

TOWSON UNIVERSITY  
COLLEGE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

BEYOND THE RACIAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP: CREATING CONDITIONS FOR  
AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT SUCCESS

By

Pamela Williams Morgan

A dissertation presented to the faculty of

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In partial fulfillment

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**DISSERTATION APPROVAL PAGE**

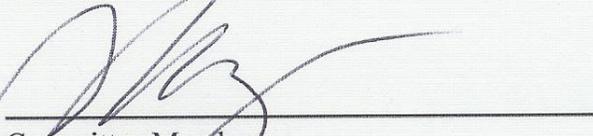
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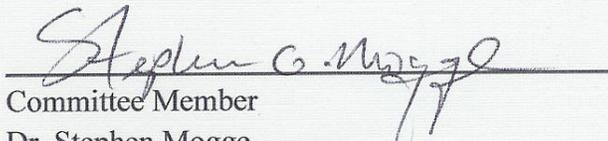
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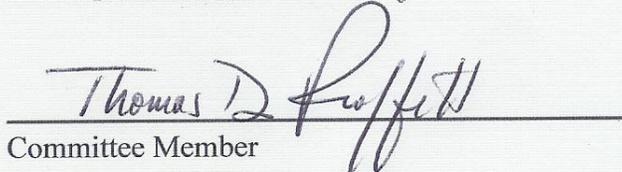
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Now, “the best is yet to come!”

## ABSTRACT

### BEYOND THE RACIAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP: CREATING CONDITIONS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENT SUCCESS

Pamela Williams Morgan

Moving beyond the racial achievement gap to determine conditions that promote African American student success requires exploring the history of African American education and what works for successful African American learners. The study uses Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a positive approach and research methodology for unlocking the phenomenon of student success for African American learners—past, present, and future—in a public education system. It employs technology as a data collection and analysis tool, but also as a tutor and tutee.

The study organization is a single gender, selective enrollment, urban public high school. Two groups of respondents are the subjects of this study. The first group consists of African American alumnae of the school who attended it during the post-*Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* era and self-identify as being successful academically and professionally. The second group is that of current African American students who were from among the school's juniors and seniors. Findings inform effective instructional practices as well as characteristics of an environment conducive to teaching and learning. Additionally, the study yields recommendations for the school's future and implications for public education.

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*This dissertation is dedicated to Justin Gabriel Morgan, my son, and to Cameron O'Neal Morgan, his son and my grandson—to Justin for the lessons he has taught me and to Cameron for the lessons I hope he never has to learn.*

## Chapter One – Introduction

### “Shifting of Views”

“The more things change, the more they remain the same.”

- Alphonse Karr (1808–1890)  
French journalist, novelist  
Les Guêpes (Paris, January 31, 1849)

#### *Problem Statement*

African Americans have been told constantly that education is a viable means to success. It is what my parents told me in words and deeds. It is what I have tried to instill in my children and students—at least until 1989 when I encountered Reginald, a bright African American middle school student who was repeating seventh grade. He managed to earn an eighty on a five-item publisher’s multiple choice quiz for a short story that he confessed he never even read, while students who read the text and engaged with me in a discussion of it failed the quiz. When I asked him how he did it, he grasped for the word *logic* as he explained that the first question was so loaded that if he guessed that one correctly, he could use that information to answer the remaining four items. His strategy worked for three of the remaining items, netting him the 80% passing grade. Amazed by his reply, I told him that someone with his ability should not be wasting it.

His “Yeah, but I make more money in a week than you make in a month” retort challenged me to examine the power and role of education in the lives of people who feel disenfranchised by our society. The truth that resonated in Reginald’s comment set me on a path of focusing on the meaningful use of knowledge in my teaching practice—the fourth dimension of *The Dimensions of Learning* (Marzano & Pickering, 1997). The challenge for me was determining what that focus looked like in practice.

What do you do when quality education remains exclusive and elusive? What do you do when the educational system in which you have been placed deals with you as though you are uneducable? What do you do when role models of alternative means to success bombard you because they gave up on formal education but top the annual Forbes list of the world's richest people, or for learners such as Reginald, these role models make the FBI's most wanted list instead?

Who makes certain that our children maintain their faith in an educational system that historically *miseducates*, under-educates, or outright refuses to educate them? Now imagine how our children feel when some of the people who *miseducate* them look like them (Woodson, 1933/1998). How do we come to grips with the reality that these teachers were doing the best that they knew how to do? As Dr. Maya Angelou is credited with saying regarding such behavior, "You did then what you knew how to do, and when you knew better, you did better" (Winfrey, 2004).

From his own educational challenges and successes, Betances recommends that some caring adult must get parental on the Reginalds of the world, for "In a society such as ours, we never know from whom the next innovative idea will come; therefore, we do not have a child to waste" (P.W. Morgan, personal communication, July, 1992).

Trent (1990) maintains that the teacher must hold a vision for her students until the students are able to hold a vision for themselves. While demonstrating the highest level of professionalism, the teacher must be committed to learning about, understanding, and getting to know her students so that her expectations of them are consistent with "the person" each student has the infinite capacity to become.

By conducting historical research, Altenbaugh and Underwood (1990) revealed that Black teachers during the Normal School era were only licensed at a first grade level but often found themselves teaching in one-room schoolhouses delivering instruction to every child regardless of grade level. Student-teacher ratios could be as high as 93:1. Publicly funded school systems controlled by people who refused to educate Black learners prompted the situation, thus setting up inequitable educational opportunities based on race alone. Separate but equal was supposed to be the policy of that day, but *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* disclosed that the systems and facilities were separate but “inherently unequal,” as described by Chief Justice Earl Warren.

Blacks took it upon themselves to pursue liberal arts degrees rather than education degrees because of the inherent preparation deficit. They often did not complete the degree because they stayed long enough to learn enough to educate Black children at a higher quality than a normal school education prepared them to do (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990). This practice was consistent with DuBois’s concept of the “Talented Tenth” that advocated for individuals in the Black community obtaining a quality education and then using that education for the betterment of the community. However, DuBois encouraged the completion of the baccalaureate degree (1903/2005).

The promise of *Brown v. Board of Education, 1954* was the dismantling of this systemic inequity in educational opportunities for African American learners. The remedy translated into forced integration of the nation’s public schools “with all deliberate speed” (*Brown, 1954*). *Brown II (1955)* yielded a decision “in which the court laid out principles for the manner and timing of compliance with the order for the

elimination of segregated schools” (Floden 2004, p. 1). The final analysis has been that the pace was deliberately slow (Ogletree, 2004).

### *Personal Perspective*

In the era after the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*, great efforts were made to circumvent the impact of the decision by any means possible. This circumvention supported an attitude that was incubated by the Justices’ stipulation that local jurisdictions determine how the Supreme Court order be implemented. In addition to enacting state laws to ensure continued discrimination and segregation, some who despised the verdict went as far as shutting down their schools/school systems rather than have their children educated in the same classrooms with children of African descent (Badger, 1999). Ironically, the Christian school movement was one offspring of the circumvention behavior; some of these schools sprung up in under-utilized public school buildings (Carper & Layman, 1997). Consequently, nothing changed for many African American children in the days and years immediately following the *Brown* decision, myself included.

I entered Kindergarten in September 1954 at the age of four because I would turn five by December 31, 1954—on December 25, 1954 to be exact. My parents enrolled me in Alexander Hamilton Elementary School #145, my neighborhood school, the same one I would have been enrolled in had there been no *Brown* decision rendered on May 17 of that year. In fact, I attended the same school that my older sister already was attending before the decision, and when my overcrowded elementary school could no longer accommodate children in grades 5 and 6, we were bused to schools that could accommodate us but not in an integrated setting. We were transferred to one of two

schools also in the Black community but not within walking distance of our homes. I was assigned to Samuel Coleridge Taylor Elementary School #122 from which my older sister had just “graduated” a year earlier.

In terms of school choice or school assignment, nothing changed for me until high school when I decided that I wanted to attend the school that is the subject of this study. My mother tried to dissuade me from making that choice, stressing the importance of learning from teachers who cared about me. Choosing her option meant I would follow what had transformed into a tradition for many Black families in Baltimore City. This tradition began as a vestige of *de jure* segregation—Black, or more appropriately for that time, “Negro” children who lived in West Baltimore had to attend Frederick Douglass High School and those who live in East Baltimore had to attend Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. Through a tuition scholarship program, these schools also became the alma maters of many Negro children from neighboring Baltimore County. They were denied education in that system beyond grade 6 (White, 2004) until 1939 when three (3) colored high schools were built, one in Catonsville – Benjamin Banneker High, the other in Sparrows Point – George F. Bragg High, and the last in Towson – George Washington Carver High (Orser, 1999).

Despite these blatant practices of discrimination, these segregated colored high schools produced highly successful graduates, with one of its most notable alumni being Chief Justice Thurgood Marshall. As a young attorney in the Legal Defense Fund of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Marshall’s legal prowess precipitated the *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* landmark decision as well as the integration of University of Maryland Law School (*Pearson v. Murray, 1936*).

The lawsuit that Marshall filed against Baltimore County’s Board of Education (*Williams v. Zimmerman, 1937*) provoked the Board to establish the aforementioned colored high schools even though the school system won the case in 1937 and was only obligated to expand the tuition program for colored children to attend high school in Baltimore City.

Chief Justice Marshall’s phenomenal academic achievements and professional accomplishments prompt the question of “how?” How is it that such African Americans were able to achieve success under less than ideal conditions for learning—conditions that Chief Justice Warren deemed “separate and inherently unequal” (*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, 1954*)—conditions that have perpetuated the contemporary racial achievement gap in education.

#### *Purpose Statement*

The purpose of this study was to examine what works for academically successful African American learners—past, present, and future—in a public education system. While this study focused on an all-girls school, the study was designed deliberately to examine issues of race, and **not the intersection of race and gender**.

#### *Research Questions*

Because the focus of this research study moved beyond the racial achievement gap to that of examining African American student success, the primary research question that guided this study was what conditions tend to facilitate the academic success of African American learners? The secondary research questions prompted by the primary question were (a) what has been the history of African American education, especially in the public education arena, and (b) what beliefs have helped to shape approaches to African American student success?

### *Significance of Study*

Using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as my methodology, I pursued a positive approach to unlocking the phenomenon of African American resilience and success in a social system designed to denigrate a race of people who were forced to relocate from their homeland only to provide free labor to an emerging society (Fraser, 1994). How could I view an often-demoralizing past with a spirit of appreciation and through a positive lens? What a challenge! What an oxymoron!

Upon exploring that history and coming to grips with this paradigm shift, I envisioned producing a study that can fill the void created in African American education. This void is the missed step of going directly from the legally marginalized teaching of African American children to legally imposed teaching of African American children compromised by inadequate preparation of all educators. Consequently, African American children were *miseducated* in the Reconstruction era and continued to be *miseducated* during the post-*Brown* era. It is no wonder that a racial achievement gap persists as evidenced in contemporary education accounts (Bracey, 2007; Davis, 2007; Davis & Bowie, 2007).

Academe never properly prepared teachers effectively to teach African American children in integrated schools, but forged passionately into multicultural education. The Academy's teacher preparation programs debated the worth of focusing attention on individual marginalized groups of children. Rather, the winning argument was to address all marginalized persons under the broad umbrella of *diversity*. However, by presenting parallel rather than integrated histories, the opportunity to highlight our humaneness and interdependency was missed (Larson & Ovando, 2001).

Locally, we mandated that teachers earn three (3) credits by successfully completing the “Education That Is Multicultural” course as a requirement for recertification. Academic accreditation teams placed multicultural education and diversity on their checklists for successful teacher preparation. However, the achievement gap continued to grow for African American children at all socioeconomic and political levels.

The findings from this study inform effective instruction and teaching practice as educators seek to adhere to the demands of *No Child Left Behind (2001)*. Its pending reauthorization focuses on comprehensive professional development for educators accompanied by the potential for the inequitable distribution of highly qualified teachers to influence adversely a state’s federal funding for education.

#### *Delimitations*

To fulfill the purposes of this study within the anticipated time of study (2-3 months), existing data were analyzed, i.e., primary source documents and school performance statistics. The school that was the focus of this study (or the study organization) was a single gender public high school to which students must apply, meet defined criteria, and be accepted in order to enroll in programs there. Subjects surveyed during this study were African American alumnae of the school, who were students in the school in the post-*Brown* era and self-identify as being successful academically and professionally. Current African American students who were juniors and seniors enrolled in the Teacher Academy of Maryland program of study in the school were surveyed also.

The methodology for this study, Appreciative Inquiry, was chosen because it fostered a focus on possible solutions rather problems. AI also afforded the researcher

the space to address the “so what” and “now what” questions by establishing a rationale for moving beyond a focus on the racial achievement to assume a vantage point of what is working, thus the focus on African American student success.

### *Assumptions*

This study encompasses the following assumptions:

1. There is a racial gap in the academic achievement of American African and White students that exists regardless of socioeconomic status.
2. Race remains a challenging, often divisive and explosive, topic of discussion in American society.
3. Teachers of all races can be prepared to reach, teach and otherwise interact effectively with African American learners.
4. The racial achievement gap for African American learners can be addressed effectively through sustained professional development.
5. If *No Child Left Behind* ever lives up to its name, we will all have a vested interest in the academic success of African American learners and in “challenging the soft bigotry of low expectations” (Bush, 2007).
6. The conditions for learning that are revealed through this research study, as features of African American student success should be in place for all learners.
7. The Academy should assume greater responsibility for addressing the racial achievement gap in the education of African American learners.
8. *Brown I and II* hold implications for the Academy and how it prepares teachers.

### *Definition of Terms*

For the purposes of this study, the following terms and definitions are used:

1. Racial achievement gap – the disparity in the academic performance of American African and White students that exists across socioeconomic levels
2. Academy – institutions of higher education (IHE); “the places where teachers are taught” (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990)
3. Professional development – learning experiences, both formal and informal, that enhance an individual’s capacity to perform effectively in his/her career path
4. African American – people of African descent whose ancestors were held in the American system of slavery; sometimes used interchangeably with “Black” to denote all persons of African descent but not necessarily indigenous to the United States
5. race – “a concept that was developed by physical anthropologists to describe the physical characteristics of people in the world more than a century ago—a practice that has now been discredited; racial groups include many ethnic groups; racial identification has been used by policymakers and much of the population to classify groups of people as inferior or superior to other racial groups; considered by some theorists to be equivalent to caste in other countries [since it is] imposed at birth on a group of people to justify inequitable social distribution of power and privilege” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002, p. 85)

6. ethnicity – an individual’s ancestral country/countries of origin which can transcend race
7. racism – “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002, p. 92)
8. the role of power in racism – “[in order for racism to have its intended impact] the dominant group must have power [real or perceived] over the oppressed group; the power has been used to prevent people of color from securing the prestige, power and privilege held by Whites” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002, p. 93)
9. discrimination – “arbitrary denial of the privilege and rewards of society to members of a group” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002, p. 92)
10. individual discrimination – “attributed to or influenced by prejudice; occurs for at least two reasons: (a) either the person has strong prejudicial or bigoted feelings about the [target or oppressed] group or (b) the person believes that societal pressures demand that he/she discriminate even though he/she may not be prejudiced” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002, p. 92)
11. institutional discrimination – “the effects of inequalities that have been integrated into the system-wide operation of a society” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002, p. 92)
12. prejudice –literally, to judge before weighing all the facts or without considering all available information; “a set of negative attitudes about a group of people; manifests itself in feelings of anger, fear, hatred, and distrust; not limited to one ethnic or racial group; does not always directly

hurt members of a group but can be easily translated into behavior that does harm them” (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002, p. 91)

13. stereotype – an unvarying form or pattern; specifically, a fixed or conventional notion or conception, as of a person, group, idea, etc., held by a number of people, and allowing for no individuality, critical judgment, etc. (Agnes, 1999)
14. success – the condition of realizing one’s personal, academic, and professional goals and expectations
15. respect – action grounded in an attitude of honoring an individual for the person he/she is and has the capacity to become
16. phenomenon – a natural occurrence that defies societal norms and/or expectations—its use in this text in no way suggests use of phenomenology as the research methodology for the study herein
17. condition – prerequisite attributes or characteristics that foster a desired outcome
18. achievement gap – the disparity in the academic performance of students from the dominant culture and those from minority cultures
19. gap – the space between success and utter failure in academic achievement that implies hope and the potential for improvement
20. AI – Appreciative Inquiry is the methodology used in this study and is a cycled process consisting of four stages—Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Cooperrider, 1990).

21. Study organization – the institution that is the focus of the research study, which in this study was a high school
22. Nvivo8 – the qualitative data analysis software used to analyze data collected in this study; coding data required use of a node or theme that could be a free node—a theme that is unrelated to other themes, a tree node—a theme that is related to other themes either as a parent node or primary theme or a child node or a sub-theme

### *Organization of the Remaining Chapters*

Conveying a metaphor of *change* achieved through a posture of *respect*, this dissertation consists of five chapters, a list of references, and a set of appendixes. Chapter 2, “Respecting the Pupil,” is the review of the literature that offers historical, theoretical, contemporary, economic, and methodological perspectives and frameworks regarding the racial achievement gap in public education and setting the stage for studying African American student success. Chapter 3, “The Oxymoron,” is a discussion of the research methodology used to conduct the study. This methodology, known as Appreciative Inquiry, has its origins in the business sector and is used to assess organizational effectiveness by analyzing stakeholders’ perceptions of what is working. On the surface, this methodology seems incongruent with examining the racial achievement gap, thus the reference to an oxymoron. Chapter 4, “Conditions for Learning,” and Chapter 5, “Lessons Learned,” report the findings and conclusions for this study, respectively.

### *Chapter Summary*

In the education of African American learners, we have progressed through multiple phases, which tended to be dictated by legal decree. During one phase, it was completely lawful not to educate African American learners; in fact, it was illegal in some geographic locations for Africans in America to be taught to read and write. At another phase, African Americans were educated only through junior high school or only in designated high schools but always under separate and “inherently unequal” conditions. In 1954, legal precedent forced the integration of our public schools, “with all deliberate speed,” with the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*. By 2001, persistent inequities prompted the enactment of *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB).

We have witnessed changes over time when legally African American teachers could be certified to teach up to the first grade but could assume a teaching assignment in a one-room schoolhouse with instructional responsibility that encompassed the full academic range of students attending the school. Sometimes these dedicated teachers, in a one-room school, could endure a student-teacher ratio of as high as 93:1.

We have lived through a time when aspiring teachers in the African American community opted to bypass the segregated normal school to obtain an “Ivy League” or liberal arts education. Often these individuals left Academe without a baccalaureate degree but with sufficient mastery of high caliber content that better prepared them to impart that knowledge to their students. Based upon standardized test data, our current African American learners, regardless of socioeconomic status, tend to be in the lowest performing racial group in our schools, despite the promise of *Brown*. Could the racial

achievement gap be the cumulative effect of institutional racism and decades of *miseducating* a people?

With this backdrop in mind, I examined what works for successful African American learners in public education despite the persistent racial achievement gap. The findings have the potential to inform effective instruction and teaching practice as educators seek to adhere to the demands of *No Child Left Behind (2001)*. The hope was to define an atmosphere of collaboration, rather than one of compromise, that tends to be promoted in public education. To realize this collaborative atmosphere means that not only will every learner be taught according to legal definition, but also that every child will matter in our vision of the future.

## Chapter Two – Literature Review

### “Respecting the Pupil”

#### Introduction

*“The secret of education is respecting the pupil.”*  
- Ralph Waldo Emerson

Examining the conditions that promote African American student success requires not only exploring what works for successful African American learners in public schools but also the history of African American education. The urgency to find the answers—the secrets—for which dedicated educators yearn, looms. Surely, there is a mystery to unravel in the quest to make the difference in academic success for millions of African American learners, especially those awkwardly, perhaps even hopelessly, situated in the infamous racial achievement gap.

