

### **Methods of Establishing Researcher–Participant Working Relationship**

Establishing a researcher–participant relationship was vital to the study (see Ellis, 2019). Because the researcher is the primary data collector, the researcher is the person who will be engaging with the participants in an intimate way, which also establishes human relations and are essential when conducting qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Interviews were scheduled based on mutually agreed dates and times of the participants with the interviewer. All interviews occurred via Zoom and were audio recorded. Before each interview, participants were reminded of their rights and

confidentiality regarding the study. I established a working relationship with each participant as a fellow educator within the school system where they all serve. The establishment of trust was formalized by ensuring the researcher–participant relationship had a clear understanding of the deliverables for the study through dialogue that covered the rights of the participant to engage in the study, how data was collected, and how data would be used from the study.

### **Ethical Protection of Participants**

When conducting qualitative research, informed consent outlines the steps to protect the participants ethically (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Informed consent is required to ensure that participants fully understand the purpose of the research and their rights as participants in the study (Ridder, 2017). Orally and written, participants were informed that their participation was strictly voluntary and that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time without any repercussions; the informed consent form detailing this information and the documents were reviewed electronically with the participant by me before initiating the interview (Creswell & Poth, 2017). My contact information, including phone number and email address, was included on all forms if the participants needed additional information or had questions regarding the study.

Pseudonyms for the participants were used to help preserve participant confidentiality (Fang & Wang, 2017). Storage of electronic data collected during the study will be housed on a password-protected computer. A locked file cabinet was used to secure paper data in my residence.

## Data Collection

Data collection for this basic qualitative design study included face-to-face interviews via Zoom to discuss teachers' experiences and expectations for teaching America American males and the equitable strategies they use with this population (see Park & Park, 2016). The following procedures were used: (a) a private Zoom account; (b) explaining the purpose of the interview; (c) verbalizing confidentiality terms with the interviewee; (d) the interview format shared with the interviewee; (e) the timeframe of the interview shared with the interviewee; (f) contact information of the researcher provided to the interviewee; (g) opportunity for questions given; and (h) notes written by the interviewer to recall answers (Saunders et al., 2015). The interview guide (see Appendix E) was adopted from published studies to determine African American males' perceptions and the perceptions of their educators of the factors that contributed to their school success (see Lewis, 2014). The interview guide questions possess interpretive and theoretical validity (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview guide questions allowed the participants to explain the phenomenon being investigated within the study.

This study comprised a two-phase process that utilizes instruments that are published. Participants provided background and demographic information about themselves as they responded to the first question from the interview guide (see Appendix E), followed by individual interviews conducted by the researcher with the participants (see Appendix E). Once I received approval to conduct the study from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the school system, I contacted participants directly via their work email obtained through school websites. All

participants received an electronic copy of the informed consent. All signed copies were collected and secured by the researcher. Descriptive data from the participants was collected during the interviews via the interview guide. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

I sought to understand the experiences of the equitable strategies they use within their instructional practices with this population of students. Participants reflected on and answered the same questions to ensure the data collected and the results were credible and valid. Interview questions mirrored an open-ended, probing questioning format to help the participants critically reflect on their experiences. The design of interview questions elicited participants' responses to summarize their experiences and outcomes to collect quality data through interviews (Mitchell & Sutherland, 2020). At the same time, a time-consuming method, the descriptive information, and data acquired through this method of inquiry added body and depth to this qualitative study. I asked participants questions from the interview guide provided (see Appendix F) along with guideline statements for conducting the interview, which served as an interview script for the researcher. These questions allow the participants to describe their responses and elaborate on previous answers.

The purpose of the interview was to collect data regarding the experiences of teachers who instruct African American males and the equitable strategies they use within their instructional practice for this population; therefore, to accurately preserve information for collection and scripting for data analysis purposes, the interview questions and answers were recorded (Ellis, 2019). Participants had the opportunity to

explain their narratives via recording the interviews. Handwritten notes were taken during the interview, and I transcribed, analyzed, and coded responses once the interviews were concluded (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A member check with the participants to ensure the accuracy of what was captured in the interviews was conducted (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The resulting conclusions have been provided qualitatively when the interview results were reported.

### **Role of the Researcher**

I have been an educator for over 25 years and have held various positions: teacher, staff developer, assistant principal, and principal. I am an employee of the school system where the study occurred but hold no supervisory authority over the interviewees. The study's research sites are boundary high schools where I am not assigned or employed. To ensure that assumptions and opinions were not generated during the interview process, I used an interview protocol to facilitate the interview process with the participants (see Ellis, 2019).

### **Participants' Rights**

Before initiating the interview session, the consent form was reviewed with the participants. During that time, I clarified the interview logistics and purpose of the study, and all the participants' rights were made aware to participants during this time, including their right to refuse to participate in the study at any time and refuse to answer questions in the study (Ridder, 2017). All electronic recordings, notes, and transcripts housed are secured on a password-protected computer in my residence.

## **Data Analysis**

Analysis of data was conducted through a triangulation approach. Denzin's paradigm shift mitigates bias through triangulation and enhances the reliability of the results; data can be saturated when utilized within a qualitative study, and depth is added to the data that are collected (Fusch et al., 2018). The data triangulated for this study included the literature review, teacher interviews, and a researcher journal. A concurrent data collection and analysis process was proposed for this qualitative study (Ellis, 2019). A database was used to organize the data collected in this study. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim to a paper copy after concluding the interviews. The transcripts did not provide other identifying information, including participants' names. All research documentation and data have been electronically and physically protected and secured and only accessible by me. This was done to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

## **Coding Process**

The interview data of the study were analyzed using a priori codes, opening coding with thematic analysis, and axial coding. This was accomplished without the use of a software program. First, a priori codes were outlined. Next, opening coding was used to label the information collected for topics and features that stood out in the data. Last, axial coding occurred to focus on the questions of the research study. Categories were developed to focus on the study's concepts and establish the study's findings. Using this method, data analysis occurred by evaluating the coded data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Hence, once the coding process was concluded, I composed a

researcher journal that captured the observations, reflections, and patterns from the interviews (Babbie, 2017). I noted the time requirements for data collection and analysis (Ellis, 2019). This process applied to all 17 interviews.

### **Evidence Quality**

Trustworthiness provides validity to research studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A study is trustworthy when it addresses the problem it intends to address. This was achieved using three measures (Babbie, 2017). To ensure that I accurately captured and transcribed the participants' responses, member checks were utilized that shared interview transcripts, analytical notes, and drafts of the final study report. Sharing a summary of the findings with the participants ensured that the researcher did not misinterpret or misrepresent the thoughts and experiences of the participants (Ellis, 2019). Peer review and debriefing provided external feedback and reflection on the findings. Clarification of researcher bias addressed the subjectivity of the researcher. My opinions were not shared with the participants during the data collection or any other study phases.

### **Discrepant Cases**

The possibility of discrepant cases should be addressed when conducting qualitative research. Merriam (2009) discusses the need to acknowledge varying perspectives that can provide contradictory information. I analyzed the data to identify potential discrepant data. I did not note evidence of discrepant cases.

## **Data Analysis Results**

This study aimed to understand the experiences and expectations of teachers who instruct African American males and the equitable strategies they use to promote their academic success. Two research questions guided the data collected from interviews. The interviews yielded data that assisted in addressing the research questions that can be implemented in the equity practices of the school system.

### **Overview of Themes**

Data from the interviews were analyzed to identify three emerging themes. A priori and open coding were utilized to address the study's two research questions. The analysis produced three emerging pieces: relevant curriculum, persons of color teacher representation, and professional development needs.

#### ***Theme 1: Relevant Curriculum***

Analysis of the interview data indicated that all 17 participants perceived that African American males need to understand why they are learning what they are learning, see the usefulness of their learning beyond high school, and see themselves and their culture reflected in their education. All the interviewees stated the importance of educators being aware and fluent in the dynamics of African American culture and experiences, especially current events that can be incorporated into the learning experience and offer real-world connections and scenarios within their various disciplines. All the interviewees also emphasized the importance of their role in advocating and disrupting the narrative of African American males not being placed in

advanced academic courses and programs and integrating the African American experience via curriculum materials and resources for all educators within the system.

Howard (2019) described that curriculum modifications and resources are required for varying learning opportunities, which is necessary for students of color.

Anderson (2019) realized that a rigorous curriculum is contingent upon proficient instructors' interrelated relationship between educational and curriculum expertise.

Németh et al. (2018) suggested that pursuing equality for students of color, especially African American males, should be based on developing core education methods instead of implementing curriculum programs on broken foundations.

Research question one focused on teacher descriptions of their experience teaching African American males based upon their use of culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching. Interviewee 7's response addresses the Access component of the Equitable Strategies Conceptual Framework Model: teacher expectations. Interviewee 7 explained, "With teaching African American males and being an African American male, the one thing that I feel like I had to learn to be an effective teacher was to be able to teach them how to learn. I think it is important for them to understand my curriculum and be realistic that everybody will not go into the field I teach. But with that in mind, what I can bring to the table that will be universally important for them is to make sure they can be citizens who can thrive regardless. What can they take that is a part of what I teach that they can utilize in the future? So, the web that character does come into play is very easy for me to talk about in mass communications. You must present yourself a certain way. But what does that say for you? In the future? How do you want to be perceived,

and how do you want to be seen simultaneously? How do you want to present yourself, and that authenticity of having truth and having your authentic self be able to be present at all times is embedded in all of my teachings? That's important no matter if I'm teaching communications, journalism, film, or English.”