As articulated in the quote above, Emerson’s assessment of the secret of education seems quite simplistic on the surface but quite true upon further analysis. The notion that respect is critical to student performance may be so simplistic that its truth eludes even well intentioned educators, particularly when it comes to African American students and their achievement. While perhaps not qualifying as the proverbial silver bullet, respect is essential in any relationship, most significantly in the teacher-student relationship and in the teaching-learning process.

Grounded in the theoretical foundation of social constructionism, Vygotsky has taught us that learning is a social act driven by effective relationships (Rieber, 1997). Vygotsky’s belief and Emerson’s secret, while enduring truths, take on new meaning when the construct of race is introduced. As Singleton explains during an interview for the National Staff Development Council,

There's only one rule that's necessary in schools, and that's the rule of respect. Respect is at the heart of successful social relationships. But it's important to understand how respect may look and feel different across racial borders. To effectively show me respect, you must understand what my experience is all about (Sparks, 2002, ¶ 19).

To complicate matters further, Hilliard (1995) asserts that it is the responsibility of families, not schools, to acculturate their children, and that there are times when the community must serve in a parental capacity. One of the most compelling texts that supports Hilliard's position is a series of articles about the challenges, setbacks, and triumphs of two high school students (Bowie, 2005). In this series, Bowie depicts these young men's lived experiences as they manage to graduate from a local urban high school without the direct involvement of their parents, but with support and mentoring from caring educators, their basketball coach, neighbors, and, most importantly, each other.

The relative success that these students achieved motivated me to ponder what happens with African American youth who have limited—if any—familial support, who are not aware that “success runs in [their] race,” as Fraser (1994) declares? Who acculturates them? If school is the least common denominator or the last institution in American society to which everyone must go, why not make the public school more adept at assuming this responsibility? Given the curricular demands placed upon today's public schools and the status of African American student achievement in these schools, is it even realistic to think that schools can address both the academic and cultural needs of all learners effectively and respectfully?

The question of realism is prompted by the persistent gap in Black<sup>1</sup> and White student performance which has been attributed to numerous factors, including incompatible home and school environments, role models, teacher attitudes, student attitudes, curriculum, teaching strategies, and poor performing schools (Carter, 2005; Kirsanow, 2004). The least publicly addressed factors tend to be those associated with the effects of institutional racism, school desegregation, and low teacher expectations (Hendrie, 2004). These factors constitute the stereotype threat that negatively impacts African American student performance even in higher education arenas (Steele, 2004). In fact, the data show that, “Almost 40 years after the Civil Rights Act, African American students, on average, record the poorest academic performance of any racial or ethnic group in the United States, at all ages, in all subjects, and regardless of class level” (McWhorter, 2000, p. 72).

### Literature Review

In an attempt to address these issues, this literature review examines scholarly writing that can inform the manner in which a study can be conducted that examines African American student success for students who have been and are being educated effectively in public schools. How is it that some African American students can meet with success while others fail? What conditions for learning tend to be in place to facilitate academic success for African American learners?

This review offers historical, theoretical, economic, methodological, and technological perspectives and contemporary educational practices that shape the rationale for studying African American student success within the context of the racial

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “African American” and “Black” are used interchangeable throughout this paper to denote non-White individuals of African descent living in the United States.

achievement gap in public education. The review holds implications for addressing the delivery of quality education to everybody's children in a manner that is respectful of the pupil.

### *Historical Perspective*

Historically, African Americans have received mixed messages regarding the value of and their eligibility to quality education. African American learners were educated in schools established by free Blacks, former slaves, Black churches and organizations, but also by a variety of Whites—the first of these institutions dates back to the seventeenth century. Koslow (1999a) documents the first known school for Blacks as having been established in Charleston, South Carolina by a White cleric, Samuel Thomas, in 1695. Koslow credits Elias Neau, a French immigrant, with opening a school for Blacks in New York City in 1704, yet, back in South Carolina, legislation was enacted that made teaching slaves to write illegal. Philadelphia established schools for Blacks as early as 1758 and later by Quakers in Philadelphia in 1770.

In 1787, the New York Manumission Society established the African Free School (AFS) and advocated for the emancipation of enslaved Africans. Among the Society's founders was Alexander Hamilton [for whom my first elementary was named]. Notable AFS graduates include Ira Aldridge who is considered to be the greatest Black actors of the nineteenth century and for whom the theatre at Morgan State University is named (New York Manumission Society web site: <http://www.nyhistory.org/web/afs/history>). Free Blacks organized a school in Massachusetts in 1789; Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, founded schools in 1804 in Philadelphia, which is also where they founded the

African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.); and New York City opened its first schools for Blacks in 1806 (Koslow, 1999a).

Establishing schools for and by African Americans represents significant historical accomplishments, especially considering that the examples cited above predate the *Emancipation Proclamation*. However, a system of privilege and oppression, grounded in race and racism, has influenced educational practice since the inception of American public education (Hilliard, 1995). This system has tended to impact adversely the academic achievement of African American learners, especially in, but not limited to, the South where the dominant culture blatantly refused to educate African American children (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1990; Tatum, 2007). Thus, the education of numerous African American learners tended to be relegated to the philanthropic outreach of well-meaning Whites, primarily religious organizations preoccupied with socializing these learners into their proper place in an unofficial caste system perpetuated by race and racism (Woodson, 1933/1998).

On the other hand, a review of case histories of *de jure* segregated African American schools and communities reveals African American children in segregated schools in the South received high quality education, despite the inequitable distribution of resources from 1935-1969. In this review, Walker (2000) cites the refusal of Southern Whites to educate African Americans and neglect from White school boards as a source of autonomy for principals of segregated Black schools. Such autonomy prompted informal partnerships between educators and Black parents to supply resources (e.g., community-owned buildings to house the schools, pianos, books, and science and playground equipment) for their children and their schools that the “system” refused to

provide solely on the basis of skin color or race. Walker found that the school was a valuable community asset and often a model of educational excellence due to the high standards and expectations that Black teachers held for their Black students, in the face of racial isolation and discrimination.

It is important to note that race is a concept, an artificial construct, created by physical anthropologists over a century ago to classify people based upon common physical characteristics (Gollnick & Chinn, 2002). Sometimes the terms *race* and *ethnicity* are used interchangeably in the literature, but *ethnicity* also is used at times to encompass *race*, especially in psychology due to the multidimensional nature of the terms (Phinney, 1996). Gollnick and Chinn distinguish the terms by associating ethnicity more closely with nationality, asserting that people can be of different races but of the same ethnicity.

While racial pride is admirable, extremes in the demonstration of racial pride accompanied by feelings of superiority motivated by race tend to lead to racism. By definition, racism is

...the systematic mistreatment of certain groups of people (often referred to as people of color) on the basis of skin color or other physical characteristics. This mistreatment is carried out by societal institutions, or by people who have been conditioned by society to act, consciously or unconsciously, in harmful ways toward people of color (Weissglass, 2001, p. 72).

When this mistreatment is supported by a legislative infrastructure, the impact becomes even more far-reaching, and the offending behavior interpreted as the norm.

Poignant examples of this systematic mistreatment being carried out by societal institutions can be found in legislation such as the *Slavery Law of 1665*, which remained in effect until 1968. The *Maryland Doctrine of Exclusion (1638)* stated that, “[B]lacks must be excluded from the benefits afforded [W]hites and that [B]lacks must remain noncompetitive with [W]hites [in all areas of performance] except for sports and entertainment” (Smiley, 2005, ¶ 3). Such laws made excelling academically illegal for Blacks in America, thus establishing a possible precedent for the contemporary “culture of disengagement” that Fordham & Ogbu (1986) found demonstrated by a segment of African American youth who viewed excelling academically as synonymous with acting White.

In addition to the 17<sup>th</sup> century legislation cited above, two pieces of legislation have had a tremendous impact on public education in this country. The legacy of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* and the promise of *No Child Left Behind (2001)* point to the reality of race as a constant issue in the delivery of quality education to America’s children (Hendrie, 2004). The phenomenon yet to be explored is how schools and school systems address the needs of the African American learner now that *NCLB* requires that data be disaggregated racially and stipulates that no school or school system can be a high performing entity as long as any sub-group within the student population is underachieving (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Since a persistent gap is evident in the academic performance of White and African American students, there is renewed interest in investigating ways to enhance student performance for all students, especially for the African American learner. This renewed interest can fuel the next steps for *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*.

### *Confronting History*

To address this renewed interest and confront the history that preceded it, Townsend (2002) advances the idea of teacher certification in culturally responsive pedagogy. She contends that a teacher preparation program leading to this certification must include a practicum in a culturally diverse setting under the guidance of a mentor teacher who has demonstrated expertise and effectiveness with culturally diverse students. Every effort to seek out culturally diverse field experiences in which to engage teacher candidates is necessary despite what may appear to be insurmountable challenges. The absence of such preparation perpetuates “inattention to cultural diversity and creation of a culture of sameness” (Knight, Dixon, Norton, & Bentley, 2004, p. 115).

In other words, teachers and students will continue to demonstrate discomfort with learning environments in which participants reflect different cultures unless they are afforded ample opportunities to practice there. Orfield & Eaton (2003) go a step further by discussing policy implications for the lack of culturally diverse settings by stating, “If we as a nation are content to let segregation rates rise, then we have a moral duty to permit affirmative action to play a double role as bridge and equalizer in a divided, unequal society” (p. 59).

*Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* tends to be the defining milestone in the history of African American education. This landmark school desegregation legislation changed the look of public education in this country with its focus on eliminating “separate but equal” as a standard for access to quality education for all learners. “Separate but equal” was established in the *Plessy v. Ferguson (1896)* decision,

and while it was rendered to cover public accommodations, it was soon applied to public education as well (Ogletree, 2004).

Undeniably, African Americans have made significant educational accomplishments since this decision (Kirsanow, 2004). However, fifty plus years later, the substantive business of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)*—improved collective academic achievement for African American learners—remains unfinished mainly because the Court failed to offer a definitive implementation plan (Noguera, 2006; Noguera & Cohen, 2004).

Interest in advancing the cause of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* in a contemporary context provides the rationale for examining African American student success and the racial achievement gap in this era of *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)*. *Brown* addressed physically placing students of diverse races in the same schools, and eventually, in the same classrooms, but merely addressing physicality without addressing the other functions of an educational system of privilege and oppression has proven to be inadequate (Hilliard, 1995). According to Hilliard, these functions are interrelated and address “ideology, political control, uses of history and culture, uses of group identity, uses of financial and human resources, and physical segregation” (p. 145).

The *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)* challenges schools and school systems nationally to address the needs of the African American learner by requiring that data be disaggregated by race, among other variables. By addressing the historic achievement gap that exists between White students and African American students, *NCLB* is provoking renewed interest in investigating ways to enhance the academic

performance of all students. In particular, is a renewed interest in the African American learner, who 50 years ago was the focus of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* [although this student was referred to then as “Negro.”] Some scholars have suggested that without *NCLB* more than likely race would not enter the current national discourse on public education and school reform (Singleton & Linton, 2006). In fact, *No Child Left Behind (2001)* is described as continuing “the legacy of the *Brown v. Board* decision by creating an education system that is more inclusive, responsive, and fair” (Paige, 2004, p. 3).

Within the legacy of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* is the belief that equity in access to quality education in this country has been tainted by racial and racist attitudes and actions (Wells, Holme, Revilla, & Atanda, 2005). Unfortunately, during the 50 years since this landmark decision, statistics indicate that there has been a relatively unnoticed resegregation of American public schools (Orfield, Frankenberg, & Lee, 2002/2003; Tatum, 2007).

While *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954)* focused on ending segregated P-12 public schools, a dual system of higher education operated locally and nationally based solely on race. In fact, the ground work for *Brown* was laid by the legal team beginning to dismantle the dual system of Traditionally White Institutions (TWIs) and Historically Black Institutions (HBIs, also referred to as HBCUs—Historically Black Colleges and Universities). As one of ten states operating a segregated postsecondary education system, Maryland was challenged to address its dual system by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in 1969 (Maryland Higher Education Commission [MHEC], 2006).

In the state of Maryland, *Pearson v. Murray (1936)* forced the integration of the University of Maryland Law School. The lawyers for the case, one of whom was Thurgood Marshall who later became the first African American Supreme Court Justice, challenged Maryland's practice of offering Black students scholarships to out-of-state institutions of higher education—a practice of which Marshall himself was a victim—a practice that was in place for over 40 years (Bowler, 2004). This decision was upheld later in *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada (1938)*, which held that states were required to provide equal facilities for Blacks in higher education regardless of cost and within the boundaries of a given state. Thus, the decision rendered in the Maryland case earned national application (Higginbotham & Anderson, 1999; Jamar, 2004).

Despite these developments, the state of Maryland still found itself challenged to address its dual system (MHEC, 2006). According to Altenbaugh and Underwood (1990), the dual public education system in higher education emerged in the 1800s during the Normal School movement with the first recorded normal school opening in Concord, Vermont in 1823. These schools tended to focus primarily on preparing elementary school teachers (Learned & Bagley, 1920/1965; Ogren, 2003; Sedlak, 2008). Normal schools tended to be founded by non-educators, calling into question the educational framework for the normal school, in general (Altenbaugh & Underwood), but those servicing African American students tended to be even more disadvantaged (Fleming, 1962).

Since normal schools set out to prepare teachers to teach in the local public school system, the inherent inequities of segregated American public schools guided curriculum development, instructional delivery, and funding levels at normal schools that prepared

African Americans teachers (Fleming, 1962; Kujovich, 1994). Driving these inequities was the policy of separate but equal that reflected the general presumption on the part of the majority culture that African Americans were naturally inferior to Whites; therefore, providing an academic or intellectual education for African Americans was a waste of resources (Kujovich).

While normal schools prided themselves in meeting their students' needs, teacher candidates at TWIs were covering classical literature, social sciences, natural sciences, and higher-level mathematics (Ogren, 2003). However, teacher candidates at HBCUs tended not to progress beyond covering the basic skills that they lacked as a result of their inadequate public schooling. The hidden curriculum also intended to assure that Black students were provided an industrial or vocational education that conditioned them for their prescribed role of performing manual labor for American society (Jackson, 1940; Kujovich, 1994). This assigned purpose of Black education fueled the infamous, historic DuBois-Washington debates (DuBois, 1935; Jordan, 1992) and made teacher education the only professional program of study in most HBCUs for years to come (Caliver, 1933). Ironically, this program placement led to a view of teacher education as a branch of vocational education in the larger society (Learned et al., 2008).

The OCR challenge resulted in Maryland eventually drafting a desegregation plan that promised increased access to quality higher education for African Americans and protection from duplication of mission and programs that would disadvantage HBI or HBCU programs. Data from examining implementation of the plan show increases in the number of African Americans earning postsecondary education degrees while suggesting a slight decrease among other students. The data also show that both TWIs and HBIs

have become victims of their success because enrollment has had to be capped based upon the number spaces available compared with the number of admissions requests. However, both categories of institutions have fallen short in their goal of attracting more other-race students to their programs and campuses (MHEC, 2006). In their letter to the OCR that appears as an attachment to the MHEC report, MHEC officials conclude:

The State of Maryland's commitment to monitor, examine, and address issues of access, enrollment, retention, and graduation of African Americans at the State's institutions of higher education and the fiscal status of the HBIs will not cease with the expiration of the Partnership (p. 11).

While the Partnership Agreement expired in 2005, the state remains vigilant in its efforts maintain the accomplishments realized under this agreement as it continues to address the unresolved issues revealed in the report. Continuing these efforts is in the best interest of higher education statewide since TWIs and HBIs can become supportive of each other in the process. HBCUs/HBIs have lessons to teach other colleges and universities regarding strategies for attracting, retaining, and graduating African American students (Fischer, 2007; Wagener & Nettles, 1998).

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

In examining the racial achievement gap and African American student success, several theoretical perspectives become relevant. African American student performance becomes more comprehensible when studied in the context of the acting White theory, teacher perception theory, racial identity development theory, and critical race theory.

As stated earlier, the acting White theory emerged from the research of Fordham and Ogbu (1986) in a study of high school students in Washington, DC. Since then, this

theory has been considered an oversimplification of the achievement disparity and is believed to contribute to racial stereotyping (Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani, 2001). In examining the validity of the acting White theory, Spencer et al. found that contemporary African American youth have such a superficial cultural identity that any use of the acting White theory by them tends to be a defense mechanism for maintaining their self-esteem, especially in response to their poor academic performance. In fact, their findings show that the sample of African American youth in their study (N=562) displayed “a clear value for school and high academic performance, with students expressing disappointment over poor academic performance and other events, such as flunking a course or being suspended” (p. 28).

Ferguson (2007) revisits “acting White” as an accusation but also as a matter of self-esteem. He concludes that personal style rather than grade point average (GPA) was a more accurate predictor of whether a Black student would be accused of acting White. Ferguson cites use of formal language in an informal setting as an example of personal style that would yield this accusation.

Lewis and Kim (2008) found that the “acting White” theory tends to be over-exaggerated. In their study of elementary school students, these researchers found that the African American students in their study demonstrated a desire to learn and resilience that transcended a school culture of low expectations. Students as young as those in second grade were able to distinguish good teaching from poor teaching as they clearly articulated characteristics of effective teaching practices and attitudes during interviews and observations. Considering these more recent positions on the “Acting White” theory, how then do race and racism factor into the disparity in student performance?

McWhorter (2000) attempts to explain the disparity by examining the impact of “the victimologist mindset that prevails among [B]lack Americans” (p.72). In doing so, he asserts that the achievement gap is a factor of Black anti-intellectualism that is the result of centuries of slavery and segregation that denied Blacks access to education, crosses socioeconomic levels for Blacks, and now perpetuates the attitude that anything White is inherently bad, including academic achievement. However, McWhorter concludes that racism is not the major cause of the achievement gap but rather that this academic disparity exists because of the tendency for Blacks to underestimate their own capacity to be successful academically, professionally, and economically. Drawing upon his personal and professional experiences, McWhorter supports abandoning the use of affirmative action in higher education admissions practices. Instead, he advocates a “race-blind policy” for higher education settings to make African Americans accountable to the same standards of excellence as those held for White students.

In stark contrast to McWhorter’s position, Dee (2005) found that teacher perception of student performance is affected by the dynamics of student-teacher race, ethnicity, and gender. He notes that the effects of race and ethnicity tend to be greater for students of lower socioeconomic status and for those being educated in the South. By analyzing data from the National Education Longitudinal Study<sup>2</sup> of 1988 (NELS: 88), Dee documented the tendency for students to be rated negatively (disruptive, inattentive, rarely completing homework) by their teachers if the students were of low socioeconomic status. The odds of a teacher having a negative view of these students were 35-57%

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<sup>2</sup> The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) is a large scale study of teachers’ perceptions of their eighth grade students’ performance and behavior in mathematics, science, reading, and social studies. The sample consisted of 21,324 paired observations across four geographic regions—Northeast, North-Central, South, and West.

higher than for students of high social economic status when the teacher was of a race or ethnicity different from that of the students being rated. When data were disaggregated by region, teachers in the south, who were of races or ethnicities that differed from that of the students they were rating, were 89% more likely to rate them as disruptive and 61% more likely to rate them as inattentive. As an implication of his findings, Dee found that the typical reaction is to recruit demographically similar teachers but that a more appropriate response would be to adopt policies that enhance the effectiveness of all teachers. Doing so, contends Dee, would have a positive impact on closing the persistent achievement gap.

In an earlier study, Dee (2004) examines the relationship between “exposure to own-race teachers and subsequent levels of student achievement” (p. 2). The results of this study of student-teacher achievement ratio data, employing randomized pairings of teachers and students, revealed statistically significant gains in achievement for students—both Black and White—who were taught by teachers of the same race. Dee offers several cautions regarding his findings, including the lack of insight into the teaching practice of own-race teachers.

From their study on teacher perceptions and reactions, Neal, McCray, Webb-Johnson, and Bridgest (2003) acknowledge the complex nature of attempting to analyze teacher perception of students in relationship to the students’ ethnicity. In examining the impact of ethnicity on teachers’ perceptions of students’ achievement, aggression, and need for special education services, these researchers concluded that justification exists for “culturally responsive inquiry and pedagogy to reverse the present trends toward school and social skill failure” (p. 56).

The researchers arrived at this conclusion by engaging 136 middle school teachers in watching one of four videotapes of an African American and an European American eighth grader walking either using a standard motion or strolling, with controls for attire and physical size. Researchers did not inform teachers of the specific purpose of the study, only that the researchers intended to study middle school teachers and students. As teachers viewed the video, they completed a 4-point Likert scale survey consisting of adjectives conveying perceptions of aggression and achievement. To analyze the survey data, researchers conducted a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine differences among and within the groups of subjects. They found no statistical difference between movement and ethnicity, but significant difference between movement style and ethnicity.

Aside from the tendency of teachers to rate African American students higher in achievement perceptions than White students, the most intriguing finding was that strolling African American and European American students were rated as higher in aggression and more likely to need special education services than walking African American and European American students. However, no statistical difference between ethnicities existed. These findings led the researchers to infer that strolling was interpreted by teachers in the study as a Black cultural movement; therefore, an attitude of “acting Black” was attributed to the European American students.

In spite of the variety of explanations posited, for years, results from standardized testing have indicated that there is a disparity in student performance for White and African American students regardless of socioeconomic status and geographic location

(Johnston & Viadero, 2000; McWhorter, 2000). As the following news article indicates, this achievement disparity is quite pervasive despite some recent signs of improvement.

Virtually everywhere across this country, school systems are struggling with the problem of how to reduce the persistent overall correlation between race and school achievement—with many publicly setting the goal of wiping out the racial differences within a few years (“Race, Schools, Income,” 2005, p.12).

In a nation that enforces mandatory education for all of its citizenry ages 6-17, why is this disparity in academic achievement so persistent despite the absence of a similar disparity in attendance rates for the same groups of students?<sup>3</sup>

How severe is this disparity? Singham (2003) declares the achievement gap to be “one of the most infuriating problems afflicting education” (p. 586). Haskins and Rouse (2005) assert that, “By the time [B]lack and Hispanic children reach [K]indergarten, they are on average already far behind their more advantaged peers in reading and math readiness. Such disparities in achievement persist or even increase during the school years” (p. 1). The authors believe that the achievement disparity can be reduced by at least 50% when investing in parental education programs and simultaneously engaging their children in preschool education programs for three and four year olds that are seen as having the potential to contribute to the resolution. Without such interventions, the disparity only tends to intensify by the time that African American students approach the

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<sup>3</sup> This inference was drawn from a cursory analysis of school performance data presented on the Maryland State Department of Education web site, <http://www.mdreportcard.org>. Descriptive data for a 13-year period (1993-2005) were compared regarding attendance, graduation, and dropout rates for grades 9-12 as well as the passing rates for English II as measured by the grade 12 High School Assessment (HSA). The data disaggregated by race were compared to the comprehensive data for the targeted school system.

age at which they should be graduating from high school.

To what extent can we explain this achievement disparity or gap within the context of racial identity development theory? Is there a nexus between how a race of people views itself and how members of that race perform academically? Racial identity development theory focuses on the psychological implications of racial group membership and associated belief systems (Helms, 1990). According to Cross (1971), racial identity development is a process that consists of five stages:

1. pre-encounter (individual absorbs many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture),
2. encounter (individual experiences an event or series of events that prompt consideration of the personal effects of racism),
3. immersion/emersion (individual adopts visible symbols of his/her own racial identity, seeks to learn more about his/her history and culture, and deliberately shuns symbols of the dominant culture),
4. internalization (individual views own racial group with more objectivity and security and is more willing to establish cross-racial relationships with people who respect the individual's self-definition), and
5. internalization-commitment (individual has achieved a positive sense of racial identity and seeks to move beyond race).

In a study of racial identity development, Tatum (2004) examined the impact of varied parental socialization practices and school experiences on racial identity development and its effect on student achievement. Tatum's sample (N=24) focused on children of color and their educational experiences in predominantly White

environments. The study involved children of biracial parents, Black children adopted by White families, and children who were immigrants. She also included children of Black parents who were reared by at least one of those parents. Subjects were asked to describe their families as race conscious, race neutral, or class conscious/race avoidant.

Students who classified their families as race conscious did so because positive images of Blacks were promoted at home; they were encouraged to become bicultural; and they benefited from courses in African American studies. Students who described their families as race neutral felt rejected by both Black and White races; had a caring adult to intervene for them; eventually moved beyond being ashamed of their race to accepting and being proud of it; were engaged in attempts to prepare them for racial encounters; or felt isolated in higher-level courses. Those who chose the class conscious/race avoidant category felt socially isolated, felt tolerated by Whites, or regretted attending a TWI.

After interviewing these 24 Black college students who were attending two White New England colleges, Tatum concludes that effective school integration is dependent upon Whites being exposed to a multicultural curriculum so that teacher expectations of students of color are higher. As a result, White students become allies to students of color in White educational settings to “interrupt racism” rather than “perpetuate” it (p. 134). At the same time, she reminds educators that access to African American studies courses is critical to Black students’ racial identity development as well.

She contends that such exposure would prepare Whites for interracial life experiences and that school plays a role in facilitating or hindering positive racial group identity development. Finally, Tatum (2004) recommends that racial identity

development theory and the stages delineated earlier in this discussion, be taught in teacher preparation programs to complete the conceptual framework—it is as important for White students as it is for students of color since White students undergo a similar process in the development of their racial identity.

The final theory to be addressed in this discussion is that of critical race theory (CRT) which is a form of oppositional legal scholarship that examines race, racism and White supremacy from a global perspective (Taylor, 2006). CRT came of age in the 1970s when legal scholars, i.e., Derrick Bell, Charles Lawrence, Lani Guinier, Richard Delgado, Mari Matsuda, Patricia Williams, and Kimberle Crenshaw, became disenchanted with the lack of progress realized from civil rights legal strategies in addressing the impact of *de jure* and *de facto* segregation on Black education (Taylor, 1998). Critical race theorists contend that traditional civil rights litigation approached securing equality for disenfranchised people by appealing for civil and human rights in a society that is built on property rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

The focus of critical race theory discourse examines the consequences of inadequately educating African Americans and legal practices including affirmative action, race-based zoning/districting, and biased sentencing for people of color in the criminal justice system (Taylor, 2006). CRT examines the intersection of race and property as a vehicle for understanding social and school inequity, contending that race is still significant in social and school inequity and that American society is built upon property rights rather than human rights (Ladson-Billings & Tate). The application of critical race theory to education forces educators to confront race, and “race is the most explosive issue in American life. . .” (West, 2001, p. 155).

By some accounts, the relatively unnoticed resegregation alluded to previously should have been predictable since court-imposed school integration is, according to some scholars, the result of interest convergence (Bell, 1980). Global media coverage of the brutality of institutional racism occurred at the same time that the United States was attempting to position itself as a world leader (Taylor, 2006). Constant images of American racial civil unrest would have undermined the plans of American leaders. It is believed this convergence of interest prompted the landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and has manifested itself in a superficial commitment to racial equity and social justice.

#### *Contemporary Educational Practices*

In this era of *No Child Left Behind*, renewed interest has surfaced in enhancing African American student achievement since this legislation dictates disaggregating school performance data based on multiple diversity factors, one of which is race. Consequently, educators are in search of effective instructional strategies for meeting the needs of a diverse student population. Such strategies can be identified by examining African American student success in the P-16 educational arena (pre-school through post-secondary education). What are the conditions that foster such academic success for African American learners? What interventions have been implemented effectively in P-12 schools and in higher education?

Analysis of theoretical and research literature on African American student success indicates a multitude of factors that contribute to this success. Ferguson (2002) deems effective teacher-student relationships to be critical to improved student learning, especially relationships characterized by teacher encouragement, use of multiple effective

pedagogies, and high quality teacher content knowledge. Consistent with these factors are the existence of high teacher expectations of students (Johnston & Viadero, 2000) and encouragement from a significant adult (Tatum, 2004).

To this evolving list, Singleton and Linton (2006) add passion, practice, and persistence as three factors needed to narrow the racial achievement gap. A safe, supportive environment at school and home fosters positive self-integrity and affirms individual self-worth (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel, & Master, 2006). In the school environment, teaching styles must be compatible with learning styles (Wagener & Nettles, 1998), and there must be consistency in instructional approaches and strategies as well as collaboration among teachers instead of competition (Olson, 2008).

In the final analysis, programs that are effective in reaching African American learners abound in the literature and tend to capture attributes or features such as operating on established or agreed upon norms for group interactions (Hrabowski, Maton, & Greif, 1998). They also encourage students to identify their aspirations for the future (Wagener & Nettles, 1998). Blum (2004) advocates employing positive use of peer pressure while encouraging students to become allies for each other by expanding their knowledge and understanding of people who are different. Offering early interventions and adequate resources was found to empower students to devote their undivided attention to learning (Hrabowski et al., 1998), while portraying culturally relevant or representative role models in prominent positions in the educational setting prompted increase in African American learners' interest in being academic successful (Bailey, 2005; Bemak, Chi-Ying, & Siroskey-Sabdo, 2005; Butler & Bunch, 2005). Involving parents actively as partners in the educational process (Walker, 2000; Noguera, 2007),

offering students a positive social context (Triplett, 2007), nurturing students' personal desire to learn, even in adverse educational conditions (Lewis & Kim, 2008), and integrating practices, such as those identified above into the mainstream curriculum (Wagener & Nettles, 1998), were identified as contributing factors that lead to African American student success.

Finally, quality professional development tends to be important in reaching populations of diverse students. Brutin (2007) contends that professional development focused on multicultural education is crucial and laments the removal of attention to social justice in the current language of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) standards for program approval and review. Ferguson (2002) asserts that effective professional development needs to address content, pedagogy and relationships.

#### *Economic Perspective*

Freire (1970) posits a "banking" concept of education as he describes pedagogy in an oppressive society that is empowered by control. His concept captures the tendency of this model of education to view students as depositories of information rather than as learners on a quest for knowledge that will enhance their creativity and critical thinking capacity. While Freire does not measure the impact of this passive style of learning monetarily, research on high school dropout patterns points to passive learning models as contributing factors, not only for African American learners but for learners of all ethnicities (Singham, 2005).

In a capitalistic society, it is evitable that the persistent racial achievement gap in education be analyzed by considering its potential impact on the economy of that society.

From my experience of working in and with public schools, I have found that the mission statement of most public school systems sets as its goal that of preparing students to function as productive members of society, now and in the future. In our society, productivity tends to be measured by one's ability to amass wealth by generating income commensurate with academic achievement. In fact, education has been viewed a viable means to economic success, and direct correlations have been established between levels of educational attainment and income. High school graduates tend to generate 50% more tax revenues than do high school dropouts, and that percentage increases to 66% with pursuits of postsecondary education (Levin, 2006).

As more public schools are operated by for-profit companies, some economists predict that by 2030 improvements in pedagogy and subsequently in student achievement will result in higher income and tax revenues nationally (Levin, 2006). Regarding how the racial achievement gap impacts the economy, Gordon and Rebell (2007) estimate \$250 billion annually "in health and welfare costs, criminal justice expenses, and lost tax income" (p. 1840). They conclude that an even greater strain socially and civically is immeasurable monetarily.

Ferguson (2007) studies lifestyle as a means of exploring the racial achievement gap. Citing data from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Birth Cohort (ECLS-B), Restricted-Use File (NCES 2004-093), Ferguson posits that children under a year old showed "almost no racial or social class difference though by Kindergarten, racial and social class differences in skill levels are firmly established" (p. 18). This position is similar to that of Haskins and Rouse (2005) which was referenced earlier. The children's skill levels were

derived from the intelligence quotient (IQ) determined using Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) during 1972 using WISC-R, 1989 with WISC-III, and 2002 via WISC-IV.

Ferguson also examined data from the Kindergarten cohort of the NCES Early Childhood Longitudinal Study that asked mothers “how many children’s books does your kindergarten child have in your home now, including library books?” Data were disaggregated based on the mother’s years of schooling and showed that Black mothers with 16 or more years of schooling reported slightly more books than White mothers with 12 or fewer years of schooling (nearly 50 books, which was the highest for all Black mothers). White mothers with 13 years or more of schooling reported an average of 100 books. Data were disaggregated by race and then divided into 3 categories—12 or fewer years, 13 to 15 years, and 16 or more years of education.

To further expand his lifestyles argument, Ferguson (2007) analyzed 2005 survey data on home-learning conditions of elementary school students from his Tripod Project, a school intervention project that the author founded in 2001 to address achievement gaps. He divides the families in the study into 2 groups: (a) advantaged or those with two parents and at least one computer and (b) disadvantaged or those with either a single parent or no computer. “Of almost 7000 first through fifth graders in this sample, 11% of Whites, 13% Asians, 34% Latinos, and 41% Blacks qualify as disadvantaged” (p. 19). The sample contained students from across seven states—New Jersey, Ohio, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Michigan, Iowa, and New Mexico. Ferguson concludes that,

Continued progress in raising achievement and closing gaps would likely accelerate if home lifestyle changes were to include things like requiring daily leisure reading, asking children to explain homework answers to parents, and substituting high-yield learning activities for high levels of television watching. Of course, we should not expect that children and youth (of any group) will accept such changes easily (p. 20).

Without the suggested lifestyle modifications being realized, “large socioeconomic disparities among families [will continue to be] morally objectionable and politically dangerous for the future of a society” (Ferguson and Mehta, 2004, p. 667).

In a study of wealth and education, Orr (2003) found differences in resources available to students in and out of the school setting because parents with greater resources are able to offer more educational opportunities for their children. However, Orr’s findings did not account for the vast racial disparity in student achievement, causing her to conclude that opportunities for success are not equally open to everyone. She concedes that “While [B]lacks have come closer to parity with [W]hites in income, education, and occupation, the substantial racial differences in wealth continue to affect educational and social opportunities” (p. 299), a point consistent with the findings of other scholars, researchers, and economists (Roscigno, 1999; Singham, 2005; Tate, 2005; Ferguson, 2007).

A similar data-driven realization prompted a local superintendent to allocate resources in his school system deliberately based upon equity rather than equality. Taking into account patterns revealed from teachers’ computer-assisted access to and analysis of student achievement data, the superintendent divided the system’s service area

into green and red zones (green for high performing schools and red for low performing schools). The superintendent assigned resources based upon the needs the data showed each zone required to be successful. In less than a decade, his approach resulted in improved student achievement to the degree that achievement gaps were narrowed, a low performing school achieved Blue Ribbon School status, and the support of affluent constituents and communities remained constant (Olson, 2008; Porter, 2006).

In their study of adult incarceration rates, LaFree and Arum (2006) cite, as a contributing factor, limitations in the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* which failed to permit integration across school systems. Accordingly, the resegregation of public schools is fueled by housing practices and patterns, and educational resources tend to be affected by housing policy and revenues (LaFree & Arum; Orfield & Eaton, 2003). Koslow contends that segregated housing is a 20<sup>th</sup> century social practice and that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century freed Blacks and poor Whites lived in the same poor communities (1999b). LaFree and Arum suggest that future research examine successful predominantly Black schools because the lessons that have been learned hold policy implications.

#### *Methodological Perspective*

With this recommendation in mind, I proposed studying the racial achievement gap by examining African American student success using Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a research methodology prevalent in the corporate world as a tool for organizational management that is grounded in social constructionism (Finegold, Holland, & Lingham, 2002; Yoder, 2005). Applying research traditions across disciplines can prompt new ways of exploring research questions (Thompson, 2005). However, applying AI to

studying the racial achievement gap poses the challenge of exploring school failure by examining what is working—an apparent oxymoron. How can a phenomenon with negative connotations be examined from an affirmative stance?

The affirmative stance of Appreciative Inquiry originated in the early 1980s as a research model that enabled examination of organizational successes instead of deficits (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 1999). Appreciative Inquiry is a qualitative research method that is a form of action research, albeit nontraditional in that it is not a problem-based inquiry process, but rather a search for the best in an organization (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Norum, Wells, Hoadley, & Geary, 2002; Troxel, 2002). AI investigates organizational elements or factors that promoted past successes and uses those elements or factors to inform the organization's creation of a positive future (Troxel).

AI has been used effectively to examine what is working in a variety of arenas from community development (Browne, 2004; Kerka, 2003; Johnson & Leavitt, 2001; Randolph, 2006; Reed, Jones, & Irvine, 2005), to international governmental operations (Michael, 2005), to religious matters (Bartlett, 2005), to criminology issues (Fischer, Geiger, & Hughes, 2007). It also has been used to analyze nursing education and administration (Moody, Horton-Deutsch, & Pesut, 2007; Shendell-Falik, Feinson, & Mohr, 2007), career exploration and development (Hagevik, 2000), and education on a variety of levels and issues (Bassett, 2003; Carnell, 2005; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2006; Preziosi, & Gooden, 2002).

Lander (2000) employed Appreciative Inquiry in compiling her evaluation materials for the promotion and tenure process at the university where she was an assistant professor at the time. Her use of AI afforded her a value-added component that

documented the quality of her work in addition to the quantity as she engaged in self-assessment. She found points of resemblance between her teaching, scholarship, and service that a quantitative review alone would not have yielded.

Other higher education uses of Appreciative Inquiry are present in the literature. To examine the benefits of a university human resources development internship, Mackey and Thomas (2005) also turned to Appreciative Inquiry. Yoder (2005) opted to use AI to examine the relationship between organizational climate and attention to emotional intelligence in a community college setting. Hanna (2003) recommends that institutions of higher education (IHEs) use AI to craft a vision and plan of action for maintaining their relevance in the global world of the 21st century.

What does this widespread use of Appreciative Inquiry suggest about this research paradigm? Just what is Appreciative Inquiry and how does it work?

The AI process is described as having four steps—the 4-D cycle—which include Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny stages (Cooperrider, 1990). The literature on Appreciative Inquiry sometimes reveals a fifth step in the AI process that actually becomes the first stage of the process, Definition (Randolph, 2006; Shendell-Falik et al., 2007). With Definition as the first step in the 5-D version of the AI process, identifying the research focus, delineating the research plan, and crafting the interview protocol become an official phase of this research methodology as opposed to a preliminary activity.

The remaining four steps are identical in both the 4-D and 5-D cycles and entail the following:

1. Discovery – the stage at which participants engage in reflecting on the organization’s past successes through storytelling
2. Dream – the stage at which participants envision the organization at its best in the future based upon data generated during the Discovery stage
3. Design – the stage at which participants develop a plan of action for achieving the newly articulated organizational vision for its future
4. Destiny – the stage at which the organization implements the action plan drafted in the Design stage and documents the process

When applying this process to school reform, researchers found that Appreciative Inquiry is more effective when used at a micro-level rather a macro-level, recommending its use with a single school (Ryan, Soven, Smither, Sullivan, & VanBuskirk, 1999). They also found that the process “reconnects teachers and administrators to their passion for teaching and to their sense of mission; for students the process enhances school pride and fosters recognition of the bonds that students have with peers and teachers alike” (p. 167).

For the purposes of my dissertation research, the 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry guided the development of the research plan.

#### *Technology as a Research Tool*

The primary role of technology in this study was that of a tool for data collection and analysis. The use of technology as a tool is one of three uses—tool, tutor, and tutee—that Taylor (1980) identified when he examined the uses or roles of computers in education and human learning and developed a framework for classifying computer use. As a tool, the computer assists the student with completing academic tasks or, as in this study, the researcher in completing methodological tasks. In the role of tutor, the

computer teaches the student, i.e., programmed instruction that can be interactive, individualized, and self-paced (often called CAI or computer assisted instruction). As the tutee, the student programs or controls the computer (Taylor, 1980). Taylor's theory of computer use prompts a focus on process, more than product, and on manipulating and understanding information, rather than merely acquiring it (Taylor, 2003).

Literature regarding the role of technology in conducting research indicates that technology facilitates the data collection and analysis process. Electronic data collection tends to be a cost-effective, time-saving means of conducting research as demonstrated by the work of Mayfield, Wingenbach, and Chalmers (2005). The researchers conducted a Delphi study in which they obtained stakeholder input on identifying Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for developing turf grass management curricula. They were able to conduct three rounds of surveying in 6.5 weeks using a secure Internet site and email notices and reminders.