Research question two focused on high school teachers' expectations regarding the academic abilities of African American male students when equitable strategies are used. Interviewee 11's response addressed the Treatment (Student Experiences) and Support (Alignment of Resources and Treatment to expand possibilities for students) components of the Equitable Strategies Conceptual Framework Model. Interviewee 11 provided the following, “One of the reasons why I asked my department chair to allow me to have ninth graders this year is because while I like the content covered during the 10<sup>th</sup>-grade year, it's all depressing. It's depressing. I'm a huge Shakespeare fan, but Macbeth, you know, it's tragic, right? I teach Purple Hibiscus. Purple Hibiscus is a story about an extreme African father and husband who are physically and verbally abusive. Yes, emotionally and mentally to his wife and children. And then I teach Night about the Holocaust. So, there we go. Depressing, depressing, painful, and sad. So, coming out of COVID, being shut down in the house for a lengthy period, and unable to socialize, I told my department chair I didn't want to do it. I don't want to be responsible for bringing my students down even more with this content. Somebody's going to do it, but I didn't want it to be me! So, this ninth-grade year, I had to teach a book entitled Speak about a high school freshman who, unfortunately, is sexually assaulted before she begins her first year, fictional. Still, does it ring true about what young people are experiencing? And last

summer, I pushed for the school system to incorporate *The Hate You Give* into the curriculum, and it got there! And so, I was like; there's no way I'll miss out on teaching this! And so, I'm happy that all of my colleagues at my school who teach ninth grade are introducing *The Hate You Give*; we're about to finish it this week. But I will say this, in terms of instructional strategies, trust between you and your students is one, and adding relatable content is another instructional strategy. I had students who had been cutting my class when we were covering *The Odyssey*. When we started *The Hate You Give*, they showed up and haven't missed a day! Students who didn't say a word about *The Odyssey* are having robust conversations, talking about, you know, just their views about the role of police and police treatment of African Americans. Interracial dating and a lot of other challenges, like gang violence. They are facilitating discussions about real and timely concerns we are dealing with worldwide, especially in America. Trust initiated the learning experience, but the content brought them back to class!

### ***Theme 2: Persons of Color Teacher Representation***

All interviewees, regardless of race and ethnicity, unanimously discussed the importance of African American males experiencing African American and other persons of color educators as an essential component of their needed learning experience. This statement was empathized by interviewees, especially for disciplines where normally educators of color, especially African Americans, are not as visible, including STEM and CTE. The African American teacher interviewees all highlighted the benefits of being able to relate culturally to African American males and how that was leverage for their instruction with this student population.

Conflicts arise when African American males perceive that their teachers do not accept them due to race (Anyon et al., 2018). African American males' perceptions regarding their connections to staff are a push factor that causes them to disengage academically (Khan, 2017). The most detrimental effect of teachers' perceptions occurs for African American males than any other group of students (Norman, 2016).

In keeping with this stance, Interviewee 3 said, "I hate to say it, but also being black is a kind of instructional strategy. Having teachers of color is vital. And it's important. Some students of color go through their life and never have a teacher of color. Most of my seniors never had me until senior year. I'm the only teacher of color in my English Department and the only black teacher in my entire English Department. Everyone else is a white person. Our students, especially African American males, are experiencing a lack of color. The instructional strategies that a person of color might think of, or the content that a person of color might think of, similar to the white culture, is ingrained in us. It's an instructional strategy because I must be aware of white culture, but they don't have to be aware of the non-white culture. So, I have a mixture of both white culture and non-white culture going on. I will include both in my classes, and having multiple options to connect to the learning would probably be the second most important instructional strategy. But you can't get to that second step without the ability to understand multiple cultures. So technically, I'd say being a person of color would probably be an instructional strategy. It's just that you can't run on that alone. You need pedagogy, cultural connection, and cultural integration. That's where your superpowers lie as an educator."

Interviewee 5 stated, “I was assigned cafeteria duty last year, and I had my duty with one of the social-emotional learning specialists in the building, a black male. I said, you know, I really would like to have a program for, if not just, black males than males of color here at the school, and he said, well, what does that look like? I told a group that they could learn about themselves and be exposed to things outside their little corner of the world where they are supported and elevated by people who look like them. I said because that’s missing. That is missing. I said we are in an environment where the teachers who are teaching them, the majority of the teachers who are teaching them daily, don’t look like them. They’re not black, you know; they’re not people of color. And don’t get me wrong, we have some excellent Caucasian teachers in the building, but the number, you know, I can count on my hands and maybe my feet, the number that looks like them, mainly black male teachers. And so, the social-emotional learning specialist said, I’ll partner with you because I told him I need a black male in the room because I can try to elevate and support them all day long, but I’m not a male. I can teach young males and black males but can’t teach black males how to be black men. I can instill some values along those lines, but they need to see an instrumental black male figure who knows what’s happening to them and can prepare them for their future manhood.

Interviewees 3 and 5 addressed research question one, which describes the experiences of high school teachers teaching African American males based on their use of culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching. Interviewee 3 addressed the Treatment (Student Experiences) component of the conceptual framework model. Interviewee 5 handled the Resources (Human, Monetary, Space, and Time) and Support (Alignment of

Resources and Treatment to expand possibilities for students) components of the conceptual framework.

### ***Theme 3: Professional Development Needs***

Unanimously, teachers identified two professional development needs as the final theme of the interviews. Teachers identified developing relationships and trust as one professional development needs. The other development that needs to be determined is understanding and managing implicit bias.

Bouyer (2017) identified that cultural mistrust plays a significant role in student achievement for African American males. African American males encounter teachers who do not have the training and capacity to address African American males' academic socialization and social skills in the classroom or incorporate instructional practices to work effectively with them (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Darling-Hammond et al.; 2017; Howard, 2019).

Interviewees 1 and 6 addressed the study's second research question, which addressed teacher expectations regarding the academic abilities of African American male students when equitable strategies are used. Interviewees 1 and 6 address the conceptual framework model's Access (Teacher Expectations) component. Both interviewees 1 and 6's statements discussed developing relationships and building trust.

Interviewee 6 stated, "I care deeply about relationships with kids; that's important. You must like them and respect them. You must care for them as individuals. It has to be authentic and caring; it has to be genuine. It would help if you sincerely believed that they not only are capable of being great but that they're good and decent

people who have great hearts. And so those are the principles that guide everything I do, and that is the foundation of establishing relationships with my students, especially African American males. Everything I do centers upon two things: kids are great and will be successful in the future, with or without you but generally with your help. Well, I can tell you what I believe to be true. But I don't know if I can say that this is a strategy that has science to back it. I simply know that I have, and I believe, solid, solid relationships with African American male students. And I think that there are many reasons for that. I think the first is that you have to provide authentic praise. It must be real, true, and authentic, and it can't be phony. And I've seen evidence of it this year without a doubt. In my observations, authentic praise is noticeably impactful, more so with African American males than with white males. When an African American male is told he's smart by me, it means a lot more. The next day to that student, it might mean to another student who may have heard the same thing from me. I think that's interesting, and I just observed that this year, perhaps not the first time, but I've noticed that it means a lot to genuinely care for what they're doing, what they're interested in, what they're into, and to give them a voice in the classroom. Meaning an opportunity to call on them to express their opinions about things that not only they care about but rather what we're talking about. I think that matters an awful lot. Now, those aren't strategies as much as they are just classroom techniques. I have had success with phone calls to parents positively about kids. Now, this is, of course, I do this to every student. But it has an immediate and a longer-lasting impact on African American males, noticeably on me as well. So those are a couple of things I do to establish relationships."

Interviewee 1 stated, “I want to call an instructional strategy, especially for African American males, relationship building and trust. That’s it right there. My students know that I only want what’s best for them and maybe today is not the day they are prepared to turn out an amazing individual project. But maybe today’s the day they need to let me know they need me to allow them to have a moment. I have manipulatives in my classroom. It sounds silly because I work with secondary, but playdough and things in my room that they can interact with...silly stuff. I have a skeleton that the kids gave an Instagram account. And so, they’ll go over in the corner and pose with the skeleton and take pictures or make a TikTok with it or something, and then they come back, and I have their full attention because I let them be them for two minutes or whatever it was they need it. It’s verbalized. It’s not a hidden message. I will go up to a student, squat down next to them, and say, we’re not feeling this right now. And they’re honest with me because they know I’m okay with that. So, the same goes for the demonstration of knowledge, like it might be the intention that they’re doing a self-directed project on cardiovascular disorders. How they choose to present that information is how they’re feeling today. So that rubric might say you’re doing a PowerPoint. They may tell me I feel like making a poster today, or I’m going to make a TikTok about it. Or I’m going to make a video, and I say, fantastic. Show me what you got!”

Interviewees 4 and 10 address both research questions of the study. Interviewee 4 handles the Treatment (Student Experiences) and Access (Teacher Expectations) components of the Equitable Strategies Conceptual Framework Model. Interviewee 10

addresses the Access (Teacher Expectations) component of the Equitable Strategies Conceptual Framework.

Interviewee 4 stated, “Educators need to dismiss any preconceived assumptions they have about African American males. Educators need to give them a clean slate. What I hate the most, what I dislike the most about my job, are the notes I get when African American students are sent to my class. Behaviorally and academically, you judge them by what you haven’t even accounted for. I mean, um, yeah, they just need a clean slate! In several insurances, this is your first time with these students, and you are already putting them out! Let them show you what they can do. I try to teach my students that they must learn how to relate to different personalities, teaching styles, and learning styles. So, why can’t white educators do the same? So, the most important thing in closing the achievement gap is to care where they are, show them that you care, and don’t make assumptions! Help them make it make sense. I just feel like they should not be prejudged. Just like I hate when students are prejudged, when they are transferred to this school system from the neighboring system, he’s from there! I’m going to put him here in this class. I’ve had to fight. And I will probably lose my job over having students automatically placed in low classes because they were transferred into our system from the neighboring system. That’s when I gave myself a voice. You just automatically assume that this student is low? Because he went to school in an urban area. No, I don’t like that! Those are the reasons why I have considered leaving the system, but those are the reasons why I have been determined to be that voice!”

Interviewee 10 expressed, “Educators have to address their prejudices. They must be better advocates for their African American male students and the society they’re being brought up. Of course, some things can affect your classroom, but the biggest thing will be YOU and how you view your students! You have teachers that will swear up and down, I’m not racist, but you know they are. For example, a white male student just walked by, and you didn’t stop them, but now this black male student walks by and asks to see their pass and demands it from them. So, it’s like, these are innate biases, and you need to constantly be holding yourself accountable and looking at them, making sure that you are viewing them. A disproportionate number of educators are white and don’t represent the communities they serve. So, they need to be more self-aware, and they need to be better, myself included. They need to do that hard work, call themselves out, and be willing to do that. I think some amazing white educators are willing to do that. But not all of them are, and that’s the problem.”

### **Summary**

The qualitative study aimed to understand the experiences and expectations of teachers who instruct African American males and the equitable strategies they use to promote their academic success. The study required purposeful sampling with strict requirements for participant selection. A basic qualitative design approach was selected because the study’s purpose and research questions required the use of open-ended interview questions to gauge participant perceptions. Ellis (2019) clarified that the researcher is required to interact with participants without manipulating any variables.

Data collection tools included an interview guide (see Appendix F) used for the interviews facilitated by the researcher. Also, aligned with the qualitative study methodology, participant responses were analyzed for common themes and phrases during data analysis. Ellis (2019) also explained that concurrent data collection and analysis processes would be used to analyze the data, including member checks to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings. The study's outcome informed me of the best approach to determine the activity, program, or initiative to complete the project study.

Purposeful sampling was used to select the study's teachers who fit the criteria and consented to participate. I was successful in interviewing 17 teachers. Data collected for the study were kept confidential to avoid harm to the participants. Data were collected through interviews. Once collected, the data were analyzed for themes using a priori and open coding. The themes that emerged were relevant curriculum, a person of color teacher representation, and professional development needs.

Section Three of the study outlines the project developed based on the need to understand and manage implicit bias. The section describes the rationale for the project, a literature review that supports the project's critical components, a description of the project, and how it will be evaluated. The project is a professional development training that addresses one of the professional development needs to be analyzed in the study.

### Section 3: The Project

#### **Introduction**

Section 3 describes the project and the professional development seminar based on the study's findings and a literature review. The goals and rationale for the project, project implementation, implementation timetable, project supports, and barriers are also discussed. This section also provides an evaluation plan, teachers' roles, responsibilities, and social change's local and far-reaching implications.

#### **Purpose**

This study aimed to examine teachers' experiences using culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching with African American males. The perceptions of teachers' expectations of the academic abilities of African American males were also explored. Lastly, the use of equitable strategies in the academic achievement of African American males was also examined.

Data analysis indicated that teachers identified three focus themes to improve African American males' academic outcomes. Relevant curriculum, a person of color educators, and professional development needs were identified. The professional development needs included establishing relationships and trust among teachers and African American males and understanding and managing implicit bias. The professional development project for this study promotes the understanding and management of implicit bias and its impact on the achievement of African American males.

### **Description and Goal**

A 3-day professional development project (Appendix A) resulted from the study. The project is intended for high school teachers who have engaged in the equity training plan offered by the school system to further their knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching and how understanding and managing implicit bias impacts the academic outcomes for African American males. The professional development seminars are based on the literature review and the data collected during the interviews that revealed a need for understanding and managing implicit bias. The professional development sessions will allow teachers to collaborate with colleagues while cultivating an instructional culture that addresses the needs of diverse and marginalized populations of students. The professional development seminars will take place in the fall at the beginning of the school year.

### **Rationale**

This project was based on the research findings that indicated that teachers who participated in the equity training plan of the school system expressed professional development needs that require additional training on topics related to equity. Specifically, study participants identified the need for teachers to understand and manage implicit bias and its impact on African American high school males. One way to address this practice barrier may be through professional development that provides teachers with the strategies and tools for identifying implicit bias and collaboration and planning with colleagues to manage it.

## **Review of the Literature**

The literature review was conducted to identify professional development strategies that help teachers identify, understand, and manage implicit bias. This section addresses the literature search strategies and describes the recommendations of the research literature regarding professional development learning. I performed literature searches of peer-reviewed articles gathered through education databases.

### **Sociopolitical/Critical Consciousness and Teacher Development**

**Intro to critical consciousness.** The implicit bias theme involves examining the sociopolitical/critical consciousness tenet within culturally relevant pedagogy (Freire, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 1995). How teachers address their students' needs is impacted by a teacher's sociopolitical/critical consciousness (Larkin & Hannon, 2019), which can be defined as an awareness of power structures that can be developed through action and reflection (Lorenza, 2018; Styslinger et al., 2019). Sociopolitical/critical consciousness involves not only analyzing inequities but being empowered to act regarding those inequities (Diemer et al., 2021). The journey (Kohli et al., 2019) of sociopolitical/critical consciousness develops at a microsystem level (Taylor, 2021). Classroom and teacher practices are influenced by external forces of marginalization (Godfrey & Burson, 2018). Facilitated through dialogue (Pollard, 2020) by teachers, critical consciousness is incorporable within the classroom (Freire, 2020). When teachers are aware of power structures (race, class, gender, and sexual orientation) and how they impact teaching and students' roles in the learning process, transformative levels of critical consciousness occur (Pollard, 2020).

**What teachers need to develop critical consciousness.** To develop critical consciousness and facilitate equitable schooling, teachers must acquire specific knowledge requisites while acting firmly in their beliefs that disrupt dominant structures and perpetuate systematic power structures (Alfaro, 2019). Teachers must possess socio-historical knowledge to identify root causes that support and promote oppression (Godfrey & Burson, 2018). Teachers must have a historical understanding of inequities and be knowledgeable of current social justice issues that marginalize people of color to employ critical consciousness (Freire, 2020). Teachers must also be personally invested in their development and the development of their students (Taylor, 2021). The relationships between teachers and students must be grounded in mutual respect and displayed empathetically with genuine care (Pollard, 2020). Natural care and mutual respect nurture classrooms that demonstrate caring and extend beyond the classroom and into the community (Nojan, 2020).

**How critical consciousness is developed.** At the heart of sociopolitical/critical consciousness are crucial conversations. Within a classroom, critical consciousness is developed through the dialogues between teachers and students and students with students, especially conversations that address relevant social issues (Pollard, 2020; Styslinger et al., 2019). Critical consciousness occurs when teachers are aware of power, privilege, and oppression and take ownership of their impact, especially when student narratives are shared that dismantle implicit bias (Mosley et al., 2021). Classroom dialogues that are rich and provide access to multiple perspectives foster and develop critical consciousness (Pollard, 2020). Critical consciousness disrupts inequality and

oppression, and teachers who engage in essential consciousness practices disrupt dominant ideologies (Alfaro, 2019). One area teachers disrupt data-driven decisions that counter deficit thinking about students (implicit bias), curriculum, instruction, and grading (Dodman et al., 2021). The engagement of disruptive practices not only addresses individual critical consciousness; it also works toward creating a different future of essential collective thinkers of consciousness and disruptors (Rutherford, 2018).

**Challenges in developing critical consciousness.** Barriers occur to teachers developing their critical consciousness, including peers of different races and ethnicities (Taylor, 2021). For example, teachers of color have been known to unlearn practices that hinder critical consciousness, and all educators of color do not possess essential consciousness (Jackson & Knight-Manuel, 2019). Most teachers are not exposed to sociopolitical/critical consciousness in their teacher preparation programs (Alfaro, 2019; Kohli et al., 2019; Larkin & Hannon, 2019). Even teachers who have gained sociopolitical/critical consciousness skills before teaching need assistance when they enter the profession (Kohli et al., 2019).

**Students developing critical consciousness.** Teachers are also an essential factor in a student's development of sociopolitical/critical consciousness (Shih, 2018). A student's development of critical consciousness depends on the teacher's content knowledge and background, along with their ability to facilitate caring classrooms where they share their experiences with inequality (Nojan, 2020). Using a relevant curriculum that highlights real-world concerns and local community connections enhances student development (Nojan, 2020; Underwood & Mensah, 2018), and instruction is a tool that

raises students' sociopolitical/critical consciousness. Essential consciousness skills could develop in students as early as elementary school (Sturdivant & Alanis, 2019). Curriculum and instruction need to provide multiple perspectives (Styslinger et al., 2019), incorporate ethnic studies (Nojan, 2020), and embed culture and content (Howell et al., 2019). Critical and crucial conversations within the classroom should cultivate critical consciousness while addressing real-world concerns (Pollard, 2020; Underwood & Mensah, 2018). Teachers help students by developing the students' ability to disrupt oppressive patterns in others and themselves (Styslinger et al., 2019). The development of sociopolitical/critical consciousness is relevant to the study and can be used in the classroom to disrupt implicit bias and improve African American males' academic achievement.