Wharton and DeBruin (2005) also found that technology enhanced the speed with which they were able to conduct surveys. They concluded that the Internet not only has changed the way that data are collected, analyzed, and housed, but also that electronic data sources can disappear or expire without warning, implying that maintaining paper sources and storage may still be advisable.

Electronic data collection can be conducted synchronously and asynchronously using computers and the Internet (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007). Data sources for qualitative research can include "e-mails, instant messages, listservs, usernets, newsgroups, bulletin boards, guest books, Web pages, chat rooms or online communities, individual interviews, and online surveys" (p. 317). These researchers caution that

“misunderstandings and misinterpretations can occur more easily through online media than in person” (p. 320). Also, researchers need to be aware, and study participants need to be informed of risks associated with using email as a data collection technique due to the potential for security and confidentiality to be compromised.

Despite the identified shortcomings, the use of technology as a tool for data collection and analysis tends to be a viable approach to integrating technology into the research process.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter, “Respecting the Pupil,” presents a review of relevant literature regarding the racial achievement gap in education and African American student success. It offers historical, theoretical, economic, methodological, and technological perspectives and frameworks that reinforce the pervasive nature of issues surrounding this topic as well as contemporary practices for addressing the gap and facilitating African American student success. Despite all of the promising practices reported in the literature, the racial achievement gap persists. Why? Perhaps it is because such practices are occurring in isolation, not having been integrated fully into the mainstream curriculum—in much the same way that levels of integration apply to the teaching of ethnic studies (Banks, 1996). One interesting assertion is that “the racial achievement gap might legitimately be seen as a teaching gap, even a racial teaching gap” (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 6).

Whatever the case, the findings of this literature review expose a much needed paradigm shift that must occur in how educators view the racial achievement gap and the children caught in it. As a Sacramento middle school principal learned, the racial achievement gap can be narrowed by talking with and listening to learners most affected

by it (Nix, 2008). Organizing an achievement gap club with 30 African American and Latino seventh and eighth graders with whom he met every other week, this principal informally demonstrated the power of Appreciative Inquiry in action. Without explicitly naming his approach, the principal's work had elements of the AI framework evident in it. That evidence illustrates how hot a topic the racial achievement gap is and how prevalent and practical AI methodology is in addressing it by exploring African American student success, especially when the researcher is setting out to learn something rather than to prove something.

Using technology as a research tool, this study examined what works for academically successful African American learners—past, present, and future—in a public education system by consulting with present and former P-12 students. Using AI to tap into students' lived experiences in public schooling is consistent with Emerson's secret of education—"respecting the pupil."

## Chapter Three – Methodology

### “The Oxymoron”

*“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.”*

*- Marcel Proust*

*French Novelist 1871-1922*

This chapter, “The Oxymoron,” is a discussion of the methodology used to examine what works for academically successful African American learners—past, present, and future—in a public education system. In addition to delineating the research design, this discussion also includes reflections on my resistance to employing a positive approach to examining a topic that historically provokes negative, often hostile reactions, pain and disbelief. This positive approach, known as Appreciative Inquiry (AI), has its origins in the business sector for assessing organizational effectiveness by analyzing stakeholders’ perceptions of what is working within the organization. On the surface, this methodology seems incongruent with a focus on the racial achievement gap, thus my reference to an oxymoron and the need for me to engage in an unanticipated paradigm shift. This unanticipated paradigm shift prompted this study’s focus to become that of African American student success, as the focal point moved beyond the racial achievement gap.

This adjustment in paradigms was prompted by my learning that Appreciative Inquiry, when applied to school reform, is best used at a micro-level rather a macro-level, supporting its use with a single school (Ryan et al., 1999). This process “reconnects teachers and administrators to their passion for teaching and to their sense of mission; for students the process enhances school pride and fosters recognition of the bonds that students have with peers and teachers alike” (p. 167).

Recognition of these bonds reinforces AI's grounding in social constructionism, a theoretical framework most often characterized by the zone of proximal development. Central to this is the concept of constructing understanding or meaning within a social context, and the belief that social contexts create conditions for learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The context of this study offered micro-level use of AI since it examined the racial achievement gap in education by investigating student performance in the form of African American student success. In the process, the study explored social contexts that fostered conditions for learning and generated student success.

#### *Purpose of Study*

The purpose of this study was to examine what works for academically successful African American learners—past, present, and future—in a public education system. While this study was conducted in an all-girls school, the study was designed deliberately to examine issues of race, and not the intersection of race and gender.

#### *Research Questions*

Because the focus of this research study moved beyond the racial achievement gap to that of examining African American student success, the primary research question that guided this study was what conditions tend to facilitate the academic success of African American learners? The secondary research questions prompted by the primary question were (a) what has been the history of African American education, especially in the public education arena, and (b) what beliefs have helped to shape approaches to African American student success?

### *Research Design*

To answer these questions, the research design for this study was guided by the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Cooperrider, 1990), which entail the following:

1. Discovery – the stage at which participants engage in reflecting on the organization’s past successes through storytelling
2. Dream – the stage at which participants envision the organization at its best in the future based upon data generated during the Discovery stage
3. Design – the stage at which participants develop a plan of action for achieving the newly articulated organizational vision for its future
4. Destiny – the stage at which the organization implements the action plan drafted in the Design stage and documents the process

The study ended with partial completion of the Design stage since it converted Dream stage data into a set of recommendations regarding the study organization’s future.

Destiny stage activities—implementation of these recommendations and documentation of that process—then become a focus for future research.

The Discovery, Dream, and Design stages examined the phenomenon of African American student success in the context of an urban public school renowned for the academic achievement of its students even as it transitioned from a White institution to a predominantly African American one. Partial completion of the Design stage involved sharing a set of recommendations for the focus organization’s future that used its successful past as the foundation. These uses of the 4-D cycle were consistent with AI’s theoretical research perspective.

*Theoretical Research Perspective*

As a research methodology, Appreciative Inquiry achieves its external validity from the different research paradigms that constitute AI's theoretical research perspective and thereby achieves triangulation with its foundations in other methodologies (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The AI 4-D cycle has evolved from research methods commonly associated with phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnomethodology, historical research, and the Delphi Study. Specific features derived from these methodologies are evident in the AI process.

From phenomenology, AI captures the study of how individuals relate to a common lived experience, and uses narrative analysis to analyze the language conveying the personal accounts of the lived experience. Features from grounded theory include engaging multiple individuals who have participated in a process or phenomenon and using constant comparative analysis to determine and reach intersecting levels of agreement. Ethnomethodology is an evident AI-feature that studies members of a culture-sharing group using content analysis and analytic induction to determine themes and recurring patterns based upon frequency and variety of messages. Obviously, examining historical accounts and documents is a common feature of historical research, while generating surveys to confirm intersecting levels of agreement from experts in the study organization is characteristic of Delphi methodology (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003).

As a result of these combined research attributes, AI research process allows for the study of the phenomenon of African American student success, especially in the selected context by revealing the "underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (Merriam, 1998, p. 159).

### *The Context*

The school that was the subject of this study, or the study organization, was established in 1844 as one of the first all-girls public schools in the country to offer education to girls beyond grammar school, but only for Whites due to *de jure* segregation<sup>4</sup>. At that time, students were required to pass an admission examination. At the end of their three-year program of study, they took a public exit examination and upon passing it, they were certified as having completed high school. No public graduation ceremony was held until 1853.

In 1867, the program expanded to a four-year program of study as enrollment soared, and the school outgrew its location. By 1870, the school had graduated 900 students, most of whom pursued careers as teachers the fall after they graduated from high school; in fact, the fourth year of the high school program was a teacher training program that became the forerunner of the normal school movement in the state (Becker, 1944). The school's most rigorous academic program, the Advanced College Preparatory Program (the "A" course), was established in 1928 as a public school-higher education partnership with an all-girls institution of higher education at the time, Goucher College. In 1932, some of the graduates scored well on a test given at Goucher and were awarded college credits for mathematics content they learned in high school. Students who graduated from the "A" course could enter college with advanced standing since they mastered five years of work in four years (Becker, 1944; WHS Alumni Association, 2006).

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<sup>4</sup> The school in this study was one of two all-girls public schools established the local school system in 1844. The other school is no longer in existence as originally constituted.

The school currently is situated at its seventh location since its inception and now has a predominantly African American student population. Enrollment data for the 2007-2008 academic year (MSDE, 2007) were: (a) 85% African American, (b) 12% White, (c) 2% Asian, (d) 0.7% Latina, and (e) 0.3% Native American.

The school, which became a citywide liberal arts college preparatory magnet school in 1975, has a reputation for its rigorous academic standards and high expectations for its students. For example, the school has met its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goals across all applicable diversity categories for each year that this *NCLB* measure has been in effect. The school's reputation is evident also in data showing that for twenty years an average of 85% of its graduating classes have entered college upon graduation. Exceeding that average, the graduating class of 2006 had 100% of its members while 98.63% of the graduating class of 2007 entered college upon graduation (MSDE, 2007). Additionally, the school ranked fourth in its school system for its 2007 SAT performance with scores exceeding the system's average scores in all three tested areas of critical reading, mathematics, and writing (DREAA, 2007).

The school began its teacher academy program in 2005 and graduated its first cohort of program completers in June 2008. Recently, it was named a State Blue Ribbon School and currently is competing for the title of National Blue Ribbon School.

#### *Unit for Analysis*

The unit for analysis in this study was successful African American learners—past and present—and their stories of the organization, their high school, when it has operated at its best. As demonstrated by the interview protocol, the phenomenon studied was the organization's legacy of student success throughout nearly two centuries of

existence, especially the African American student success that its history depicts.

While the study organization was a single-gender public high school, the focus of this study was neither gender nor the intersection of gender and race, but rather the role of race in academic achievement. The fact that the population in the study organization is female is a matter of circumstance and convenience.

### *Subjects*

The subjects in this study are successful current students and alumnae of an urban public school with decades of high academic performance, despite a 180° shift in the composition of its student population. At the Discovery stage, an interview protocol was implemented as a written survey. This survey was administered electronically and was intended to be used, as needed, in follow-up focus groups that were to be conducted in Yahoo Groups. However, plans were modified to accommodate characteristics and challenges presented by participants in the sample that will be discussed as findings.

The sample was one of convenience based upon affirmative responses to the call for participation, and became purposive in that it was dictated by school affiliation, African American heritage, and self-reported and/or documented successful academic performance. The anticipated sample consisted of 45 participants of whom 25 were to be alumnae and 20 current students who are juniors and seniors at the school. The actual sample size turned out to be 50 participants (N=50), consisting of alumnae (29) and current students (21)—Teacher Academy of Maryland<sup>5</sup> (TAM) juniors and seniors. Since the targeted high school is a single-gender, all-girls public school, all of the

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<sup>5</sup> TAM is a Career and Technology Education (CTE) program of study for high school students interested in careers in education. The students complete four courses usually starting sophomore year. The courses address human growth and development through adolescence, teaching as a profession, foundations of curriculum and instruction, and a year-long internship in authentic classrooms.

participants were females. The projected age range was 16-65; however, the ages of actual participants ranged from 16 to 69 years. Alumnae participants encompassed the graduating classes of 1957 to 1995. The graduating classes for current students in this study spanned the classes of 2009 and 2010. The level of educational attainment of the alumnae participants ranged from some post-secondary education to earned doctoral degrees.

After reading the cover letter for expedited research and assent form (see appendixes A and B), all alumnae participants completed and submitted assent statements electronically. However, the original cover letter and forms were adapted for electronic transmission (see appendix C). Parents of all minor participants were issued hard copies of the cover letter and assent form for minor participants (see appendixes D and E) that they submitted to their children's teacher, in order to participate in the study.

### Data Collection and Analysis

#### *Data Collection Instrument and Protocol*

Data for this study were collected electronically using Zoomerang, an online survey platform, and via electronic mail (email) during the Discovery and Dream stages of the AI process. Two online surveys were administered, one to alumnae participants and the other to current student participants (see appendixes F and G).

For the Discovery stage, a two-part survey, preceded by fields for demographic data, was administered to alumnae participants in Zoomerang. This survey was developed from the original interview/research protocol (see appendix H). Prior to launching the survey, two alumnae piloted the survey on December 16, 2008 and offered feedback on their experience. Their feedback informed refinements to the online survey

and helped determine the estimated time that participants should devote to completing the survey. The completion time for the pilot respondents was 16-17.5 minutes once they overcame their frustration with trying to enter demographic data in fields that were not interactive. The demographic fields later were activated, and language for identified survey items was revised to eliminate educational jargon and make the underlying question more conducive for participants from a variety of professional arenas.

The alumnae survey was launched on December 19, 2008, and participants were sent the hyperlink and directions for accessing the refined Zoomerang survey (see appendix F) via email on December 22, 2008. The first part of the survey posed questions formulated from my experience with the organization and from my understanding of the chosen research methodology. The questioning began by asking each participant to offer her personal definition of success and, based upon that personal definition, to decide whether she considers herself to be successful and explain why. If the respondent viewed herself as successful, she was invited to continue completing the survey; otherwise, the survey ended if she responded in the negative. The rest of the survey questions tapped into participants' stories of the organization's successful past by inquiring about the factors characteristic of the organization that contributed to participants' success in and beyond high school.

Part two of the survey consisted of features, factors, or attributes that were identified during the review of the literature as contributing to African American student success. Respondents were asked to rate the extent of the impact of each of the 22 items on their high school success, using a five-point Likert scale informed by the work of Algozzine (2008). The ratings on the scale were: 1 for "very great extent," 2 for "great

extent,” 3 for “somewhat,” 4 for “small extent,” and 5 for “very small extent.” The results from this survey were to be used to construct a new, shorter survey to be administered to current student participants, and determined by the factors that at least 80% of alumnae participants rated as “very great extent” or “great extent.”

Therefore, the initial survey became the framework for the second survey with adaptations made to the demographic data fields to make them more appropriate for the intended audience. Also, open-ended questions were modified to make them relevant to this audience. To tease out distinctions between components of a multifaceted item pertaining to a safe, supportive environment at school and home, this survey presented the item as four separate items. These same items formed the basis for follow-up questions posed to alumnae participants.

In order to participate in the study, all respondents were required to complete the consent process. The consent process evolved from the approval process, beginning with the current principal of the high school documenting her support for this study. The study, survey, and assent forms were approved by Towson University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) conditionally, pending approval from the comparable entity for the focus organization (see appendix I). The conditional IRB approval permitted Discovery stage data collection to begin with the adult subjects while the secondary approval was sought from the school system governing the focus organization.

After obtaining conditional IRB approval, application was made to the Department of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability (DREAA)—the school system’s equivalent of the IRB—for permission to conduct the study using subjects from the focus organization. The local school system granted its permission (see

appendix J), and the University's IRB was apprised of the approval (see appendix K).

As previously stated, the study was structured and implemented in accordance with the 4-D cycle of the AI methodology, using the process outlined in the following discussion.

### *AI Stages of Data Collection*

#### *Discovery Stage*

According to Shendell-Falik et al. (2007), "This phase serves 2 important purposes, one, to get the most important data relevant to the change process into the hands of the people who are actually creating the change and two, to help build relationships" (p. 97). During this stage of the AI process, the survey was administered, interviews conducted, and data were mined for the effective attributes identified by alumnae who are the subjects of this first round of data collection and analysis.

Using a modified Delphi approach, the list of attributes was shared with current students who were juniors and seniors as an online survey in Zoomerang. To limit the disruption to instruction, students completed the survey during after-school Future Educators Association (FEA) meetings, as feasible, or during their TAM class session as needed. Using the same a five-point Likert scale as that used by alumnae participants, current student participants identified the extent of the impact of the listed attributes on their academic success. Data collected during this both rounds were compiled preliminarily in a table with adjacent columns and shared with alumnae participants as well as current student participants prior to their engaging in the Dream stage of the AI 4-D cycle.

These survey data were analyzed manually in Excel spreadsheets to determine themes and patterns in the three categories of responses from the survey—definitions of

success, conditions for learning, and concerns. Nvivo8, a qualitative data analysis software program, was used to analyze the data more in-depth to determine relationships between and within the sample response groups. Themes captured in the Excel spreadsheet were transported to Nvivo8 and converted to free nodes—themes that are independent of other themes—and tree nodes—related themes that are labeled as parent and child nodes due to the interrelated nature of the themes.

Participants' responses were saved as Word documents and imported into Nvivo as internal sources, after which specific passages were labeled with appropriate code(s). To maintain objectivity on my part, I removed participants' names from their responses and labeled each response based upon the participants' sub-group membership (alumna or current student) and then assigned a number corresponding to the sequence in which the participants' online surveys were submitted, i.e., alumna 1...alumna 29 or student 1...student 21. Reports were generated in Nvivo and exported to Microsoft Word and Excel.

Also during the Discovery stage, historical documents were reviewed to answer questions regarding the history of African American education, particularly as the history addressed the desegregation of the study organization and the shift in the racial identity of the study organization from all White to predominantly African American. Newspaper accounts from the era of *de jure* segregated education were consulted as well as yearbooks and other documents, i.e. centennial and sesquicentennial commemorative celebration booklets housed in the school's Archives Room.

Acting on the advice of an alumna and retired principal of the school, I reviewed yearbooks stored in the school's archives room to identify alumnae of that era and to

confirm the newspaper accounts. My yearbook review procedure involved: (a) counting the number of graduates pictured in senior portraits for each graduating class, (b) determining the number of girls who looked as though they were African Americans based solely on my assessment of their physical attributes as well as cultural implications of surnames, and (c) calculating the percentage of the portraits the apparent African Americans constituted. Based upon these determinations, unstructured telephone interviews were also conducted with alumnae who helped integrate the school or who enrolled in the school shortly thereafter.

### *Dream Stage*

At the Dream stage, the plan was to have participants engage in intergenerational focus groups (Browne, 2004) using semi-structured paired interviews to articulate what the organization (the high school) would look like in its ideal future state. They were to organize their thoughts in writing first and then share them with a partner from the other generational group as the partner recorded notes. Participants were to share their interview proceedings in a focus group discussion as I facilitated and recorded field notes. The focus group session was to be videotaped, and participants were to submit all written documentation to me before leaving the focus group session.

I planned to engage study participants in intergenerational online discussion groups using Blackboard as a secured site, but aspects of my data collection plans were modified for multiple reasons. First of all, I was informed that I could not use Blackboard as a secure site for gathering my dissertation study data since my participants were not affiliated with my IHE. As an alternative, I was directed to Student Voice ([studentvoice.com](http://studentvoice.com)) to administer my survey and to Yahoo Groups for my online

discussions. Since I already had access to Zoomerang as the platform for my online survey, I decided to use it for the survey and Yahoo Groups for the intergenerational online discussions.

On October 20, 2008, I created the “student\_success” group on Yahoo Groups, and on February 6, 2009, I sent an invitation to my alumnae participants asking them to join the “student\_success” group. I sent the participants a message from a familiar email address, alerting them to the invitation that they would be receiving from Yahoo Groups. A generic email account with a common password was established in Yahoo for current student participants to protect their identities and personal email information.

However, both iterations of this plan were modified to accommodate characteristics of the sample that will be covered in detail in the next chapter as findings. In the modified procedures, participants were presented three prompts for sharing their hopes and dreams for the organization’s future and were asked to select only one to which they responded electronically via email. Each participant submitted her response to the self-selected prompt electronically either embedded in the body of an email message or drafted in Word and sent as an email attachment. Responses were analyzed electronically using Nvivo to determine patterns, themes, and relationships by conducting a word frequency query and translating relevant words from this query into free nodes. Once data from this stage were coded, relationship queries were conducted using the attributes created in Nvivo that were derived from the demographic data provided by participants when they completed the online survey in Zoomerang.