### **Identifying and Addressing Implicit Bias in Public Education**

Implicit bias influences educational inequalities, discipline practices, and lower teacher expectations of students, which are significant issues African American students face in public education, specifically African American males (Garcia, 2018; Peterson et al., 2016). Concentrating on implicit bias must occur in pre-service teacher education programs, in-service teacher professional development, higher education, and the broader education community (Schwartz, 2019). Regarding having conversations about race, some barriers prevent White educators from realizing and discussing implicit bias. Diangelo (2018) described "white fragility" as a form of bullying White people engage in when the topic of race is concerned. Some signs of "white fragility" include anger, argumentation, fear, and silence (Diangelo, 2018).

Wing (2017) described three steps for unlearning hate. The three steps include: 1) Trace it, 2) Face it, and 3) Replace it. Step one requires honest acknowledgment of historical practices that have fostered institutional and systematic racism. Step two requires engaging in difficult yet crucial conversations about race to seek an understanding of diverse perspectives. The last step supports people to substitute implicit bias with positive images of diverse populations.

Effective professional development focuses on teachers' teaching (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Both Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) and Kennedy (2016) discussed that improving student achievement requires the effective professional development of teachers in all aspects of their practice. Collaboration is another feature of effective professional development that must be supported systematically within schools (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Dogan et al., 2016; Ndunda et al., 2017). Professional learning communities are a form of professional development collaboration that support and improve teachers' knowledge, skills and practice through mutual respect, trust, and collegiality (Dogan et al., 2016; R. H. Woodland, 2016). Modeling is another feature of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The researcher will recommend professional development time for teachers to observe their peers within the system who have demonstrated sociopolitical/critical consciousness effectively within their classrooms with diverse learners, specifically African American males.

### **Project Description**

The professional development program will be offered in person during three days of the school year (August, January, and May), along with monthly professional learning communities (PLCs) after school. During the whole day of professional development sessions, participants will be allowed an hour for lunch. Participants will be provided with the dates and locations for the full-day sessions. They will be able to register for the sessions using the school's professional development registration system. The researcher will use the research conducted by Darling-Hammond et al. (2020) to develop the PLC. Participants will have an opportunity to create a shared vision for improving teacher collaboration and increasing student achievement. The goal of the three-day professional development program will be for teachers to gain a deeper understanding of diversity, equity, inclusion, implicit bias, unconscious bias, and how to assess themselves regarding implicit bias and microaggressions. The PLC will allow teachers to collaborate consistently regarding their individual and collective equity journeys. The researcher will encourage teachers to share how they develop their classrooms into sociopolitical/critical consciousness learning environments.

### **Potential Resources and Existing Supports**

The most vital resource and support for implementing this professional development plan would include collaborating with the Office of Equity (OOE) within the school system. The project (Appendix A) will consist of three days of professional development for high school teachers who have participated in the school system's equity training plan consisting of in-person, building, and virtual after-school professional

learning communities. The researcher will coordinate the PD days and the PLC agendas while collaborating with OOE about content resources relevant to the topics that will be addressed in the sessions. One of OOE's significant priorities is collaborating with stakeholders within the school system to enhance instructional environments that support academic rigor and access cultural relevance and relationships. OOE will also serve as a resource for space to conduct the 3-day professional development sessions. The PLCs will be completed virtually, and the researcher can access system applications, including Google Meets and Microsoft Teams, to conduct these sessions.

### **Potential Barriers**

Funding and time are two significant barriers to implementing this professional development plan. In terms of time and funding, the researcher would schedule the professional development sessions on system-wide professional development days. System-wide professional development days are already identified on the calendar for August, January, and May. Utilizing these system-wide professional development days will alleviate the need for substitutes to cover classes. The researcher will suggest that the virtual after-school PLCs are offered a consistent day monthly after school so teachers can share implementation ideas and resources.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

The primary training of the professional development program will occur during the three full-day sessions. I will facilitate the activity with support and collaboration from OOE. Teachers will revisit some of the concepts they were exposed to through OOE's equity training plan while utilizing the Wing (2017) process of unlearning hate by

identifying, recognizing, and assessing for implicit bias while learning how to develop sociopolitical/critical consciences classrooms. High school teachers who have previously participated in the school system's equity training plan will be expected to attend and participate in the three-day professional development training. Their role will consist of them being active participants in both the three-day sessions and PLCs, where they will share their resources and experiences in developing and implementing sociopolitical/critical consciousness classrooms.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

The evaluation process will consist of teacher feedback that will be provided in a survey format that teachers will receive after each professional development session and monthly PLC (Appendix A). The survey will be made available via Google Forms, and the formative feedback will determine the sessions' effectiveness. The evaluation seeks to gather information about the goals of the plan and the use of collaboration strategies regarding sociopolitical/critical consciousness. At the end of the year, I will conduct a summative evaluation to determine the overall effectiveness of the professional development plan and to gather recommendations to present to OOE. Attendance will also be monitored for engagement and effectiveness of the sessions.

The stakeholders for this professional development plan include the school system's superintendent, deputy superintendent, chief academic officer, chief of schools, Office of Equity, teachers, and students. The training plan facilitated by OOE for the school system includes: (1) developing and establishing shared language for discussing racial equity, (2) coaching for racial equity, and (3) putting equity into practice. The

training plan is not required by staff and personnel of the system but is encouraged. The need expressed by the study's participants, who have already participated in the system's equity training plan, identified an additional professional development need regarding implicit bias through the lens of socio-political/critical consciousness. de Groot-Reuvekamp et al. (2018) shared that teachers participate and engage in professional development based on their needs. This professional development plan was created based on the need expressed by teachers who are already committed to equity but recognize that more professional development is required. Project evaluation will be an ongoing effort to allow for time and monitoring of the plan.

### **Project Implications**

The project design was developed based on the research findings that indicated a professional development need for implicit bias through a collaborative model that includes a PLC group of teachers engaged in the school system's equity training plan. The expected implication for social change is to address the collaboration between high school teachers to improve the academic achievement of African American males' inequitable learning environments using the tent of sociopolitical/critical consciousness. The study participants perceived that additional equity professional development on implicit bias was needed to address the implementation of equitable strategies for improving the academic outcomes of African American high school males.

The professional development plan was designed to provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate in implementing sociopolitical/critical consciousness within their respective classrooms. As a result of the project, classrooms, schools, and system culture

could shift towards being more collaborative in addressing implicit bias against African American high school males and all marginalized populations the school system services. Through the joint learning sessions, teachers could share their experiences and resources for implementing sociopolitical/critical consciousness learning environments. Collecting evaluation data and documenting these practices could contribute valuable data to inform improvements for the school system and other systems within the state of Maryland that are obligated to demonstrate compliance regarding equity and access in schools, multicultural education, racial and cultural awareness, and diversity issues.

Section 3 described the project that addressed the suggestion for a professional development seminar based on the study's findings with a literature review. The goals and rationale for the project, project implementation, implementation timetable, project supports, and barriers were discussed. This section also provided an evaluation plan, teachers' roles and responsibilities, and social change's local and far-reaching implications. The last section of this manuscript, Section 4, will conclude the study with conclusions and final reflections.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

A basic qualitative research design was used for the examination of teachers' expectations of equitable strategies and their influence on African American male academic achievement. Following the introduction, Section 4 of the study will review the project's strengths and limitations. This section also involves recommendations for addressing the practice problem and what the researcher learned about the scholarship, project development, evaluation, and leadership change.

#### **Strengths**

There are several strengths in this project. This project was implemented based on teachers' feedback within the local school system and current literature. This project allowed me to provide research-embedded professional learning seminars that correlate with the study's conceptual framework of culturally relevant teaching/pedagogy. In addition, this project entitled me to provide a concentrated focus on implicit bias, which is not discussed in detail within the three phases of training offered by the school system on equity but was referenced by all the study's participants as essential training that is needed in educating African American males. Finally, the project addresses the need for collaboration among teachers to share ideas and best practices for instructing and supporting African American male student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

#### **Limitations**

The research study's project was limited to 17 participants who were purposefully sampled for the study. The participants engaged in an equity training plan specific to the

school system they are employed. Therefore, the recommendations may only address the needs of teachers in that particular school system. The guidance provided by the participants was specific to high school teachers within the system. It may not apply to teachers who teach African American males within elementary and middle schools located within the system. Finally, a possible limitation is the acceptance of teachers recognizing implicit bias and addressing it.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

One approach to mitigate the limitations of this study would be to conduct studies using a similar or the same research design with elementary and middle school teachers in the school system who are experiencing success educating African American males. A second approach to mitigate the limitations of this study would be to conduct studies with teachers who have not participated in the school system's equity training plan. Teachers may require additional professional development assistance managing implicit bias following the initial seminar. School-based administrators can address this limitation by incorporating additional ongoing professional development coaching that would allow them to include the recommendations identified by the study's participants without impeding the school system's professional development plan and training. A final alternative could include establishing the required participation of all system employees to engage in the equity training plan. This would ensure that all employees are aware of the system's equity policy and that staff members are provided with the tools to transition to a space of reflection and practice utilizing an equity lens for professional duties and responsibilities.