### *Design Stage*

During the Design phase of the cycle, participants were to engage in online discussions to identify what needs to be in place in order for the school to build on its successes and positive past. Data gathered were to be used to develop an action plan that reflects the dreams of the participants for the organization's future. Any concerns that surfaced during this Discovery stage were converted into recommendations that were to be incorporated into the action plan. The plan for this stage of the AI cycle was adjusted since participants did not engage in either face-to-face or online discussions. Data generated during the Discovery and Dream stages, including the concerns, were used to create a set of recommendations that will be presented to the School Improvement Team (SIT) to inform their planning for the organization's future. The SIT will use the recommendations to draft the action plan instead of my drafting it alone and submitting to the Team to implement. The rationale for this adjustment will be shared in chapter 5.

### *Destiny Stage*

Having identified recommendations for the school's future success during the Design stage of this study, the Destiny stage will serve the purpose of documenting implementation of the Design stage recommendations by the organization's School Improvement Team beyond this research study. As the immediate audience for my work, the SIT was informed of the research process and methodology for this study. A final draft of the Design stage recommendations is to be presented to the Team during its next scheduled meeting.

### *The Role of Technology*

This study was conducted in fulfillment of requirements for a doctoral degree in instructional technology; therefore, attention to technology integration was critical to the completion of the study. Technology was integrated into this study as a tool for data collection and analysis. As such, surveys were administered during the Discovery stage of the AI using Zoomerang, an online survey instrument. During the Dream stage of the AI process, participants used email and word processing software to draft their hopes and dreams for the organization's ideal future. At the Design stage, participants' ideas of what needs to be in place in order for the organization to operate at its ultimate best were translated into a list of recommendations to be contemplated for implementation by the organization's School Improvement Team.

Finally, technology facilitated analysis of data at various stages of the AI process, using Excel and NVivo8. As previously stated, Nvivo8 is the latest version of a software program designed to analyze qualitative data generated in a variety of formats, including narrative responses and multimedia documentation (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2008). In order to use Nvivo as a tool for data analysis, I was required to learn the software program. The act of studying and learning the program prompted me to use technology as a tutor. Also, using the software to determine relationships within and among my data sources required that I run appropriate queries; therefore, I used technology as a tutee. Essentially, my use of technology in this study encompassed all three of Taylor's identified roles of instructional technology—tool, tutor, and tutee (1990).

### *The Role of the Researcher*

As the researcher in this research process, I was a participant-observer by virtue of my relationship with the study organization as an alumna of the institution and a member of the SIT. The participants in this study were informed of my relationship to the study organization and to them, thereby, granting me immediate credibility with participants as an insider. However, I had to bracket my personal experiences and perceptions in relation to the study organization since the role of data collector was the primary purpose of my involvement (Merriam, 1998). The use of technology in the data collection and analysis provided one level of distance between my role and membership in the study organization. The AI process also allowed me to transform, rather than ignore, negative responses and observations that surfaced into additional recommendations for the study organization's future.

The focus on the individual experiences of others added another layer of objectivity to my role as a participant-observer. As acquainted as I am with my own stories of success regarding the study organization, I was as unacquainted with those of other alumnae of this organization. While we share a common experience, this study afforded me the opportunity to determine the commonalities and distinctions among our experiences with the focus organization.

### Chapter Summary

The objective of this study was to examine the racial achievement gap in education by focusing on African American student success. Essential to achieving this objective is the identification of forces that are at work with African American students who have been/are academically successful. This information was used to develop a set

of recommendations that should be integrated into an action plan for the organization's future. Ultimately, the action plan will be implemented by the organization's School Improvement Team, enabling the organization to continue to address the current, persistent racial achievement gap in education effectively while sustaining its legacy of student success.

The research design was based upon the 4-D cycle of Appreciative Inquiry research methodology, as a survey research study facilitated by technology. Alumnae and current students from the targeted organization/school were asked to participate voluntarily in this study and were solicited from the school's alumnae and from current students who are participants in the Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM), a state-approved high school Career and Technology Education (CTE) program of study. The data collected for this study were submitted by respondents voluntarily and with the assurance that all individual participant information would be kept confidential since only group data were reported.

Finally, the chosen research methodology has built-in external validity that fostered a personal goal of learning something rather than proving something. Researching this topic and methodology caused my thinking to evolve from my original consideration of Appreciative Inquiry as an oxymoron, in terms of its use as a methodology for examining the racial achievement gap in education. The initial tension I experienced transformed into recognition of the compatibility of this methodology with my research focus. Appreciative Inquiry enabled me to examine the racial achievement gap through the lens of African American student success. Thus, I revisited an old landscape with "new eyes."

## **Chapter Four – Findings**

### **“Conditions for Learning”**

*I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.*

- Albert Einstein

I acknowledge, yet look beyond the persistent racial achievement gap and stereotypes that lie therein. Consequently, I based the premise of this study on the belief that African American student success can be unpacked to identify the conditions for learning that facilitate academic achievement. To arrive at the anticipated conditions for learning, I invited African American learners who self-identified as academically successful to reflect upon and share their educational experiences associated with the school that is the study organization for this dissertation.

In the process of collecting data—as detailed in chapter three, implementation of the methodology was adapted to accommodate characteristics, circumstances, and challenges presented by participants in the sample, i.e., comfort levels with technology use, variations in participants’ access to certain software applications, and limitations on participants’ time as a direct result of their success. Adaptations made to the process are elaborated in the discussion of findings for the Discovery and Dream stages. The findings were generated from a variety of data sources, including historical documents, online surveys, telephone interviews, and electronically submitted responses to prompts.

It was anticipated that the study would be conducted within two to three months (November, 2008 to January, 2009). However, five months were required to conduct the study (December 16, 2008 to May 26, 2009)—from piloting the online survey through

the procedures of gathering and analyzing data for both the Discovery and Dream stages of the AI process.

### *Historical Document Review*

The study organization plays a crucial role in the history of African American education locally and nationally since the school was among the first all-girls public high schools established in the nation. Originally established in 1844 as an all-White, all-female public high school, the institution has transitioned since 1954 to an all-girls public high school that now has an 85% African American student population, while maintaining its legacy of high academic performance.

To determine the underlying factors to maintaining this legacy, two intriguing questions had to be answered—When was this school integrated? When did African American students become the majority group in the school? A review of relevant historical documents led to answers to these questions, which contributed to answering the research question, “what has been the history of African American education, especially in the public education arena?”

The breakthrough came on Monday, January 5, 2009 after an Internet search including the name of the school, the city in which it is located and the word “desegregation” yielded five screens of results. On the fourth screen was an excerpt from an article about the newly named NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) leader, which alluded to someone’s mother having been among the first girls to integrate the school (Brewington, 2008). Another article reporting on the appointment of this leader noted that the leader’s mother was in the area to attend her 50-

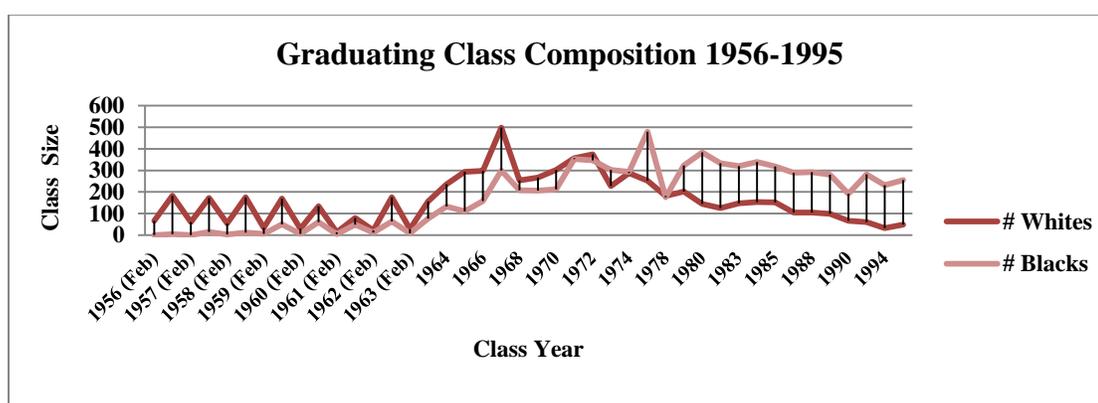
year high school reunion which meant that she graduated from high school in 1958 (Linskey & Brewington, 2008).

While attempts to recruit this alumna for the study were unproductive, I presumed from this information that the school was integrated in 1954 after the *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* decision which was rendered on May 17, 1954, assuming that this alumna's graduating class attended the school for four years. My review of yearbooks stored in the school's archives room yielded pictures of four African Americans in the June graduating class of 1956. I also found that 14 African Americans were in the class of 1957. These discoveries caused me to question the accuracy of the accounts I found online earlier. Fortunately, my yearbook review also yielded the identity of several alumnae with whom I was familiar, and I was able to locate two of them who graduated from the school in 1957 and 1958, respectively, using the "six degrees of separation" principle.

I conducted individual, unstructured telephone interviews with each, and my original conclusion regarding the year that the school was integrated was confirmed. These and other interviews also clarified what I thought was an inconsistency in the historical accounts of the school's desegregation (B.Y. Davis, personal communication, January 12, 2009; L.M. McMillan, personal communication, January 13, 2009; A.P. Benton, personal communication, January 15, 2009; I.W. Mallory, personal communication, January 15, 2009; B.B. Johnson, personal communication, April 27, 2009). From these interviews, I learned that African Americans were admitted to the school for the 1954-1955 academic year at a variety of grade levels from grades 9-11. Consequently, the African American in the class of 1956 attended the school for two

years, and African Americans in the class of 1957 attended for three years. Therefore, the first cohort of African Americans to complete four years of study at this school were those in the class of 1958. My yearbook review also revealed that the first African American student credited with graduating from the school's "A Course" did so in 1959.

Having answered my first intriguing question, I continued reviewing school yearbooks and probing its history to determine when African American students first became the majority group within the school's student population. My process for investigating this question included reviewing all available yearbooks in the Archives Room<sup>6</sup> represented by alumnae in my sample. I reviewed 42 yearbooks in all, and data show 1973 as the first year African Americans comprised a majority of the graduating class at 57.2%. Of the subsequent years, 1978 was the only year when African Americans did not represent a majority of the student body since they appear to have been 49% of the total graduating class that year. By 1995 (the last year represented by alumnae in this study), African Americans appear to have comprised 83.9% of the total graduating class as reflected in yearbook senior portraits for that year (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Yearbook Review Results**

<sup>6</sup> I reviewed yearbooks for 1956-1995 but was unable to locate books for six graduating classes, those for 1975, 1976, 1981, 1986, 1991, and 1992.

It is important to note that until 1963, there were two graduating classes each year—one in February and the other in June. Based on anecdotal reports, I learned that the school system permitted children born after December 31 of one year but before April 1 of the next year to begin school at the age of four because they would turn five during the spring semester (L.M. McMillan, personal communication, January 13, 2009). This practice allowed children to enter school in February of that school year rather than wait until the following September. Consequently, there was a February class and a June class in this data set for the graduation years of 1956-1963. The first February graduating class completed the high school experience in 1916 (Becker, 1944).

The historical document review also revealed that the study organization began a teacher preparation program that, along with similar programs launched at other area high schools, evolved into State Normal School (Becker). This evolution is consistent with documented accounts of Normal School history (Altenbaugh, & Underwood, 1990; Goodlad, Soder & Sirotnik, 1990).

### *Demographic Profile*

The sample for this study was purposive in that participation was based upon school affiliation, African American heritage, and self-reported and/or documented successful academic performance<sup>7</sup>. The sample was also one of convenience based upon affirmative responses to the calls for participation that came directly from the researcher and/or from other alumnae participating in the study. The sample size was projected to be as many as 45 participants (N=45), consisting of 25 alumni and 20 current students (TAM juniors and sophomores). This projection was exceeded since the affirmative

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<sup>7</sup> Alumni participants' academic success was self-reported. Current student participants' academic success was documented using TAM program of study completion criteria in progress.

responses to the calls for participants produced a sample size of 50 participants (N=50) of which 29 were alumnae and 21 were current students. Since the targeted high school is a single-gender, all-girls public school, all of the participants are females and are between the ages of 16 to 69 years old—46 of them identified themselves as African American<sup>8</sup>.

Regarding the graduation year for alumnae participants, the range of years was organized into decades from 1950 to 2010. The sample consisted of two alumnae who graduated during the 1950-1959 decade, fifteen from the 1960-1969 decade, six from the 1970-1979 decade, four (4) from the 1980-1989 decade, and two (2) from the 1990-1999 decade. All 21 of the current student participants were from the 2000-2010 decade, as members of the graduating classes for 2009 and 2010.

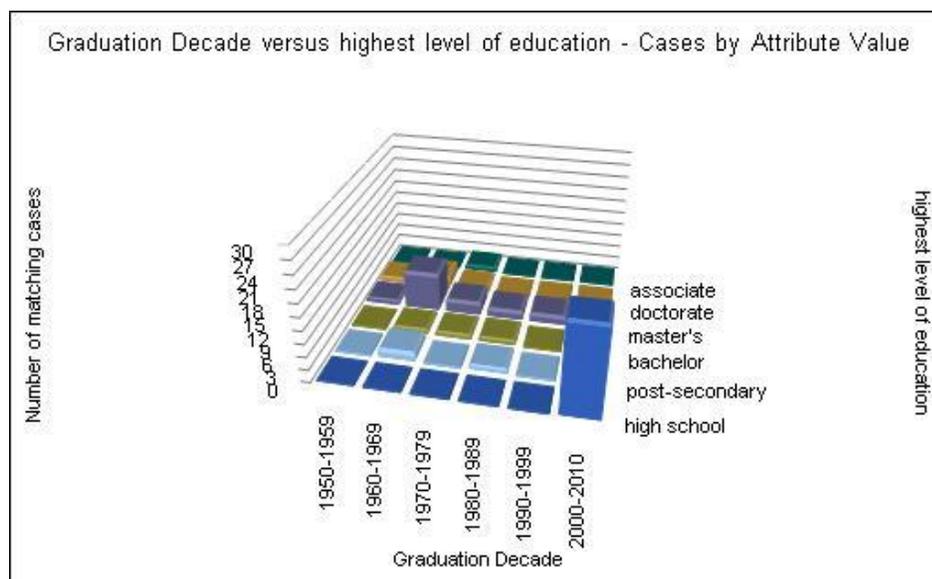
In terms of highest level of educational attainment, the 21 current students will have obtained their high school diplomas by 2010, with eleven in the class of 2009 and ten in the class of 2010. All of the current student participants, except one, were able to identify the institution of higher education (IHE) that was their expected choice as well as their career goal or intended profession. The student who did not name an IHE did identify teaching as her career goal or intended profession, implying that college is in her future plans.

For the alumnae, three completed some post-secondary education, one earned an associate degree, three earned baccalaureate degrees, 17 earned master's degrees, and five earned doctoral degrees. Ethnicity, graduation decade, and highest level of education were used as attributes to classify study participants in Nvivo8 to determine relationships across the two groups of participants and among attributes. A query into

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<sup>8</sup> While all of the participants in this study are females and the majority self-identify as African American, the intersection of race and gender intentionally was not the focus of this study.

the relationship between graduation decade and highest level of education showed the 1960-1969 decade as producing the greatest number of alumnae holding master's and doctoral degrees in this study (see figure 2).



**Figure 2: Highest Educational Attainment by Graduation Decade**

### *Sample Dynamics*

Several references have been made to a need to adapt my plans for gathering data that were driven by the dynamics—characteristics, circumstances, and challenges—of the participants in my sample. These characteristics primarily related to technology skills and time and the challenges they posed during a data collection process that relied extensively on the use of technology as a tool, and was contingent upon adhering to specified timelines and employing planned strategies. These challenges first surfaced during the Discovery stage of data collection as alumnae participants completed the online survey housed in Zoomerang.

I issued the initial invitation to participants electronically on December 22, 2009 after revising the survey using feedback from the survey pilot. In the invitation, potential

participants were informed that completing the survey would take no more than 30 minutes of their time. On the consent form that accompanied the invitation and on which the hyperlink to the survey was given, participants were informed that the survey program had no option for stopping the survey, saving responses, and returning later to finish the survey. Therefore, I urged participants to start the survey when they knew they could devote 16-30 minutes of their time to completing it (see appendix D). Despite my admonition, several alumnae participants reported being timed out of the survey—for various reasons, including taking too long to contemplate their answer before responding to an item or leaving the survey momentarily to read and respond to an email message that popped up while completing the survey—and losing all previously recorded responses.

Because participants were composing their answers as they were completing the survey, they had no record of their responses and had to begin the survey again. As this issue was reported to me, I began forwarding respondents a Microsoft Word version of the survey so that they could compose their answers offline and transfer them to the survey online. Even with this accommodation, a couple of participants opted to send me the completed survey in Word so that I could enter their answers for them. One participant who persevered through multiple timed-out sessions informed me that she would have quit if she had not been completing the survey for me!

Time and timing also proved to be challenges that presented themselves and forced alterations in original plans. The planned closing date for the online survey was to have been Friday, January 16, 2009, but the survey was closed, reopened twice, and finally closed on February 25, 2009 due to requests by alumnae whose schedules

prohibited them from meeting the original deadline(s). Although they completed and returned the study consent form that stipulated that data would be collected in two stages and articulated the projected amount of time required of them, participants opted out of stage two data collection (Dream stage) for understandable reasons, i.e., dealing with health issues, hectic work schedules and workloads, and technological issues. The final timeline challenge pertained to current student data collection. The planned timeline required some revisions due to unanticipated school closings for inclement weather or lack of heat, early dismissal days, planned field trips, or general curricula priorities.

#### *Discovery Stage Results*

To answer the research question, “what conditions tend to facilitate the academic success of African American learners,” two online surveys were administered during the Discovery stage of the AI process, using Zoomerang. The initial survey was designed for alumnae participants and the other for current student participants (see appendixes F and G). The alumnae survey consisted of the following three parts:

1. a section for supplying demographic data,
2. nine open-ended questions that dealt with the respondent’s definition of “success” as well as her assessment of whether she measured up to her definition and reflections on her high school experience, and
3. a 5-point Likert scale section that asked the respondent to rate the extent of the impact that the given factors had on her success during her high school years and beyond.

The results from this survey were to be used to construct a new, shorter survey that was to be administered to current student participants to determine which of the factors that at

least 80% of alumnae participants rated as “very great extent” or “great extent” were currently in place at the school, based upon current students’ perceptions.

Only five factors achieved the combined 80% ranking, and those factors were: (a) encouragement from a significant adult, (b) personal desire to learn, (c) high quality teacher content knowledge, (d) safe, supportive environment at school and home, and (e) high teacher expectations of students. Consequently, I decided to issue basically the same survey to current student participants with minor modifications in the demographic data section and in the open-ended questions, along with one other change that will be discussed later in greater detail. Doing so afforded me the potential to compare the results and draw conclusions regarding patterns in participants’ perceptions about the school’s climate and programming.

I launched the current student survey on February 17, 2009 and closed it on March 26, 2009. One of the students’ teachers assumed responsibility for administering the survey once I forwarded the hyperlink for the online survey to her electronically. Of the combined 50 respondents for both surveys, only one participant—an alumna—discontinued the survey after indicating that she did not consider herself successful. The remaining 49 respondents defined “success” in terms of pursuing or achieving goals and having a fulfilling career or life.

Regarding the success theme or tree node of pursuing or achieving goals, thirty references were found, with the majority offered by current students. Sub-themes or child nodes emerged from these references, one of which was financial stability or security. One current student’s definition included her declaration of “being able to live without living from pay check to pay check.” An alumna addressed the child node of

self-determination by defining success as “having positioned yourself to pursue any social, professional, and personal endeavors of your choosing.” Another current student mentioned “seizing opportunities or blessings” in her definition of success.

The tree node for success as defined by having a fulfilling career or life yielded twenty references, a majority of which tended to be offered by alumnae participants. These references addressed numerous child nodes or sub-themes that included: (a) living a balanced life, (b) contributing to society, (c) enjoying life, (d) having family connections, (e) honoring God by using God-given talents or fulfilling destiny, (f) displaying happiness or peace of mind, (g) being loved and trusted, (h) having passion, (i) having personal independence, (j) experiencing positive relationships, and (k) enjoying sustained good health. Several definitions cited contributing to society as reflected in alumnae comments such as “...making a difference in the lives of others,” “to be an asset in society,” or the all-encompassing comment about “making a positive contribution to society, having a passion for what you are doing, being financially secure.” A current student’s definition referenced “Being happy with what you are doing with your life or the direction your life is heading.” These quotes are representative of participants’ overall attitudes about success and preceded their identification of the conditions for learning that influenced their success.