## **Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change Scholarship**

I have gained a new perspective on the term scholar engaging in this research process. The research process was daunting and challenging at times, especially due to working in three different school systems and becoming the primary care provider for my mother. Presenting a relevant literature review that used peer-reviewed, primary, and reliable sources regarding the educational affairs of African American males was a highlight of the research process. The presentation of those various sources provided a chronological and systematic perspective of the experiences of African American males as they navigated the public education system.

I am constantly pursuing learning, growing, developing, and enhancing my skillset to serve the community. I consider my role as an educational leader a form of service—a ministry. My mission is to change the landscape of education within a society that has historically denied education to people of color who are underserved and under-represented. This doctoral work has illuminated, confirmed, and validated my role as an educational leader and will impact my continued professional career in education.

## **Project Development and Evaluation**

I have previous experience implementing and facilitating professional development seminars. Developing a project of this nature that expands 3 days of consecutive learning broadened my research, organization, and planning skills. Considering the audience and the focus topic was also crucial in developing this project.

Equity-based needs expressed through the study, like racism and implicit bias, present challenges when presented to a diverse population of participants.

### **Leadership and Change**

Regardless of the professional assignment, I have always embraced my leadership influence in the workplace. This project confirmed and validated my passion and mission to embed diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within the public school not as a program or a philosophy but as a financially supported and systematic approach for educating all students, especially those of marginalized populations. This project allowed me to research reliable sources to solve a research problem identified within the study. I am in a strengthened position to present the professional development needs identified by teachers who have experienced the equity training plan of the school system and advocate for the expansion or modification of the equity training program to address those needs.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

#### **Analysis of Self as Scholar**

The academic achievement of African American males is a significant concern within the United States. Through the study, I identified the increasing problem within the school system of the study. An important implication of the study is its impact on supporting high school African American males. Several themes emerged through the collection and analysis of data that revealed teachers' perceptions of relevant curricula, persons of color educator representation, and professional development needs. Consequently, I determined that professional development seminars, specifically addressing implicit bias, would provide teachers with the opportunity to collaborate to

address the challenges identified in the study. Participant concerns identified in the study designed the professional development seminars of the study. The project can address barriers to high school African American male student success. The professional development seminars and the study have a solid potential for positive academic outcomes for African American high school males and the teachers who instruct them within the school system.

### **Analysis of Self as Practitioner**

My lens as an African American woman was challenging as a practitioner. I had my own opinions and personal biases regarding the research topic. I learned through the related literature review that cultural bias is not a unique problem regarding the educational experiences of high school African American males. The facts presented in the data revealed that teachers who had experienced significant amounts of equity training identified the overwhelming need for professional development specifically focused on understanding and managing implicit bias and the need for collaboration regarding this area of professional development. Milestones were achieved while completing this study, and I have developed a heightened awareness of the affordances and barriers to collaboration.

### **Analysis of Self as Project Developer**

I developed a project for the school system to increase awareness of understanding and managing implicit bias. The project was designed to reflect what I learned from the one-on-one interviews and the needs of teachers identified in those interviews. The project developed could assist high school teachers regarding their

expectations and equitable strategies for high school African American males. I learned that the teachers who participated in the system's equity training plan continue to have equity-related professional development needs that should be incorporated within the equity training plan or presented in a collaborative learning model once participants complete the training plan.

This project can impact social change in the classrooms and schools of the selected study system by building more vital relational and instructional skills among teachers who utilize equitable strategies to improve the academic outcomes for African American high school males. This project has the potential to foster collaborative adult learning environments and more vital cultural competency skills for educators who are instructing diverse populations of students. This project recommendation could be incorporated in schools across the school system by directly addressing its equity policy of implementing supportive learning environments that understand and manage implicit bias and the role it plays in teachers' expectations of African American male students and other students of diverse populations.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

I aimed to examine teachers' expectations and their use of equitable strategies that could assist the academic achievement of African American high school males. The goal was to utilize the study's findings to inform the design of a professional development project that would provide teachers with the necessary insight, perspective, and skills to individually and collaboratively address implicit bias and its impact on the achievement of African American high school males. This project can be implemented throughout the

school system of study, regardless of if teachers have participated in the school system's equity training plan, to accurately assess the supports teachers perceive are needed to serve diverse populations of students within the system, especially marginalized people like African American males. As a result of similar studies, similar seminars should be developed, and professional development should be ongoing.

The interviews revealed that, even with teachers who experienced the equity training plan of the school system, a concentrated focus on implicit bias training was needed. They all identified it as a mandated training for all teachers. An equity policy exists in the school study system, and an equity training plan is offered. Still, the training plan is not required for all employees and staff of the system, especially teachers. I recommend that newly hired teachers engage in implicit bias training as a part of the onboarding process for system employment. The system has a new teacher training track, and implicit bias, along with the phases of the equity training plan, should be essential components of that training track instructing new hires about the system's priorities, especially as they relate to equity and student outcomes. This new training would need to be evaluated and reviewed to ensure that the changes to teaching practices support the academic achievement of diverse populations within the school system, specifically African American males are occurring. Evaluations will inform improvements to the professional development seminars and activities offered and will ensure that the school system is adaptive to the needs of the diverse student populations that it services.

The main recommendation for further research is to develop a qualitative study using a similar or identical research design used for this study to analyze the experiences

of teachers in elementary and middle schools and their expectations of African American males using equitable strategies. Further research recommendations would also include exploring other marginalized diverse populations of the school system using a similar or identical research design regarding teacher expectations. In addition, a hint of a broader qualitative study is designed to observe the impact of instructional and relational outcomes for students of diverse populations with the incorporation of the school system's equity training plan and implicit bias as significant components of the school system's onboarding process for new teacher hires. This research should involve teacher perceptions of students K-12 throughout the school system.

### **Conclusion**

An examination of teachers' expectations of equitable strategies and their influence on African American male academic achievement was analyzed using a basic qualitative research design. Section 4 of the study consisted of a review of the project's strengths and limitations. Section 4 also included recommendations for addressing the practice problem and what the researcher learned about the scholarship, project development, evaluation, and leadership change. I shared their experiences as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer.

The study focused on African American male high school students regarding the instructional practices that could help them succeed academically. This project study was developed to determine the curriculum, instruction, and assessment methods teachers believe most influence the academic achievement of African American males. This study contributes to the gap in the literature regarding teachers' perceptions of teaching African

American high school males and provides insight into the educational practices that most contribute to their academic success.

Teacher interviews revealed that relevant curriculum, persons of color educator representation, and professional development needs were the study's themes. Specifically, professional development needs to consist of relationships and trust among teachers and African American males and understanding and managing implicit bias. The project for this study addressed the professional development need to understand and manage implicit bias. Teachers expressed and perceived the need for ongoing and relevant job-embedded professional development that addressed the professional development needs identified. Teachers also discussed the importance of collaborating and being change advocates regarding the continued marginalization of diverse student populations, especially African American males. In conclusion, teacher perceptions identified challenges that they perceived, individually and collectively as a school system, they need to overcome; they felt that job-embedded professional learning collaboration along with systemic prioritization regarding equitable strategies are necessary to meet the needs of not only African American high school male students but all students of diverse populations who have been marginalized.

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## Appendix A: The Project

### **Introduction**

This project was developed from one-on-one interviews with high school teachers who have participated in the school system's equity training plan. The teachers shared their perceptions and expectations of African American male academic achievement using equitable strategies. A review of the findings revealed that teachers might benefit from additional equity training in the area of implicit bias by utilizing a collaborative professional development learning model.

When a group of educators works toward a common goal collaboratively, a professional learning community (PLC) is established (Woodland, 2016). PLCs focus on enhancing teacher knowledge, skills, and practice implementation within an environment that fosters collegiality, respect, and trust (Dogan, 2015; Woodland, 2016). Establishing a professional learning community among high school teachers tackling implicit bias allows the teachers to foster a supportive learning community individually and collectively.

### **Purpose**

This project is designed to support teachers who have already engaged in the system's equity training plan and have identified additional equity professional development needs in the area of implicit bias, which falls under the sociopolitical/critical consciousness. The goals of the project are to identify, assess and address implicit bias within the classroom by developing teachers who facilitate their instruction with a lens of sociopolitical/critical consciousness and to learn and use collaboration strategies, the professional learning community (PLC) to support and improve teacher knowledge and skills in sociopolitical/critical consciousness. The professional development plan consists of three full-day seminars (August, January, and May) and monthly after-school collaborative sessions.

### **Goals and Objectives**

To facilitate and encourage collaboration among high school teachers to share resources and strategies for implementing sociopolitical/critical consciousness learning environments.

To provide opportunities for teachers to observe their colleagues implementing the tenet of sociopolitical/critical consciousness within their classrooms. To identify, assess, and address implicit bias within the classroom by developing teachers who facilitate their instruction with a sociopolitical/critical consciousness lens.

### **Implementation Schedule**

*Professional Development Workshops (August, January, and May):*

This professional development will be offered to teachers who have participated in the school system's equity training plan and have identified an additional equity professional development need of implicit bias. A professional learning community will be developed as another means of continuing the professional development work and increasing collaboration among the teachers regarding implicit bias and implementing sociopolitical/critical consciousness classroom environments.