Regarding conditions for learning that were evident in alumnae responses to the open-ended questions on the survey, these responses also were coded as tree nodes and fell into three major themes or parent nodes. Ranked by the number of references made to each theme/parent node, those themes were: (a) academic rigor (63 references); (b)

family, friends, and community expectations and motivation (44 references); and (c) effective or encouraging teachers (43 references).

Sub-themes or child nodes for academic rigor included teacher content knowledge or competence, leadership preparation (for students), adequate and appropriate resources, accessible extra-curricular activities, and career preparation. These sub-themes were conveyed in responses such as:

1. “The school established high academic standards, employed well qualified faculty, and integrated best practices in education and quality content into the curriculum; also, extra-curricular activities provided the opportunity for leadership and full student engagement” (Alumna).
2. “My high school experience was something new. Most of the time it was a little hard but other than that it proved to be a rewarding one. I was able to understand life a little more and had people around me that understood me” (Current Student).
3. “My high school's high academic standards, culturally enriching experiences, diverse student population, and dedicated faculty prepared me to face new challenges in life” (Alumna).
4. “...enjoyed the college preparation [I]’ve been given throughout the years” (Current Student).

For the second theme (family, friends, and community expectations and motivation), sub-themes or child nodes included supportive home environment, positive student interactions and peer support, positive role models, belief in education as a means to success, and personal desire to learn. Participants made comments such as, “My

grandfather has a way to push me to succeed” (Current Student); “Hard working parents that sacrificed and insisted that I performed to the best of my ability. Encouragement from family, neighbors and teachers. Libraries, television, radios all played an important role in my thirst for knowledge and success” (Alumna); and “STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM FROM MY FELLOW AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS. TO THIS DAY, AFTER 46 YEARS, I AM STILL CLOSE AND NETWORK WITH VERY MANY OF THESE STUDENTS<sup>9</sup>” (Alumna). Another alumna summarized her experience by citing:

...a mother and family that expected that I would be “successful” (i.e. good grades, high extracurricular participation) in high school. Lots of activities that held my interest and kept me from getting "in trouble" (i.e. pregnant). High school was the doorway to experiencing different cultures that was expanded further in college life and beyond.

For the final theme of the presence of effective or encouraging teachers, the sub-themes or child nodes included teacher or school expectations for academic and social behavior, supportive school environment, and diversity. Representative responses included,

1. “My high school experience has been excellent because you are always able to seek help when needed from any staff member. Many of the teachers in this building are eager to help students with any problems that they may have” (Current Student).
2. “The supportive nature of my high school allowed me to grow and become all the person that I am today” (Current Student).

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<sup>9</sup> This participant typed all of her responses using all caps.

3. “My high school places emphasis on unity and coming together” (Current Student).
4. “[School] had great faculty: Widenhouse, Glazers (there was more than one), Harth—all were well-traveled and deep thinkers. When we got to college, we were great thinkers already” (Alumna).
5. “Professionals who cared about their students and who had great expectations, well disciplined and planned educational curricular and implementation of the same” (Alumna)

These findings appear to be consistent with the results from the Likert scale section of the survey that required both groups of participants to rate a list of factors for African American student success generated from the literature review for this study. Further analysis of the Likert scale data from both groups yielded a host of patterns across and within the groups. The top ten conditions for learning for each group showed commonalities but also variations in their perceptions of the extent of impact. The first finding from comparisons of these data showed five factors realizing the 80% criterion on the alumnae survey and ten factors doing so on the current student survey (see table 1).

The factors from the alumnae survey in ranked order were: (a) encouragement from a significant adult (97%), (b) personal desire to learn (93%), (c) high quality teacher content knowledge (90%), (d) safe, supportive environment at school and home (89%), and (e) high teacher expectations of students (83%). However, the ten factors meeting the 80% criteria from the current student survey were: (a) personal desire to learn (95%) (b) safe environment at home (95%), (c) supportive environment at home (95%), (d) high quality teacher content knowledge (90%), (e) offering early interventions and adequate

resources that empower students to devote their undivided attention to learning (86%), (f) teacher encouragement (81%), (g) encouragement from a significant adult (81%), (h) quality professional development or teachers' continued learning (81%), (i) encouraging students to identify their aspirations for the future (81%), and (j) portraying culturally relevant/representative role models in prominent positions in the educational setting (81%).

Another finding was that three conditions for learning were rated “very great extent” or “great extent” by at least 80% of the respondents in both groups. Of the three factors, “encouragement from a significant adult” was rated in one of the two categories by 97% of alumnae participants and by 81% of current student participants. When asked about the identity of the significant adult to whom they referred, both groups of participants identified parents (both mother and father), siblings, extended family members (i.e., a great-grandmother, a cousin, and a godmother), and school administrators and faculty. One alumnae respondent contended, “Our Principal and the administrative staff set an atmosphere of excellence. Academic excellence, teachers who encouraged ‘thinking’ through the answers, insisting that the concepts were understood - not regurgitated from text.”

The second factor, personal desire to learn, was rated “very great extent” or “great extent” by 93% of alumnae and 95% of current students, producing reactions from alumnae that included,

1. “School was difficult for me. The one thing that helped me was that I was a reader.”
2. “I had a loving home with both parents interested in my education. I had a

**Table 1: Zoomerang Survey Results on African American Student Success**

Alumnae				Current Students			
Item#	Item Description	%	Rank	Item#	Item Description	%	Rank
25	encouragement from a significant adult	97	1	12	personal desire to learn	95	1
19	personal desire to learn	93	2	22	safe environment at home	95	2
20	high quality teacher content knowledge	90	3	23	supportive environment at home	95	3
27	safe, supportive environment at school and home	89	4	13	high quality teacher content knowledge	90	4
24	high teacher expectations of students	83	5	32	offering early interventions and adequate resources that empower students to devote their undivided attention to learning	86	5
22	teacher encouragement	76	6	15	teacher encouragement	81	6
39	offering students a positive social context	76	7	18	encouragement from a significant adult	81	7
26	teachers' passion, practice and persistence	75	8	27	quality professional development or teachers' continued learning	81	8
33	encouraging students to identify their aspirations for the future	75	9	29	encouraging students to identify their aspirations for the future	81	9
36	offering early interventions and adequate resources that empower students to devote their undivided attention to learning	71	10	33	portraying culturally relevant/representative role models in prominent positions in the educational setting	81	10
34	employing positive use of peer pressure	69	11	31	encouraging students to become allies for each other by expanding their knowledge and understanding of people who are different	77	11
23	effective teacher-student relationships	65	12	19	teachers' passion, practice and persistence	76	12
29	consistency in instructional approaches and strategies	63	13	24	teaching styles compatible with learning styles	76	13
21	use of multiple effective pedagogies	62	14	25	consistency in instructional approaches and strategies	76	14
28	teaching styles compatible with learning styles	59	15	35	offering students a positive social context	76	15
37	portraying culturally relevant/representative role models in prominent positions in the educational setting	57	16	36	integrating factors above into the mainstream curriculum and programming, instead of treating them as add-ons	76	16
40	integrating factors above into the mainstream curriculum and programming, instead of treating them as add-ons	53	17	14	use of multiple effective pedagogies	72	17
35	encouraging students to become allies for each other by expanding their knowledge and understanding of people who are different	51	18	17	high teacher expectations of students	72	18

32	operating on established or agreed upon norms for group interactions	50	19	21	supportive environment at school	71	19
38	involving parents actively as partners in the educational process	50	20	16	effective teacher-student relationships	67	20
30	collaboration among teachers instead of competition	47	21	28	operating on established or agreed upon norms for group interactions	67	21
31	quality professional development or teachers' continued learning	46	22	20	safe environment at school	62	22
				34	involving parents actively as partners in the educational process	58	23
				26	collaboration among teachers instead of competition	57	24
				30	employing positive use of peer pressure	57	25

study area just for me. I had family who wanted me to succeed and go to college. I knew that I was going to college in elementary school. I knew at age 12 that I wanted to be a doctor, though I did not know what type.”

3. “I had a competitive group of friends who, like me, came from poor/middle class households where there were no college-educated folk in the family. So, WE, had a desire to be successful in our work lives as we believed our family and spiritual lives WERE successful.”

The final of the three conditions for learning that was rated at or above 80% by both groups was high quality teacher content knowledge. This factor was rated at the “very great” or “great” extent level by 90% of alumnae and current students. However, one factor or condition for learning—high teacher expectations of students—was rated quite differently by the two groups of respondents as 83% of alumnae but 72% of current students rated it “very great extent” or “great extent.”

Five conditions for learning were rated higher by current students than they were by alumnae, and these differences may hold implications for the impact of school reform on public education. Among these five factors, “offering early interventions and adequate resources that empower students to devote their undivided attention to learning” was rated “very great extent” or “great extent” by 71% of alumnae respondents but by 86% of the current students in the study. Teacher encouragement was perceived as affecting student success to a “very great extent” or “great extent” by 81% of current students while 76% of alumnae concurred. Several alumnae commented that they were unaware of the fact that their teachers were engaging in professional development or continued learning because such information was not discussed with students during

certain decades covered in this study. Consequently, only 46% of alumnae rated quality professional development or teachers' continued learning at the “very great extent” or “great extent” level while 81% of current students rated it at that level.

Finally, it appears that more attention is being devoted to encouraging students to identify their aspirations for the future as reflected in the ratings of 81% of current students as opposed to 75% of alumnae. The same seems to be true for “portraying culturally relevant/representative role models in prominent positions in the educational setting” since only 57% of alumnae but 81% of current students rated this condition for learning “very great extent” or “great extent.” For the remaining 12 learning conditions, less than 80% of participants in both groups rated them at the “very great extent” or “great extent” level.

One significant finding for this study was evident in the difference in the numbers of items on the Likert Scale section of the two surveys—22 items on the alumnae survey (see appendix F) and 25 items on the current student survey (see appendix G). The difference in the number of items was the result of inconsistencies that I detected while analyzing the data from the alumnae responses to the Likert scale section and comparing them to data from the open-ended questions that pertained to conditions for learning. The inconsistency related to alumnae respondents' rating the factor “safe, supportive environment at school and home” as “very great extent” or “great extent” reflecting 89% of alumnae respondents. However, contents of the answers to the open-ended questions conveyed issues with the school environment as compared to the home environment that called the Likert scale rating into question.

To examine the apparent inconsistencies, I teased out the school and home features of the original question when I created the current student survey so that this single item became four items on the new survey. Therefore, the factors on the new survey were: (a) “safe environment at school,” (b) “supportive environment at school,” (c) “safe environment at home,” and (d) “supportive environment at home.”

As a way of compensating for this change in the surveying, I attempted to get follow-up questions answered by my alumnae participants in which I separated school and home. The response to the follow-up inquiry was limited since I heard from ten of the 28 alumnae who completed the Zoomerang survey in its entirety (36% response rate). Of these ten respondents, a safe, supportive school environment was rated either “very great extent” or “great extent” by 80% while 100% of them rated a safe, supportive home environment that way. Alumnae also were asked about the significant adult they had in mind while completing the survey. I added an open-ended question to the survey asking current student participants to identify the person they had in mind when they rated the Likert scale item about a meaningful relationship with a significant adult.

The results of this line of inquiry were that both groups perceived their home environment as having a greater impact on their success than their school environment. The majority of respondents in both groups also identified a family member as the significant adult to whom they were referring when they rated the extent of the impact of a significant adult on their success (see table 2).

Question Focus:	Environment		Significant Adult			
	School	Home	Family Member	School Personnel	God	No Response
Alumnae	80%	100%	67% (8)	33% (4)	0	0
Current Students	67%	95%	70% (16)	17% (4)	4% (1)	9% (2)

**Table 2: Home-School Environment and Significant Adult Results**

The results of this line of inquiry also validate inconsistencies detected in the responses of ten of the 28 alumnae participants who completed the survey in its entirety. Of the ten alumnae, two were graduates of classes during the 1950-1959 decade, six during the 1960-1969 decade, and the final two during the 1970-1979 decade.

These data were labeled “concerns” since they addressed issues of racism, discrimination, prejudice, and/or an unwelcoming school environment—issues coded jointly as a tree node with one parent node in Nvivo8. The child nodes for this parent node spoke to challenges these alumnae faced that were of a perceived discriminatory nature, including (a) feelings of isolation, (b) inaccessible administration, (c) inadequate preparation for postsecondary education, (d) inadequate or inappropriate counseling, (e) low expectations, (f) scarcity of culturally relevant or representative role models in the educational setting, and (g) tracking. Concerns or complaints are predicted to surface even with a research methodology that focuses on what is working. Despite its focus, AI does not ignore concerns but rather converts them into recommendations for the study organization’s future. As the conclusions in the next chapter reveal, these data were used in the aforementioned manner.

### *Dream Stage Results*

The Dream stage of the AI process is the stage at which study participants articulate their hopes and dreams for the study organization’s future, based upon its successful past. In addition to the findings from the literature review for this study, gathering participants’ hopes and dreams helped to answer the research question regarding beliefs that helped to shape approaches to African American student success.

Gathering these data required participants to respond to one of three writing prompts that offered a context for thinking about and addressing the organization's future.

Responses to the prompts were intended to be posted on the "Student Success Group" site that was created in Yahoo Groups on October 20, 2009. An invitation for alumnae participants to join this Yahoo group was issued on February 6, 2009. The outcome included a few of the invitations being sent to participants' spam folders, and several participants thought they accepted the invitation by responding directly to me instead of clicking the "join this group" button on the Yahoo Groups invitation. Two weeks later, three people, in addition to me, had joined the Yahoo group, so, in consultation with my dissertation adviser, I issued a "change in plans" email to all of the alumnae participants simplifying the data collection process for this stage of the AI process.

Having learned from the technology skill level and time challenges I discovered during the first data collection stage, I opted to gather participants' responses via email exchange since I also had eliminated the idea of engaging all study participants in intergenerational online discussions. Delays in collecting Discovery stage data from current student participants contributed to this decision since I promised to share a preliminary report of the Likert scale results prior to engaging participants in sharing their hopes and dreams for the school's future. In the "change in plans" email message, I tested this new data collection process by posing the previously discussed follow-up questions to the online survey, embedded in the body of the message and attached the same message as a Word file. The results of the test for the new process were less than

anticipated with ten of the 28 remaining alumnae participants<sup>10</sup> responding to the follow-up questions.

On March 30, 2009, I posted the prompts for the Dream stage data collection via email and disseminated the preliminary report of the Likert scale results as an attachment to the message. Participants were directed to review the preliminary report and respond to the prompt of their choice by April 7, 2009. I also sent a similar message to the teacher of the current student participants, so that she could have her students respond to the stage two prompts via her email address prior to leaving for spring break. My goal for the return rate for this data collection stage was 80%; I achieved a 74% return rate. This 74% return rate reflected responses from 36 out of 49 of the participants, of whom 17 were alumnae (61%) and 19 were current students (91%).

The three prompts from which participants chose were as follows:

1. Considering the successes and challenges of our alma mater's past, what one aspect or feature of the high school experience would you improve upon to assure the school's future as an effective, high performing, and well-populated institution? How would improve upon it? Please offer as much detail as possible.
2. Imagine it is the year 2014 and the same online survey has been administered to another group of alumnae and current students. The survey results in two (2) of the lowest ranked items in the report that I just shared with you in this email have improved to being ranked among the top five items. What two (2)

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<sup>10</sup> Since one alumnae participant opted out of the online survey during the Discovery stage after deeming herself unsuccessful, the pool of alumnae participants was reduced from 29 to 28 for the Dream stage, creating a combined sample size of 49 (N=49). Alumnae represented 57% of the sample while current students, still at 21 participants, comprised 43% of the sample.

items did you choose? What has occurred at the school that produced these improved results? Be as specific as possible.

3. Suppose a child who is near and dear to your heart is a student at our alma mater. What do you want the school community (faculty, staff, fellow students, parents, alumnae, and school partners) to do to help her have a successful, fulfilling high school experience, academically, emotionally, and socially?

Of the three prompts, prompt #3 was selected by 21 participants or 58% of those responding, prompt #1 was chosen by 31% or 11 of the responding participants, and prompt #2 was the option of 4 participants (11%).

Respondents' hopes and dreams for the school's future disclosed 17 themes or free nodes which were: (a) strong and supportive alumni association, (b) ample, accessible resources at home and school, (c) knowledgeable counselors, (d) curriculum ideas, (e) high standards or expectations, (f) holistic approach, (g) improved communication skills, (h) outreach or recruitment ideas, (i) parents as partners in all facets of education, (j) professional development ideas, (k) promoting diversity, (l) public relations or marketing ideas, (m) remain all girls school, (n) safe, supportive environment, (o) suggestions for/about school leadership, (p) suggested programs, and (q) highly qualified teachers. The three most frequently referenced nodes in ranked order were holistic approach, safe, supportive environment with appropriate support services and peer and life or career mentoring, and high standards or expectations. A theme-to-prompt analysis was conducted in an effort to determine which prompt tended to yield which themes or free nodes (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

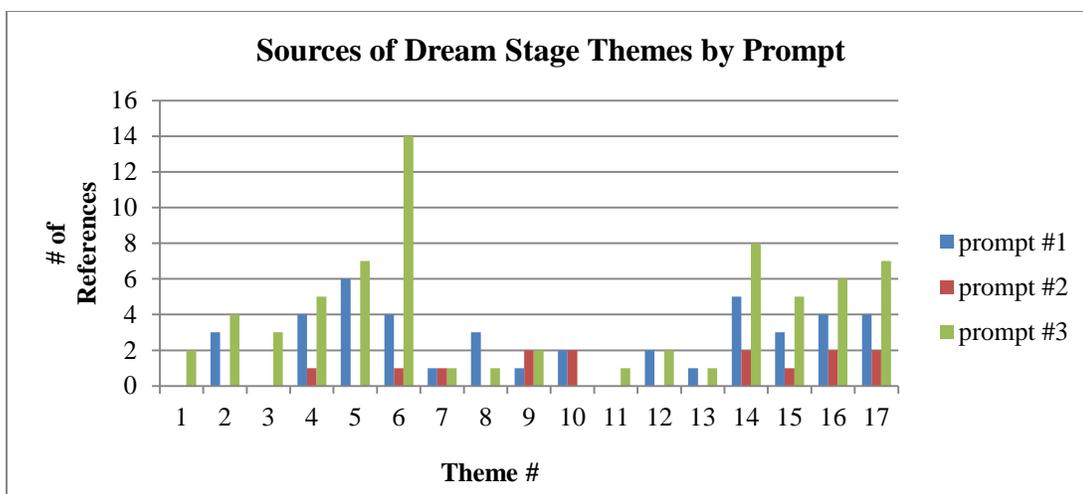
Of these themes, the most frequently referenced was that of the organization practicing a holistic approach to educating its students in the future. As Table 3 and Figure 3 show, the majority of the references were offered by respondents who selected the third prompt, the prompt for which participants shared their ideas by imagining that a loved one was attending the school. Participants tended to name the person they envisioned as the student who would be attending the school, i.e., daughter, granddaughter, niece, younger sibling, or goddaughter.

Distribution of Dream Stage Themes by Prompt					
Theme #	Theme	Prompt #1	Prompt #2	Prompt #3	Rank
1	Strong and supportive alumni association	0	0	2	15
2	Ample, accessible resources (home and school)	3	0	4	8
3	Knowledgeable counselors	0	0	3	13
4	Curriculum ideas	4	1	5	6
5	High standards or expectations	6	0	7	3
6	Holistic approach	4	1	14	1
7	Improved communication skills	1	1	1	14
8	Outreach or recruitment ideas	3	0	1	10
9	Parents as partners in all facets of education	1	2	2	9
10	Professional development ideas	2	2	0	11
11	Promoting diversity	0	0	1	17
12	Public relations or marketing ideas	2	0	2	12
13	Remain all girls school	1	0	1	16
14	Safe, supportive environment	5	2	8	2
15	Suggestions for/about school leadership	3	1	5	7
16	Suggested programs	4	2	6	5
17	Highly qualified teachers	4	2	7	4

**Table 3: Distribution of Dream Stage Themes by Prompt**

Participants' responses that referenced the holistic approach theme included comments represented by the following excerpt from a current student's response:

Academically the teachers could provide coach class as well as peer tutors that could help the students in particular subjects. Emotionally, the guidance counselor could help students by scheduling appointments by which the students could come in and talk about their issues. Socially the teachers can address social problems such as bullying within the school and how to prevent it.



**Figure 3: Sources of Dream Stage Themes by Prompt**

Other examples of details offered by participants who referenced the holistic approach theme depict a vision for the school’s future that stressed the need for the school to take a balanced approach to educating students in ways that:

1. “...challenge their minds, nurture their spirits, and teach them to soar.”
2. “...foster an environment of discipline and responsibility balanced with individual freedom, expression, and rights.”
3. “...teach them how to communicate effectively in a variety of ways, ...work cooperatively, ...build consensus, and ...interact intelligently with everyone they encounter.”

Other recommendations addressing this theme included providing students access to the services of health professionals and assisting them in building character, becoming self-reliant, and developing a sense of self-worth. Some respondents also addressed grade level configuration within this theme; for instance, one alumna asserted “...a stable school environment which will nurture them academically, socially, and emotionally

beginning in grade 6 and continuing through grade 12 could be the difference between being a citizen of the world or a citizen of the hood.”

The theme that was the second highest referenced node was that “safe, supportive environment with appropriate support services and peer and life or career mentoring.” Most of the references to this theme were generated by prompt #3 also. Respondents who referenced this theme tended to offer ideas such as:

- (1) “teachers work together to plan activities and strategies that will create an environment in which staff and students thrive, as a school family, each teacher participating as a part of the whole” [Alumna]
- (2) “...want the school to protect her by keeping the doors closed during the day making sure that it is not easy for anybody to enter the school and making sure that it is not easy for her or another student to leave school unless given permission” [Current Student]
- (3) “create a pool of career and life mentors who would guide the students in the direction of their career goals as well as their life's dream” [Alumna]

The last of the three most frequently referenced nodes was “high standards or expectations.” The majority of these references were made by participants who selected either prompt #1 or prompt #3. In referencing this theme, one alumna recommended that, “All classes offered at the school should be honors courses....” A current student felt it was important that her loved one have “...teachers, faculty, and students to support her academically.” For her loved one, another current student urged the school to “let her know ahead of time if she may be failing a class or let her know when they may be concerned about her grades.”

Although these hopes and dreams were entered in Nvivo8 as free nodes, each free node reflects a variety of suggestions that were merely collapsed into a single free node. For instance, within the suggested programs or models node was the recommendation that the study organization develop and implement plans to become a 6-12 school—a sub-theme that also surfaced in the holistic approach theme. Respondents suggested that the proposed middle grades component (grades 6-8) should be an open enrollment school with girls being acculturated into the study organization’s tradition and legacy of student success. The effectiveness of this strategy would be seen in increased enrollment at the school, particularly in the number of girls who successfully complete the middle grades component and are able to meet the entrance requirements for admission into the existing high school component.

#### *Design and Destiny Stages*

The purpose of the Design stage in the AI process is that of converting Dream stage data into an action plan for the organization’s future that is implemented and monitored during the Destiny stage. However, I decided to share the hopes, dreams, and other relevant data with the study organization’s School Improvement Team (SIT) at an upcoming meeting as a set of recommendations rather than as a fully developed action plan<sup>11</sup>. Of course, all data shared with the SIT will offered while maintaining the confidentiality of the study participants. Thus, this study concluded at the Dream stage with the expectation that the study organization’s SIT will use the recommendations and other data generated in this study to draft its plan for the organization’s future, based upon its successful past. Implementation and of the plan and documentation of the

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<sup>11</sup> Since it is the responsibility of the entire membership of the SIT to plan and make decisions regarding the school’s performance and future, I was a bit presumptuous in my original goal of drafting the action plan alone, with hopes that the other members of the team would adopt and implement it.

process, if and when they occur, would launch the Destiny stage of the AI process. From its inception, the plan has always been for that Destiny stage to launch after this dissertation study ended.

### The Role of Technology

Technology was used in this study as a data collection tool with data gathered extensively, but not exclusively, electronically. As a result, participants in this study were local residents as well as residents of two other states, both of which are hundreds of miles from the state in which the study was conducted. Another participant had to travel abroad prior to submitting her completed Discovery stage survey. Since she had access to technology while in a foreign country, she was able to forward her survey responses to me and remain an active study participant. The use of technology as a data collection tool enabled participants to submit responses at their convenience and enabled me to capture their observations, reactions, and suggestions in their own words. In essence, technology bridged time and distance, afforded asynchronous access, and fostered local, national, and international participation.

At the same time, technology also presented challenges for the duration of this study that tended to revolve around issues of time, timing, and variations in participants' technology skill levels and resources. While time seems to be an ever-present issue and one that was discussed earlier in this chapter, timing as an issue was not as predictable. In hindsight, I always seemed to be requesting data from study participants near a holiday or some other major event, i.e., three days before Christmas, within days of the historic inauguration of President Barack Obama, or during tax season—an event that affected taxpayers as well as tax professionals in the sample.

The most unanticipated timing issue was my request for Dream stage data that was issued shortly before an international computer worm/virus threat was publicized. It seemed that several participants opted to avoid turning on their computers until after the threat passed, thus, precipitating yet another deadline extension.

To compensate for these challenges to the study process and timeline, I made accommodations that facilitated participants' sustained, active involvement in the study.

Those accommodations included:

1. Making certain that attachments were saved in compatibility mode since everyone did not have access to Word 2007 and resending ones when I inadvertently forgot.
2. Sending the Zoomerang survey to participants as a Word document to combat issues of being timed-out of the online survey and losing entered data.
3. Transferring responses from Word to Zoomerang for participants who found technology challenging.
4. Typing participant's response to the prompt as she dictated it—she admitted to being used to relying on her secretary to compensate for her limited keyboarding skills.

Finally, technology was used in this study also as a tool to analyze generated data that tended to be qualitative. Initial analyses were conducted using Excel spreadsheets, the contents of which were transferred eventually to Nvivo8 for more in-depth analysis. In performing these tasks, I used technology as a tutor and tutee as well. As a tutor, I used technology to learn the Nvivo8 software program by participating in an interactive

electronic demonstration of the software on April 23, 2009. I also completed three hours of online tutorials to expand my ability to utilize the program's features and operations effectively. One such operation was that of running queries to compare data within and among groups of participants. Doing so resulted in my use of technology as a tutee since I was programming the computer to perform specific tasks within the Nvivo8 software.

### The Role of the Researcher

As the researcher or principal investigator for this study, my role was that of a participant-observer by virtue of my relationship with the organization of study as an alumna of the organization and a member of the SIT. The use of technology in the data collection and analysis promoted objectivity on my part that was enhanced by removing participants' names from their responses and replacing them with anonymous labels. This labeling also allowed me to make comparisons across documents imported into Nvivo8 for a given respondent, which resulted in observing patterns and/or inconsistencies in a respondent's data.

The ability to make such comparisons led me to the concerns that were coded from the open-ended online survey questions. I was able also to mine those concerns to access the anecdotal data that produced them. The AI process allowed me to transform, rather than ignore, these responses and observations into additional recommendations for study organization's future.

My role as participant-observer also prompted attention to *epoche* or the bracketing of my experiences with and preconceived notions about the study organization while accessing the experiences of others. The fact that I had insider status with study

participants offered instant credibility with the participants; at the same time, technology provided a level of distance between role and membership in study organization.

As the researcher, I was implementer of the AI methodology and process and was able to manipulate process and environment to accommodate group dynamics that surfaced. Manipulating the AI process eventually meant absolving myself from the presumption of developing an action plan alone. Instead, I opted to offer the study organization's SIT a set of recommendations that collaboratively could be integrated into a viable plan of action. In essence, the recommendations suggested a plan for the organization's future that was informed by its successful past.

#### Chapter Summary

This chapter, "Conditions for Learning," described the results of examining African American student success and captured the findings of the data generated during the Discovery and Dream stages of the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) process. A profile of the sample and sample dynamics are detailed as well as modifications that were made in order to implement the planned study.

The benefits and challenges of the technology-assisted data collection and analysis processes were shared, and descriptions of the software programs used to collect and analyze data were provided. The sources of data gathered included historical documents, surveys, and interviews. The presentation of findings was organized by the AI stage in which the data yielding the findings were generated and the research question addressed by each data set. These data included participants' definitions of "success," their perceptions about the conditions for learning that contributed to their success, and their vision for the school's future informed by its successful past.

Among the major findings discussed in this chapter were those that answered the three research questions that were foundational to the study. Those questions were:

1. What conditions tend to facilitate the academic success of African American learners?
2. What has been the history of African American education, especially in the public education arena?
3. What beliefs have helped to shape approaches to African American student success?

Prior to answering these questions, research into the history of the study organization was conducted to determine when it was desegregated and when African American students first represented a majority of the student population as it transitioned from being an all White public high school. The results indicated that the school was desegregated in 1954 after the *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* landmark decision was rendered. For the first time in the school's history, African American students were the majority of the graduating class of 1973, representing 57.2% of that class.

Another preliminary question sought to understand how participants defined "success." Definitions offered by the participants characterized "success" as pursuing or achieving goals or having a fulfilling life or career. Based upon data from the open-ended questions section of the online survey, there were major conditions for learning that participants credited with having a significant impact ("very great extent" or "great extent") on their success. These were academic rigor; family, friends, and community expectations and motivation; and effective or encouraging teachers. From the Likert Scale section in the online survey, the major conditions for learning that participants

identified were encouragement from a significant adult, personal desire to learn, and high quality teacher content knowledge. These data were gathered during the Discovery stage of the AI process.

During the Dream stage of the AI process, participants responded to the writing prompt of their choice to articulate their hopes and dreams for the study organization's future. The major findings for this stage of the data collection and analysis process included themes, i.e., a holistic approach to education; a safe, supportive environment; and high standards or expectations.

This chapter ends with a discussion of findings relative to the role of technology in the study as well as the role of the researcher. In this study, technology fulfilled the roles of tool, tutor, and tutee as reflected in its use in data collection and analysis; in assisting the researcher in learning an unfamiliar, qualitative analysis, software program; and in being directed to perform queries that identified relationships between and within data sets.

Interpretation of the findings presented in this chapter led to the conclusions, implications, and next steps shared in the next chapter, "Lessons Learned."

## Chapter Five – Conclusions

### Lessons Learned

*Seek first to understand, then to be understood.*

- Stephen Covey

This study sought to understand a legacy of African American student success and the conditions for learning that facilitated it at the high school that is the study organization for this research. To do so, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) qualitative research methodology was implemented to answer the following research questions:

1. What conditions tend to facilitate the academic success of African American learners?
2. What has been the history of African American education, especially in the public education arena?
3. What beliefs have helped to shape approaches to African American student success?

Data were gathered and analyzed from multiple sources that included historical documents, interviews, and surveys generated from alumnae and current students who were members of the study sample.

In addition, I maintained reflection journals and logs throughout the dissertation process in which I documented my observations and reactions. I reserved the elements of my journal entries for use in arriving at and articulating implications that I derived from the findings presented in the previous chapter and propose next steps for future research that maybe conducted on this topic.

As the framework for this chapter, I share implications and lessons learned in the context of the research questions previously cited and initially determine whether the study actually answered these questions by identifying sources of evidence. I link the conclusions directly to the research questions, specific findings, and elaborate upon the findings with implications or lessons learned. However, I do not address the questions sequentially.

### *History of African American Education*

The most logical question for me to address first is the second research question, which deals with the history of African American education, especially in the public education arena. Significant evidence gathered and presented in the literature review began answering this question. Additional answers were provided by the review of historical documents pertaining to the study organization and in data gathered from alumnae participants through unstructured interviews and surveys. These sources of evidence reveal a sorted past, fraught with unjust practices but also illuminated by examples of making a difference.

The examples of making a difference involve people of all races and ethnicities. They occurred as early as 1695 when the first known school for Blacks was established in Charleston, South Carolina by a White cleric, Samuel Thomas (Koslow, 1999). After the enactment of the *Emancipation Proclamation*, Blacks left plantations eager to become educated, and some were said to have been literate, even as slaves (Butler, 2009). Butler also found that the first generation of freed slaves chose love and did not talk about slavery to their children because they did not want their children to be bitter, not because they were ashamed. They wanted their children to find their own way.

There is also the *de jure* segregated urban high school that is the alma mater of the late Honorable Thurgood Marshall, the first African American Supreme Court Justice and a major player in the *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* landmark case. There are the accounts of African Americans who sought post-secondary education at Ivy League institutions rather than at a Normal School because of the potential to acquire a higher caliber of knowledge. Their objective was to impart their knowledge to children in their community and offer them a better education than they otherwise would receive, even if it meant that these teachers sacrificed earning baccalaureate degrees for themselves (Goodlad, Soder, & Sirotnik, 1980).

#### *Conditions for Learning*

Regarding the first question, conditions for learning that facilitate African American student success were uncovered while conducting the literature review. Those conditions were transformed into a 5-point Likert scale survey that became a section of the online survey. Participants were asked to rate their perception of the extent of impact each condition had on her success. In addition, open-ended questions that focused on conditions for learning were posed to alumnae participants as part of the online survey. From both sources, the conditions for learning tended to point to the impact of academic rigor; expectations and motivation from family, friends, and community; a personal desire to learn; encouragement from a significant adult; and the presence of effective, encouraging teachers.

These findings were supported when participants continued assessing their experiences by envisioning the future through the eyes of a younger relative, i.e.

granddaughter, cousin, or sibling. Using this vantage point created a meaningful context for the hopes and dreams that participants expressed.

### *Beliefs Shaping African American Student Success*

The final research question dealt with beliefs that helped to shape African American student success. The evidence that addresses this question was conveyed in the findings of the literature review, and substantiated by data embedded in participants' responses and reactions to the study surveys and in telephone interviews. The answers to this question were more often implicit rather than explicit. They reflected both positive and negative influences in participants' home and/or school environments as well as attitudes and perceptions about what constituted success. Examining participants' definitions of success offered insights into their frame of reference for identifying the learning conditions that contributed to their success, academically and in life after high school.

### Implications

#### *Conditions for Learning*

The data gathered and analyzed in this study confirm the existence of conditions that can be created and maintained to foster African American student learning and success. The learning conditions identified in this study during the Discovery and Dream stages of the AI process tend to be home-related and/or school-related as well as personal and/or programmatic. These categories of conditions began surfacing early in the data collection process through interview and survey data. Some of the specifics of the conditions were predictable, i.e., "good teachers," high expectations and academic rigor,

extracurricular activities, access to academic resources, class size, single-gender environment, and motivation from family and friends.

Others that were less predictable included being encouraged to think, insisting that concepts are understood or mastered, displaying a no excuses demeanor, holding students accountable, being a reader, recognizing the history and reputation of the school, and having a fear of failure or not wanting to let down those students who preceded them. The participants in this study, particularly the alumnae, demonstrated an awareness of the history that preceded them and an understanding of their own role in drafting the next chapter of that history.

Regardless of the degree of their predictability, the conditions for learning reported in this study were generated by asking participants to identify the extent of impact that given attributes/conditions had on their success, not whether the conditions were important or existed. Therefore, the failure of an attribute or condition to meet the 80% criterion<sup>12</sup> does not imply that it is not important or does not exist.

One such case in point is the condition for learning relative to quality professional development or teachers' continued learning. Several alumnae participants suggested that this condition was difficult for them to rate because during the time when they were students, teacher professional development was not an openly discussed topic. The rating for this attribute may have been higher for current students because they are dismissed from school early or are given a day off in order to accommodate professional days for teachers. Experience has taught me that modern-day families are more aware of teacher

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<sup>12</sup> This criterion refers to a condition for learning being rated at the "very great extent" and "great extent" levels by at least 80% of the participants in a given response group.

professional development, especially since restructuring the school day and calendar requires parents/guardians to make alternate arrangements for care and supervision.

*History of African American Education*

The data from this study depict a history of African American education that is inspiring and triumphant, yet challenging and often painful as evidenced by my encounters with alumnae, especially those from graduating classes in the decades of 1950-59, 1960-69, and 1970-79. In fact, the first alumna with whom I spoke to extend an invitation to participate in my research study responded with, “You don’t want my data.” Little did I know at the time that this refrain, in some shape or form, would become a recurring theme with several of the more seasoned alumnae I encountered during the study. Often the stories presented themselves once I described my methodology as looking at what is working. The pattern tended to be that the person interjected a veiled disclaimer that was best captured in the “You don’t want my data” response. Another alumna cautioned, “Things are not always as they appear.”

Several respondents addressed/expressed—either explicitly or implicitly—the negative encounters and/or atmosphere they endured at the school. Upon completing the online survey, one person emailed me, almost apologetically, to tell me that she hoped her responses did not skew my data. By this time, I was able to assure her that her story and feelings, sadly, were not unique to her. Her story did surprise me because she was one of the two older girls at my church who inspired me to attend the school. The other source of my motivation informed me that she received an education that was “second to none” but the environment was “unwelcoming.” My conclusion was that they both

suffered in silence, at least publicly. Had it not been for this research, I would have never known the trials, only the triumphs of these individuals.

Ironically, several of the respondents were able to use their concerns as motivation to succeed. The educational attainments of this group of alumnae bear witness to the effectiveness of using prejudice and/or inappropriate counseling to propel themselves to success. Their level of educational and career accomplishment is especially impressive in light of the recurring theme of tracking, the adverse impact it tended to have on students in and out of a given track, and the low expectations that tended to inform the actions of the decision makers. Anecdotal data show students in the college preparatory track tended not to have exposure to technology of the day, while students in the business education track tended not to receive adequate preparation for college. It seems that both tracks were shortsighted in providing students with skills they would need in their future. Thus, tracking failed to fulfill the commonly held school system mission of preparing students to function as productive citizens of society now and in the future.

#### *Beliefs that Helped to Shape African American Student Success*

For the purposes of this research study, the discussion of beliefs that have helped to shape African American student success emanates from the themes framing participants' definitions of success. These data revealed that participants' defined success in terms that were categorized by themes of pursuing or achieving goals and having a fulfilling career or life. Once each respondent offered her definition of success, she was asked whether she considered herself to be successful, based implicitly upon her definition. If she deemed herself successful, she was to proceed with completing the

remainder of the survey. If she deemed herself unsuccessful, she was to stop the survey after answering question three since the questions that followed required her to reflect on her success and the conditions that facilitated it. Only one respondent in the sample of fifty participants discontinued the survey.

This development prompted me to contemplate the reason one alumna would consider herself unsuccessful while she shared a profile similar to at least two other alumnae who completed the survey in its entirety. My sense was that success is a state of mind (Meier, 1995). Consequently, not only is there power in one's thinking she is successful, but also that it is all relative to one's internalized understanding of success. My data reaffirmed that one's station in life tends to color her definition of success (Jakes, 2007). While this reaffirmation took me full-circle to Trent's notion of teachers being able to hold a vision for their students until the students are able to hold one for themselves (1990), it left me pondering the visions teachers hold for their students. It also caused me to wonder whether the teachers' visions of their students are consistent with the vision the students hold and/or the vision their parents/guardians and other loved ones hold for them. Finally, it led me to ponder what children are being told, either implicitly or explicitly, that shapes who they are to become.