**Session 1: 8:00 am – 2:30 pm**

Research Background, What is Implicit Bias, and Implicit Association Test

Proposed Time: August (Pre-Service Week for Teachers)

Duration: 6.5 hours

The first session's goal will be to provide teachers with the background of the researcher's research. Also, during this session, teachers will explore and reflect on resources that define and identify implicit and unconscious bias. Teachers will be administered the Implicit Association Test to assess for implicit bias in the area of race. Teachers will also be aware of the monthly after-school PLCs that will occur virtually. Each participant will be able to share resources and practices they are implementing within their respective classrooms regarding sociopolitical/critical consciousness.

**Session 2: 8:00 am – 2:30 pm**

Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions

Proposed Time: January (After the second marking period)

Duration: 6.5 hours

The goal of the second session will be to continue the work from the August professional development. Teachers will explore the three forms/types of microaggressions. Teachers will use the four agreements from Courageous Conversations, Wah's Nine Healthy Ways to Communicate, and DiAngelo's Frame of Reference to facilitate conversations about microaggressions.

**Session 3: 8:00 am – 2:30 pm**

Colorblindness, Racial Battle Fatigue, and Review/Wrap Up

Proposed Time: May (After the completion of final exams)

Duration: 6.5 hours

The session will address colorblindness and racial battle fatigue. The session will also review teacher participation in the after-school collaboration sessions. This session will also be utilized as a goal-setting session for the following year's PLC.

<b>DAY 1: AGENDA</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>
8:00 am – 8:30 am	Introduction Goals of PLC- discuss the background of research and the needs of teachers
8:30 am- 9:00 am	Teachers will read and reflect on the article: Checking Yourself for Implicit Bias.
9:00 am – 9:15 am	Break
9:15 am – 10:15 am	Teachers will watch a 3-minute video to think more deeply about Understanding Unconscious Bias and read an overview by the Kirwan Institute on Understanding Implicit Bias.
10:15 am – 11:15 am	Teachers will read and discuss Peggy McIntosh’s “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.”
11:15 am – 12:00 pm	Morning Session: Review and Reflections
12: 00 pm – 1:00 pm	LUNCH
1:00 pm – 2: 30 pm	Teachers will take Project Implicit’s: Implicit Association Test for implicit race bias and will discuss their results and experience taking the assessment.
<b>DAY 2: AGENDA</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>
8:00 am – 9:00 am	Reflections: Day 1 (August) and PLCs (September-December)
9:00 am – 10:00 am	Race as a Crucial Factor: Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations, Nine Healthy Ways to Communicate, the Art of Mindful Inquiry and Diangelo’s Frame of Reference
10:00 am – 10:15 am	Break
10:15 am – 12:00 pm	Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions: Microassaults, Microinsults, and Microinvalidations
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	LUNCH
1:00 pm – 2:30 pm	Teachers will analyze a video that provides examples of microaggressions in school. Based on that analysis, teachers will examine the instances of racial microaggressions from the School of Public Health at the University of Minnesota. Which have you observed? Which have you experienced? Which may you have committed? Most importantly, now that you know the harm they can cause, how might you combat them in the future?
<b>DAY 3: AGENDA</b>	<b>TOPICS</b>
8:00 am – 9:00 am	Reflections: Day 2 (January) and PLCs (January-April)
9:00 am - 10:00 am	Colorblindness and Racial Battle Fatigue
10:00 am – 10:15 am	Break
10:15 am- 12:00 pm	Colorblindness and Racial Battle Fatigue
12:00 pm – 1:00 pm	LUNCH
1:00 pm – 2:30 pm	Reflection/Wrap-Up: Implicit Bias and Microaggressions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When reflecting on these resources and concerns, what are the practice problems at your school?</li> <li>• How will you prevent and disrupt implicit bias and microaggressions at your school?</li> <li>• As you move forward, there are <b>three main questions of reflection</b>:</li> <li>• What have you learned and become aware of about yourself about systematic inequalities, race, and privilege?</li> <li>• If we are not interrupting systematic inequalities, we are complicit in perpetuating them. What will your actions look like in the future to interrupt frequent racial beliefs, policies, and practices? How might you take action in anti-racist ways?</li> <li>• Coming to racial consciousness is never complete. What will you do to continue this journey of “waking up” to the myriad ways the system of unearned power and privileges operates? What will you do to develop multiple perspectives and continue developing cultural humility?</li> </ul>

Part 2: The researcher recommends one-hour PLC sessions after school each month for teachers to meet virtually to provide ongoing support for teachers who are addressing the professional development need of implicit bias identified during the interviews. Two teacher participants will share their experience managing implicit bias and developing sociopolitical/critical consciousness in classrooms each month.

All professional development materials will be housed on Google Drive in a folder designated for the professional development seminar. The materials include power point presentations, agendas, videos, articles, assessments, and evaluations. Additional materials needed for the professional development include teacher laptops, the facilitator's laptop, and a projector.

## **EXPLORING AND CULTIVATING SOCIOPOLITICAL/CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: ADDRESSING IMPLICIT BIAS**

**Day One:  
Research Background  
What is Implicit Bias**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- 1. How do high school teachers describe their experiences of teaching African American males based upon their use of culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching?**
- 2. What are the expectations of high school teachers regarding the academic abilities of African American male students when equitable strategies are used?**

## SETTING AND SAMPLE

A large geographically diverse district located in a Mid Atlantic state.

High school teachers who have completed the equity training plan offered by the geographically diverse district located in a Mid Atlantic state regardless of content area, grade level or ability focus teaching assignments.

## BASIC FINDINGS

17 one-on-one teacher interviews provided the findings which consisted of three themes of focus: relevant curriculum, persons of color educator representation and professional development needs.

Two professional development needs emerged: establishing relationships and trust and understanding and managing implicit bias.

The teacher interviews also expressed the importance of collaboration among teachers.

## CONCLUSIONS

Provide a three day professional development seminar that addresses understanding and managing implicit bias through the tenet of sociopolitical/critical consciousness

Establish a professional learning community (PLC) for high school teachers who are engaging in the three day professional development seminar for collaboration and sharing of resources and strategies.

## IMPORTANCE OF A PLC

Focus on the successes and challenges of addressing implicit bias and fostering sociopolitical/critical consciousness classrooms.

Assist teachers in adjusting and enhancing their teaching practices.

Provide support in a focused group setting with a common goal of improving teacher knowledge, skills and implementation through collegiality (Dogan et al., 2016; Woodland, 2016).

## LET'S TAKE A BREAK



## SESSION EXPECTATIONS

### **Commit To Learning Something New Today**

Big or small- let's make this a good use of time. Hear people's stories and perspectives and take something with you.

### **Step Up, Step Back**

When there are opportunities to share, be engaged – as a listener or a contributor. Monitor yourself and the space you may be taking up or not.

### **Be Present**

In a technology world, it is hard to be fully present. Please only use your laptop and/or mobile device for session activities.

## WHAT IS DEI?

### **DIVERSITY**

Diversity is about numbers and representation of vast differences (acknowledging identities and talents).

### **EQUITY**

Equity is about resources (time, access, money and processes- the bridge). Equity is individualized.

### **INCULSION**

Inclusion is about a sense of belonging (community, compassion, connection).

## IMPLCIT BIAS

Identifying and addressing your own biases is the first step in creating a truly equitable environment.

As board educators, it is especially important to learn how to manage these biases, as students are able to internalize the messages that they have been hearing/seeing from a young age into adulthood.

Biases are taught to us in social settings from a young age.



## WHO BELIEVES IN ME?

“...protection models hypothesize that teacher expectations “protect against,’ or counteract, negative expectations created by neighborhood effects or lack of access to educationally successful role models (Gregory and Huang, 2013).”

### DISIDENTIFY

Low expectations can negatively effect students’ performances causing students to “disidentify” with educational environment. Giving into stereotype threat.

### MODIFY

Students begin to modify their expectations, and behavior, to conform to negative biases from teachers.

**DISIDENTIFY + MODIFY = SELF-FUFILLING PROPHECY**

### ADJUST

Teachers begin to modify or adjust their teaching to how they view (implicit or explicit) students, and subsequently adjust their advising and evaluating of students.

## ACTIVATE PROTECTION MODE

### Action Items To Cultivate Equity

#### INCREASE PERSONAL AWARENESS

Do the work on yourself- read, read, read! Do not rely on folks with underrepresented identities to educate you.

#### INCREASE STUDENT AWARENESS

Create opportunities to develop a better understanding of your students. What identities do they hold?

#### CREATE PROGRAMS TO INCREASE VISIBILTY AND CHALLENGE STEROTYPES

What programs can be implemented in the academic year that increase visibility/challenge stereotypes and increase cultural awareness? Ex: Girls in STEM, BHM, WHM

## IMPLICIT BIAS: ANALYSIS

Let's Read, View, Review, Assess and Discuss:

**CHECKING YOURSELF FOR BIAS IN THE CLASSROOM:** Article (By: Ellen Fracassini)

**UNDERSTANDING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS:** Video (The Royal Society)

**UNDERSTANDING IMPLICIT BIAS:** Article (Kirwan Institute)

**WHITE PRIVILEGE: UNPACKING THE INVISIBLE KNAPSACK:** Article (By: Peggy McIntosh)

**IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION TEST:** Assessment (Project Implicit)

## EXPLORING AND CULTIVATING SOCIOPOLITICAL/CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: ADDRESSING IMPLICIT BIAS

**Day Two:  
Race as a Crucial Factor  
Recognizing and Responding to Microaggressions**

## SESSION EXPECTATIONS

### **Commit To Learning Something New Today**

Big or small- let's make this a good use of time. Hear people's stories and perspectives and take something with you.

### **Step Up, Step Back**

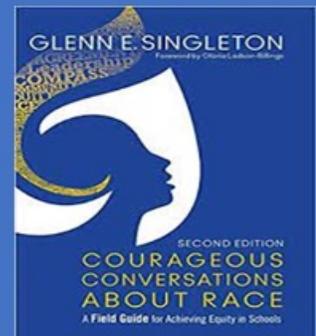
When there are opportunities to share, be engaged – as a listener or a contributor. Monitor yourself and the space you may be taking up or not.

### **Be Present**

In a technology world, it is hard to be fully present. Please only use your laptop and/or mobile device for session activities.

## IT IS ALL GOOD!

- We are all on a racial journey and wherever you are is okay.
- It is **OKAY** to make mistakes. We are human. This is a forgiving and safe space.



## RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Call IN

Do Not...

Call OUT!

### THE CHARGE

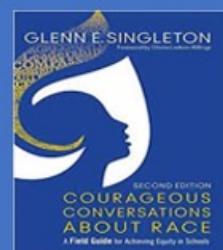


Despite being well-intentioned and compassionate, we are often not meeting the needs of our scholars/children. We need to understand the systematic pressures and underlying issues to help our children fully. We need to understand student and adult behavior within a racial context.

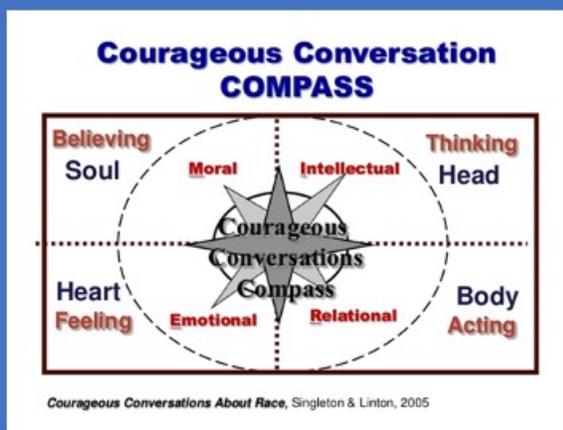
## RACE AS A CRUCIAL FACTOR

### Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations

1. Stay engaged
2. Speak your truth
3. Experience discomfort
4. Expect and accept non-closure

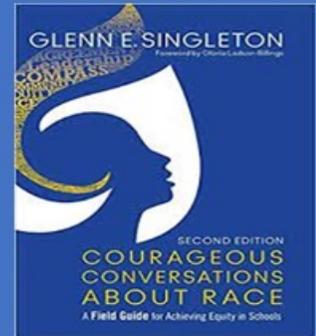


## COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION COMPASS



## THE FIRST TWO CONDITIONS

- Focus on the personal, local and immediate.
- Isolate race.



## WHEN YOU TALK ABOUT RACE

### **Isolate race**

A: Most issues are multi-factorial, focus on race!

B: "As a white male, I think..."

Don't say **THEY** when you mean **BLACK PEOPLE** or **POC**. Don't say **WE** when you mean **WHITE PEOPLE**. Say what you mean.

**Identify where you are on the compass.** "I am in my feelings when I think about this topic because..."

**Tie your answers to our local issues.**

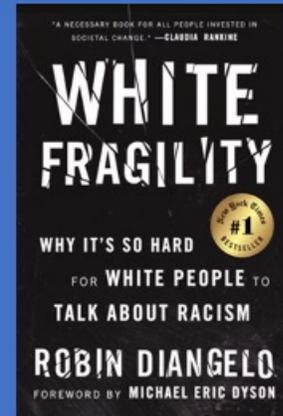
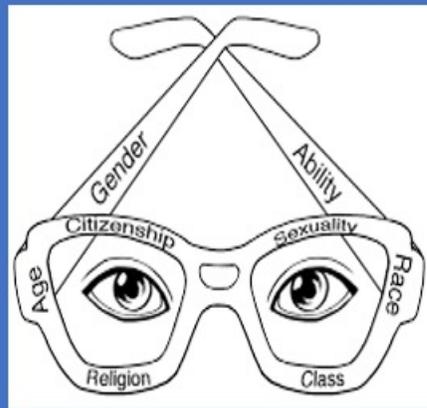
## **NINE HEALTHY WAYS TO COMMUNICATE (BY: LEE MUN WAH)**

- Reflect back on what is being said. Use their words, not yours.
- Begin where they are, not where you want them to be.
- Be curious and open to what they are trying to say.
- Notice what they are saying and what they are not.
- Emotionally, relate to how they are feeling. Nurture the relationship.
- Notice how you are feeling. Be honest and authentic.
- Take responsibility for your part in the conflict or misunderstanding.
- Try to understand how their past affects who they are and how those experiences affect their relationship with you.
- Stay with the process and the relationship, not just the solution.

## **ART OF MINDFUL INQUIRY (BY: LEE MUN WAH)**

- What I heard you say was...
- Tell me more what you meant by
- What angered (or excited) you about what happened?
- What hurt (or encouraged) you about what happened?
- What's familiar about what happened? (How did it affect you? How does it affect you now?)
- What do you need/want?

## DIANGELO'S FRAME OF REFERENCE



## INTRODUCTIONS

Staying in CCaR Protocol, introduce yourselves in 2 minutes or less, using DiAngelo's "Frame of Reference."



## LET'S TAKE A BREAK



## RECOGNIZING AND RESPONDING TO MICROAGGRESSIONS

Starting With A Reflection...

*Think about a time that someone said something about some aspect of your identity that you felt was intentionally or unintentionally dismissive, insulting, or demeaning.*

Turn to the person next to you and share the following:

- What was said to you
- How it made you feel
- How you responded to what was said
- How you felt afterwards

## TYPES OF MICROAGGRESSIONS

**Microassaults-** is most similar to what we traditionally think of as “overt discrimination”. Microassaults can be verbal, nonverbal, or environmental.

- **Verbal-** name calling (Ex: “spic” or “fag” or when radio host Don Imus referred to the Rutgers University women’s basketball team as “nappy-headed hoes” in 2007)
- **Nonverbal-** behavioral discrimination (Ex: Christian parents discouraging their children from dating Muslims)
- **Environmental-** offensive signs, posters or other visual displays (Ex: Neo-Nazi or Confederate symbols, Asian caricatures with exaggerated slanted eyes or posters that feature KKK)

## MICROASSULTS (CONTINUED)

Microassaults are conscious and intentional

Microassaults frequently occur in three ways

- When it is possible to remain anonymous
- When a person feels like they are with other like-minded people
- When a person becomes emotional and loses control

## MICROISULTS

Microinsults- is a comment or an action that communicates insensitivity to or disregard for a person's identity or heritage.

Microinsults often occur as "subtle snubs" that convey "a hidden insulting message to the recipient"

Perpetrators of microinsults are not usually consciously aware of the harmful nature of their behavior

Ex: A teacher does not acknowledge or call on Muslim students in the classroom

Ex: A tour guide ask a Chinese American student if he is planning to major in math because she thinks "all Asians are good in math"

## MICROINVALIDATIONS

Microinvalidations- is a comment or action that ignores or dismisses the thoughts, feelings, or experiences of a member of an underrepresented community

Like perpetrators of microinsults, perpetrators of microinvalidations are not usually consciously aware of the harmful nature of their behavior

Ex: A gay couple tells a friend that the manager of the hotel where they stayed on vacation was very rude to them and their friend tells them not to be "overly sensitive"

Ex: A white student rolls his eyes when a Latina student comments in class that there aren't very many courses that cover Latinx history or culture

Ex: A white person tells their African American neighbor that they are glad they now live in a "post-racial society"

## MICROAGGRESSIONS IN SCHOOL



### EXAMPLES OF RACIAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

Examine these Examples of Racial Microaggressions from the School of Public Health from the University of Minnesota. Which have you observed? Which have you experienced? Which may you have committed? Most importantly, now that you are aware of the harm they can cause how might you respond to them in the future?

## **EXPLORING AND CULTIVATING SOCIOPOLITICAL/CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: ADDRESSING IMPLICIT BIAS**

**Day Three:  
Colorblindness  
Racial Battle Fatigue  
Review and Wrap Up**

### **SESSION EXPECTATIONS**

**Commit To Learning Something New Today**

Big or small- let's make this a good use of time. Hear people's stories and perspectives and take something with you.

**Step Up, Step Back**

When there are opportunities to share, be engaged – as a listener or a contributor. Monitor yourself and the space you may be taking up or not.

**Be Present**

In a technology world, it is hard to be fully present. Please only use your laptop and/or mobile device for session activities.

## COLOR BLINDNESS

<p><i>Color Blindness</i> Statements that indicate that a White person does not want to acknowledge race</p>	<p>"When I look at you, I don't see color." "America is a melting pot." "There is only one race, the human race."</p>	<p>Denying a person of color's racial / ethnic experiences. Assimilate / acculturate to the dominant culture. Denying the individual as a racial / cultural being.</p>
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## WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF COLOR BLINDNESS

**If I don't see race,  
I can't recognize racism.  
If I can't recognize racism,  
I can't be anti-racist.  
If I can't be anti-racist,  
I participate in racism.  
This is where color-  
blindness gets us:**

--

**Racism.**

EquityLiteracy.org



## EDUCATORS MUST DISRUPT 'COLORBLIND IDEOLOGIES'

The photograph is from [I, Too, Am Harvard](#), "a photo campaign highlighting the faces and voices of black students at Harvard College. Our voices often go unheard on this campus, our experiences are devalued, our presence is questioned-- this project is our way of speaking back, of claiming this campus, of standing up to say: We are here. This place is ours. We, TOO, are Harvard. The #itooamharvard photo campaign is inspired by *I, Too, Am Harvard*, a play based on interviews with members of the black community exploring and affirming our diverse experiences as black students at Harvard College.



## WHAT IF MICROAGGRESSIONS HAPPENED TO WHITE PEOPLE?



## GRINNAGE-CASSIDY'S TED TALK



## WHAT IS RACIAL BATTLE FATIGUE?

William defines racial battle fatigue as

- “cumulative result of a natural race-related stress response to distressing mental and emotional conditions. These conditions emerged from constantly facing racially dismissive, demeaning, insensitive and/or hostile racial environments and individuals.”
- Smith believes that racial battle fatigue stems from racism and microaggressions, and in order to view these acts in today’s society

*“. . . one must not look for the gross and obvious. But the subtle, cumulative miniassault is the substance of today’s racism”*

## SYMPTOMS OF RBF

- Symptoms of RBF are suppressed immunity and increased sickness, tension headaches, trembling and jumpiness, chronic pain in healed injuries, elevated blood pressure, and a pounding heartbeat. And when people of Color with RBF anticipate racially motivated conflicts, they may experience rapid breathing, an upset stomach, or frequent diarrhea/urination.
- Other possible symptoms are constant anxiety, ulcers, increased swearing or complaining, insomnia or stress/anxiety dreams, rapid mood swings, difficulty thinking or speaking coherently, and emotional and social withdrawal in response to racial microaggressions or while in environments of mundane racial stressors. These stressors can lead to long-term health issues and cause PoC's to lose confidence in themselves and their self-worth.

## RBF

Racism is often preserved as a personal threat/battle and after facing that threat/battle continuously in predominately white spaces, people of Color may experience RBF and are left mentally, physically, and emotionally drained. And when RBF goes untreated or dismissed this stress-related psychological and physiological disease can be lethal and can kill gradually and stealthily through hypertension and poor health attitudes and behaviors.

## REFLECTION: IMPLICIT BIAS AND MICROAGGRESSIONS

- When reflecting on these resources and concerns, what are the problems of practice at your school?
- How will you prevent and disrupt implicit bias and microaggressions at your school?

## WRAP UP

- As you move forward there are **3 main questions of reflection:**
- What have you learned and become aware of about yourself with regards to systematic inequalities, race and privilege?
- If we are not interrupting systematic inequalities, we are complicit in perpetuating them. What will your actions look like going forward to interrupt systematic racial beliefs, policies and practices? How might you take action in anti-racist ways?
- Coming to racial consciousness is never complete. What will you continue to do to continue this journey of “waking up” to the myriad ways in which the system of unearned power and privileges operates? What will you do to develop multiple perspectives and to continue to develop your cultural humility?

**Evaluation: Days 1-3 Seminars**

Day: \_\_\_\_\_

Please answer each question below to describe the usefulness of this session.

1- Not Helpful 2- Somewhat helpful 3- Very helpful

Peer Collaboration 1 2 3

Materials Presented 1 2 3

Overall Experience 1 2 3

Please describe below any additional information you would like to share to make this learning opportunity more useful for others:

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**Evaluation: PLCs**

Month: \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond to each question by describing to leaders how to improve this—learning opportunity.

How do you think collaboration with your equity peers will help you improve instructional outcomes for African American males?

What will be your biggest challenge(s)?

Based upon the resources and strategies shared among your equity peers, what do you think will work in your classroom, and what will not work in your classroom? Explain why.

## Appendix B: Correspondence to School District

## CORRESPONDENCE TO THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Greetings,

My name is Danielle Green, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am attempting to complete my doctorate in educational leadership and project study with a Northeast Maryland School District. As a current Northeast Maryland School District employee, I appreciate the hard work and diligent efforts to increase graduation rates for all students, particularly that minority male. Several partnerships and initiatives have been established to improve educational outcomes for minority males within a Northeast Maryland School District. My doctoral study is aligned with those efforts.

My proposed doctoral study is entitled Equitable Strategies: Teachers' Expectations and the Academic Achievement of African American Males. This study seeks to gauge teachers who instruct African American males in two high schools for their experience, expectations, and the equitable strategies they use instructionally to engage African American males. This study is significant in successfully educating African American males in America and the need to isolate and identify meaningful curriculum, instruction, assessment, or other school-related factors that influence their achievement and graduation.

Gauging teachers for their perception of successful school factors that contribute to their students' increased graduation rates can assist district and school-based leaders in making more focused and supportive professional development decisions for teachers educating minority males. This study also highlights the positive school-related factors and programs that a Northeast Maryland School District provides students. My proposal is attached for your review and consideration. Also, I have completed and submitted my research application to conduct this study with a Northeast Maryland School District.

I appreciate your consideration in allowing me to conduct my study at your school. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

Danielle Green, Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix C: Letter to Principals

Dear Principal,

My name is Danielle Green, and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. Your school district has permitted me to conduct a qualitative study on teacher professional development. The research study is entitled *Equitable Strategies: Teachers' Expectations and the Academic Achievement of African American Males*.

This study aims to gauge teachers who instruct African American males in two high schools for their experience, expectations, and the equitable strategies they use to engage African American males. This study is significant in successfully educating African American males in America and the need to isolate and identify meaningful curriculum, instruction, assessment, or other school-related factors that influence their achievement and graduation.

Gauging teachers for their perception of successful school factors that contribute to the academic success of African American males can assist school leaders in making more focused and supportive professional development decisions. Your participation is strictly voluntary, and there are no risks to your school, staff, or students. The study is completely confidential, and your school will not be identified for the study. To ensure that the teachers selected meet the research criteria, a list of teachers who have received equity training provided by the school system will be needed from the school's administration.

You or a school designee will need minimal assistance to collect data from your school. I want to schedule three dates when I can come to meet with you or the designated liaison to discuss the study in more detail and clarify their role in the research study and review the compiled list of participants. Once the teacher list is developed, I would like to schedule possible dates where teacher interviews can occur and available space to meet within the school.

I will not need any school technology or equipment to conduct the interviews. The researcher will remain at the school to complete the meetings, and there will be no inconvenience to your school day or schedule because of participating. I appreciate your consideration in allowing me to conduct my study at your school. If you have any questions or concerns, please get in touch with me at

  
Sincerely,  
Danielle Green, Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation from a Research Partner

A School District in Northeast Maryland

Insert Contact Information

Date (Insert Date)

Dear Danielle Green,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I permit you to conduct the study entitled *Equitable Strategies: Teachers' Expectations and the Academic Achievement of African American Males* within the Northeast Maryland School District. As part of this study, I authorize you to contact the principals of the schools identified and request their participation in the study. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include none. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study if our circumstances change.

I understand that the student will not be naming our organization in the doctoral project report published in ProQuest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Authorization Official

Contact Information

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature if both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. The Uniform Electronic Transactions Act regulates electronic signatures. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

## Appendix E: Interview Guide (Teacher)

Informant Name:

Location:

Position:

Date:

1. Describe your background and experiences in education.
2. How do you describe your philosophy of teaching?
3. Describe the type of school you are working in, including demographics, population, and ability level of students.
4. Explain the types of instructional strategies you have utilized and administered within the school that have impacted African American male student achievement levels.
5. What influenced your decision to implement those teaching strategies?
6. What type of resources or information did you use in helping with deciding what instructional remediation or acceleration strategies to include?
7. What instructional strategy(s) have had the greatest impact on African American males' student achievement?
8. Describe how African American male students have benefited from these instructional strategies the most, least, and why.
9. If one of your African American male students described their experience of having you as a teacher, what would they say about you?
10. Tell me about an African American male student that you believe you had the greatest academic impact. What do you believe contributed towards that student's academic success?

11. Tell me what type of documents you analyzed to determine if the teaching strategies are successful and are achieving its goals.
12. What time span do you think is appropriate to administer these techniques before seeing results?
13. List the pros and cons you feel are a result of these interventions.
14. If you could design or implement an instructional strategy that would influence the academic achievement of African American males, what would it be and why?
15. Have you participated in cultural diversity training beyond the two phases of equity training offered by the school system? If so, how has this training impacted your instructional practices?
16. How would you rate your knowledge of different cultures and ethnic groups?
17. How do you identify students' learning styles?
18. How do you build relationships with students from other cultures?
19. Is incorporating culturally responsive instruction a part of your weekly lesson plans?
20. How often do you incorporate the following instructional strategies into your lessons? (pair-share, differentiation, performance-based assessments such as skits, speeches, and presentations, culturally related activities, and cooperative style interactions)
21. What do you believe is the most important thing educators can do to help close the academic achievement gap for African American males?
22. What other information do you feel should be included in this interview?