Another belief that seemed to shape African American student success was a belief in the reputation of the institution (the study organization) and in the concept or vision of women's education. A quote posted on one of the display cases located in the school's Archives Room caught my attention. The quote reads, "A higher grade of schools is very much required in which females...may be afforded the opportunity of obtaining a more liberal English education" and is dated "1844." The actual quote came

from a report to the mayor of the municipality written by its School Board and read as follows:

A higher grade of schools is very much required in which females who may have manifested superior abilities and attained suitable acquirements in the primary schools may be afforded the opportunity of obtaining a more liberal English education... We earnestly recommend this subject to the consideration of the Council as one of very great importance in completing our system of education (Becker, 1944, p. 18).

In response to this recommendation, the school in this study was established in 1844 as a mandate for women's education but for a different population of females than those who began to enter the institution in September 1954.

The relevance of this mandate to the conclusions I draw for this study lies in the theory that emerged from the concerns that alumnae voiced about the quality of education they received in a somewhat hostile learning environment. I would posit that the study organization has established and maintained a legacy of academic success that inadvertently is inclusive of African American learners because of the nature of the institution. The institution exemplified a paradigm shift in expecting educational excellence in women's public education beyond grade school. The institution's commitment and dedication to the concept may have been motivation for sustaining student success while the ethnicity of the student population was going through transition—another example of the convergence of interest (Bell, 1980). Perhaps the success and longevity of the organization has been more about the institution not failing than about the children not failing. How was this theory borne out as at least an initial

rationale for the legacy of student success? Did transition in thinking, motivation, behavior ever occur from a focus on the institution to a focus on the children? Are the two synonymous?

One source of evidence for my theory appeared in an article pertaining to the integration of another all-White high school in the same municipality but two years earlier in 1952—two years before the *Brown v. Board of Education* landmark decision was even rendered. The confirmation of my position of commitment to institutional reputation motivating African American student success during the desegregation era presents itself in the efforts of the school's principal. The principal developed a support system for the thirteen Black students who entered the school's "A Course" in the fall of 1952. The support system included assigning each Black student a White student to serve as his "chaperone" as well as providing tutorial experiences at school by teachers and on weekends and during summers at a local HBCU by the English Department faculty to strengthen the students' composition skills. The principal's belief was that the Black boys' failure would tarnish the school's reputation (Glazer, 2001).

The implication I offer is that in order to facilitate African American student success, our society and educational systems, along with all of their stakeholders, must empower schools and communities to build a legacy of and reputation for student success that is worth continuing and protecting. Empowering schools and communities equates to providing them with the talent, time, and resources they need to establish schools with welcoming learning environments and in which learners of all races and ethnicities excel, even against all odds.

### Findings Related to the Literature

This study assumes the positive stance of examining what is working for African American learners in public education by acknowledging the past, honoring lived experiences, and using past successes to inform future actions. Situating this study within the body of research and other scholarly works pertaining to African American student success is contingent upon identifying parallels as well as points of departure across the identified works. Such a crosswalk revealed that the conclusions presented herein are consistent with the findings of many of the scholars who, during the course of conducting the study, became my “distant teachers” (Hubbard & Power, 1999, p.181).

Considering the three conditions for learning rated highest by alumnae and current student respondents (encouragement from a significant adult, personal desire to learn, and high quality teacher content knowledge), the work of several scholars prove relevant. The finding of encouragement from a significant adult as the highest rated learning condition is supported by Tatum (2004) and her work regarding racial identity development. Since the majority of participants identified a relative as the significant adult to whom they referred, my study is consistent with those that found that African American parents valued education, supported their children’s schools, and instilled these values in their children (Delpit, 1995; Walker, 2000).

Delpit also asserts that teachers, regardless of race and ethnicity, can effectively teach children of other cultures if they are willing to learn about and from the children. Participants in my study identified teachers of a variety of races and ethnicities who taught them effectively and helped them succeed. This conclusion is supported by the work of Ladson-Billings (1994) and conclusions drawn by Dee (2004, 2005). In fact,

my subjects learned effectively from whatever teacher was before them, but not necessarily because the teachers had been appropriately prepared to teach them. To the contrary, students in my study were motivated by their personal desire to learn, and the teachers may have been motivated to see these students succeed because the school had a reputation worthy of protection by the faculty—student failure would adversely impact the school’s legacy (Glazer, 2001). These two, very different sources of motivation also support the concept of a convergence of interest (Bell, 1980).

One other condition for learning that was highly rated by alumnae and current students was the impact of a safe, supportive home environment on their success. For alumnae respondents, the online survey presented the school environment and the home environment as a compound learning condition that 89% rated at the “great” and “very great extent” levels, but their answers to the open-ended questions on the survey painted a different picture of the school environment. When the environments were separated in a follow-up alumnae survey, the home environment was rated significant by 100% of the respondents and the school environment by 80%. On the current student online survey, the two environments were presented separately, resulting in 95% rating the home environment at the “great” and “very great extent” levels, but the school environment yielded an average of 66.5%. The characteristics that participants cited as evidence of the impact of home environment are consistent with those identified by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005). These characteristics were parental communication and encouragement regarding the importance of education, the quality of parental supervision in the home, and the style of parenting practiced in the home.

Regarding the school environment, not all of the respondents in my study rated high teacher expectations of students as a significant condition for learning. Several alumnae participants detected low expectations of them by certain teachers and deemed these expectations racially motivated. Wells, Holme, Revilla, & Atanda (2005) support this assessment with the conclusion that equity in access to quality education in this country has been tainted by racial and racist attitudes and actions. Attitudes and actions of this nature should have been anticipated since a legal decree, *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), was expected to promote a paradigm shift. As Rogers (1995) found, the more rigid the structures surrounding the innovation, the more likely it is that the innovation will meet with resistance and the slower the rate of adoption. Perhaps this observation explains the absence of “deliberate speed” in the implementation of *Brown*.

In spite of such attitudes and actions, the students in this study managed to achieve academically. In their study, Lewis and Kim (2008) found that African American learners in their study demonstrated a desire to learn that flourished, even under adverse educational conditions. They discovered resilience that transcended a school culture of low expectations, and concluded that even second graders were able to detect effective teaching practices and strategies.

One ineffective practice that this study noted was that of ability tracking. As conveyed in the findings, tracking shortchanged students in both academic tracks relative to providing them with the skills they would need in their future. This conclusion is consistent with the literature regarding the use of tracking, especially in public education (Dickens, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Hochschild, 2003; Oakes, 2008; DeSena &

Ansalone, 2009). However, tracking did not prevent the participants in this study from being successful.

This pattern of African American student success represents a point of departure with scholars who posit the theory of a culture of academic disengagement that has been described as “acting White” (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). In stark contrast, students in my study viewed academic achievement as a norm, as an expectation. Their point of view is supported by the research of Spencer, Noll, Stoltzfus, & Harpalani (2001) who found African American learners valued education and academic success.

While my study aligns with these researchers’ conclusion, it defies the position of African Americans thinking of themselves, and behaving, as victims (McWhorter, 2000). Instead, the alumnae participants in my study tended to use their adversity to propel themselves to success and capitalized on the extraordinary opportunity they were afforded to excel (Gladwell, 2008a, 2008b). Neither the students’ success in the face of adversity nor convergence of interests negates the importance of effective teacher-student relationships, effective teacher preparation, and comprehensive professional development (Ferguson, 2002; Dee, 2005).

As Paley (1992) demonstrated in her work with Kindergartners, attitudes and practices of exclusion formulate early in human growth and development. However, a meaningful relationship with a significant adult can positively impact student success, as the participants in my study demonstrate by identifying the conditions for learning that contributed to their success. In essence my study could be akin to a longitudinal study, not because I began collecting data in 1954, but because my study taps into data spanning 1954-2009—a period of 55 years! I cover that span by capturing the collective memories

and reflections of women regarding their high school experiences in the same institution. In doing so, the benefits of using AI methodology since it prompted me not only to convert concerns into recommendations but also to ask the “right” questions of data generated by the outliers my study yielded (Levitt, 2005; Gladwell, 2008a).

### *The Outliers*

A surprising development in my study was the nature of concerns that surfaced during my data collection and analysis process—concerns that almost derailed some alumnae participation. A sub-group of the alumnae respondents in this study initially expressed reservations either about participating or about the data they provided because they deemed their own experiences during high school might be inconsistent with the focus of my study. Their ambiguity stemmed from school climate and culture issues, not from the quality of education these women received in high school and definitely not due to their gender, but rather because of their race.

By virtue of their adverse experiences, this sub-group of participants epitomizes the belief that adversity, not privilege, fosters success (Gladwell, 2008b). They endured adversity in the form of racism and its fallout to become models of success. Based upon Gladwell’s research examining the success of highly accomplished individuals—outliers—and sharing trends that he observed, I concluded that this sub-group of participants could be considered outliers (2008a).

The term, *outliers*, is used primarily in quantitative research to describe “unusual scores in the data that are often considered extreme and require special consideration” (Hinkle, Wiersma, & Jurs, 2003, p. 63). While the data gathered from my sub-group were anecdotal and not scores, these data could be considered unusual and deserving of

special attention when compared to anecdotal data from the rest of the participants in my research study. This sub-group represented 20% of the total participants but shared compelling reflections of the environment in which they had succeeded. A closer look at these reflections in the context of Gladwell's work produced compelling conclusions as well as questions. Gladwell (2008a) asserts that all of the subjects in his study had extraordinary opportunities that maximized their extraordinary talent. He concludes that "...what truly distinguishes their histories is not their extraordinary talent but their extraordinary opportunities" (p. 55). It appears that space was carved out for his outliers to be nurtured on their way to success by purely arbitrary advantage, i.e., "accidents of time and place and birth" (p. 68). He examines these accidents and concludes that these highly successful people were given the opportunity to practice and develop their expertise for what amounted to 10,000 hours or seven consecutive years—the amount of time Gladwell's meta-analysis showed is required to master a skill in order to qualify as a world-class expert.

By this standard, could the study organization have been the space that was carved out for my outliers—the concerned group? Could the *de jure* segregated Black high school have been the space that was carved out for the likes of late Chief Justice Thurgood Marshall? What is/was it about these "carved out spaces" that fostered success? Yes, my outliers are talented, but they were also granted an extraordinary opportunity to enroll in a school that prior to 1954 had been legally and traditionally off-limits to people of their race. Despite school climate issues, my outliers excelled. How do we as a society and culture replicate and maintain these "carved out spaces" so that ALL children have extraordinary opportunities for success?

What happened to the “carved out space” of the *de jure* segregated Black high school? Why didn’t its legacy of success endure? It would be interesting to explore “a tale of two institutions” to determine how one has become a National Blue Ribbon School while the other has become the poster child for the failure of public education under *No Child Left Behind*. Could the answer be as profoundly simple as Mamie Todd’s assessment? When asked by her grandson about the current state of affairs in the African American community, she replied, “It’s simple, baby, we got what we fought for, but we lost what we had” (Jealous, 2008).

If I were able to examine the same “accidents” for my outliers, what would I find? What would be the measures of success? For a college preparatory high school, would it be the number of alumnae who achieved baccalaureate degrees and beyond? While generalization of Gladwell’s findings regarding his outliers may prove a bit of a stretch, the outliers in my study, “the concerned” sub-group, were afforded seven consecutive years to practice being academically successful—three years of high school and four years of college. It was the success that they achieved during those first three years that empowered them to continue “practicing” for the next four years. Had they been unsuccessful during high school, college would not have been a viable option for them. They would have been relegated to pursue a full-time vocation.

Only a small percentage of these outliers appeared not to have gone directly into post-secondary education, and even that percentage did not opt to launch a vocation because of poor academic achievement. For example, one participant from this small percentage went directly into the world of work full-time because she was “tracked” to do so. However, she was presented an extraordinary opportunity when she accepted a staff

position at an institution of higher education (IHE) and decided to pursue her degree on a part-time basis after marrying and starting a family. This option doubled the amount of time it took her to earn her degree. However, her degree was conferred upon her as the valedictorian of her graduating class! As the first line of the poem, “A Dream Deferred” queries, “What happens to a dream deferred” (Hughes, 1948). According to Grimes (2007), the theme of this poem is that “having to postpone one’s deepest desires can lead to destruction.” Fortunately, this respondent’s story of a dream deferred guided her to success.

### Next Steps

Having been afforded the extraordinary opportunity to examine a focus about which I am passionate, I am convinced that future research on this topic should expand the focus by examining a comparable formerly all-male, now co-ed urban public high school with a similar history and profile—thereby addressing the issue of the intersection of race and gender. This study might be extended to include data collection at the higher education level to determine how African American student success during high school transfers to post-secondary performance. The findings of this study also should be examined in an open enrollment or comprehensive high school. It is suggested that researcher(s) would study the process and outcomes while attempting to replicate the conditions for learning that participants in this study identified as having a positive impact on their success.

Since this study ended with partial completion of the Design stage of the AI process, work should continue with the study organization’s School Improvement Team (SIT) to complete the Design stage and to develop a plan of action that integrates the

recommendations offered by the participants in this study. The expectation is that the SIT Team would then be ready to move into the Destiny stage, documenting and studying the implementation process derived from the recommendations. In doing so, the SIT Team may find AI to be an important tool in the school improvement process.

Beyond these possibilities for next steps, I am intrigued with the idea of following up with the respondent who opted out of the study as a way to explore the nexus between student success and self-perception. I am considering also the notion of conducting additional research that continues to examine the “You Don’t Want My Data” perspective, which could extend to studying the outliers and possibly answering the questions I pose in the earlier “outliers” discussion.

In the data collection process, a future researcher might engage a third cohort to respond to survey—a cohort of teacher educators from local institutions of higher education (IHE) who would rate their perception of the life-giving forces regarding African American student success. Also in the higher education arena, researchers could conduct an AI study to determine the lived experiences of IHE teacher educators and students when the Academy has been and/or will be at its best in addressing the racial achievement gap in P-12 public education. Another possibility could be to survey IHE education faculty regarding the Academy’s role in addressing the racial achievement gap in education and how the Academy is fulfilling it.

Finally, future research might examine the implementation of *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* and the integration of American public schools as an innovation and analyze it according to Roger’s (1995) principles of diffusion.

### Final Thoughts

This research process was definitely an odyssey, a sojourn into areas and issues that I never imagined. I found that talking about their high school experiences seemed cathartic for quite a few of the women in my study. I called women just to invite them to participate in my study and ended up taking copious notes—unexpectedly collecting data and documenting anecdotal accounts. While all I wanted was an email address, I became a trusting repository for the stories and by accident, the scars of these women. Had their successes masked the questions no one ever raised?

It may be that the scars were not transparent during high school because of the extraordinary opportunity these students had been afforded and the posture of strength they were taught to display. An alternative approach is offered by hooks (1995) when she declares, “Without surrendering the meaningful legacy of triumph over adversity that has been such a dynamic aspect of black experience in the United States, we must always make a place for the acknowledgment of unresolved, recurring psychological pain” (p. 144).

Hence, I believe my research offers insight into the “mystery” of limited participation in the school’s Alumni Association by alumnae from several of the earlier decades represented in my study. I detect a distinction by class years relative to who is active consistently and who is not. I would venture to assert that the data regarding negative memories, hostile or unwelcoming environment, perceptions of racist attitudes, and low teacher expectations hold implications for alumnae of the 50s, 60s, and 70s [and maybe even the early 80s] and the level of their continued involvement with the school. I also posit that alumnae of the late 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s have more positive attitudes

about the school because alumnae of earlier decades paved the way by enduring the discomfort at the price of receiving a quality education and succeeding in their post-secondary educational and career endeavors.

In terms of the research process, I was able to resolve my initial reservations concerning Appreciative Inquiry as the appropriate research methodology for my research focus. I still contend that engaging participants effectively and consistently in the AI process requires an active commitment to the study organization on the part of the participants, dedication to the researcher, a vested interest in the outcome of the research, and/or research funding so that participants may be compensated for the extensive investment of time in the project. This research experience taught me that successful people tend to be busy people who maintain their habit of success by finding time and space for themselves. Being able to compensate them for their time may enhance the level of involvement in such research efforts.

Despite the length of the research process, AI provided the opportunity to shift my thinking from problems to solutions, from obstacles to what is working, and from the racial achievement gap to African American student success. However, I must admit that I was doing exactly what I promised not to do—ignoring the complaints. AI allowed me to honor the “complaints” while making the conscious decision to refer to these data as “concerns.” I discovered that participants made it easier for me to translate their concerns into recommendations because they tended to express the concerns in more positive language than I otherwise would have anticipated.

The electronic nature of the data collection, which was a major role of technology in this study, also afforded participants a degree of anonymity that may have prompted

their candor. The challenges that technology presented during the data collection process may be mitigated by the department negotiating use of Blackboard space by doctoral candidates for electronic data collection so that participants only have to access one site to participate in the data collection process, especially for a methodology such as AI in which data are collected at multiple stages.

Perhaps seasoned alumni, like many in this study, may be able to replace the not so pleasant memories that produced concerns with experiences of returning to their alma mater to enhance their technology skills. In return for this benefit, the alumni could interact with current students to bring relevance to the history and reputation of the school while demonstrating and instilling the social graces that several respondents anticipate the school will teach. Such interactions could be the focus of ILCs or intergenerational learning communities that integrate reciprocal teaching and existing efforts to re-engage alumnae in meaningful ways.

The regular presence in the building of these models of African American student success should help current students channel feelings that maybe provoked by confronting history and truth so that the negative emotions are not permitted to paralyze the receiver/hearer of that truth. Both groups can support each other in resisting the tendency to suppress or mask pain to display strength (hooks, 1995). Together, they will master the art of permitting such feelings to empower and propel them into action (Gladwell, 2008b; Morgan, 2008).

Having shared the belief that adversity fosters success, it is as equally important to stress that no child should have to encounter hostility or feel unwelcomed, especially in the learning environment. Educators as well as the other significant adults in

children's lives must break the "habit of exclusion" (Paley, 1992, p. 117) and promote an atmosphere of inclusivity while modeling the expectation. This lesson learned is significant, particularly since the school in this study is embarking upon yet another period of transition that some alumnae view as a potential "threat" to the school's longevity.

In an effort to summarize my final thoughts, I offer the following literary quote:

The fact that the adult American Negro female emerges a formidable character is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. It is seldom accepted as an inevitable outcome of the struggle won by survivors, and deserves respect if not enthusiastic acceptance (Angelou, 1969/2009, p. 268).

The participants in this study, especially the outliers, offered a glimpse into the conditions for learning that fostered their success. In doing so, they personify not only the words of Dr. Maya Angelou but also those of Sir Winston Churchill which declare, "Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts" (Anderson, 2007, p. 12).

## Appendices

## Appendix A

## Cover Letter for Expedited Research



## Cover Letter for Expedited Research

August 21, 2008

Dear Participant,

My name is Pamela Williams Morgan, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Instructional Technology Ed.D. Program in the College of Education at Towson University. As part of the completion of my dissertation project, I will be conducting a research study designed to look beyond the racial achievement gap in education to determine the attributes, characteristics, and features of the high school program to which former and current students credit their academic success.

Department of  
Educational Technology  
and Literacy  
  
College of Education  
  
Towson University  
  
8000 York Road  
  
Towson, Maryland  
21252-0001  
  
t. (410) 704-2576  
f. (410) 704-2733

You are being asked to participate in this study with the understanding that your participation is entirely voluntary. If you are a current student at Western, your academic standing or grade will in no way be affected by whether you choose to participate in this study. No instructional time will be required in order for you to participate. Since TAM students are members of the Future Educators Association (FEA) at Western, you will be asked to complete the survey after school during FEA meeting times.

Should you elect to participate in this research study, your identity will not be revealed at any time, and you will supply your responses to the survey confidentially. All individual records and results from the study will remain confidential. Only group data will be reported.

If you have questions or concerns about this study and/or your participation in it, please contact Mrs. Morgan at (410) 704-4331, Dr. Roxana DellaVecchia (faculty sponsor) at 410-704-2422, or Dr. Patricia Alt (Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants) at (410) 704-2236. Survey results will be made available to you upon completion of the research project.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation, time and support.

Sincerely,

Pamela Williams Morgan

Doctoral Candidate and Principal Investigator

## Appendix B

### Statement of Assent for Participants Who are Alumni



#### Statement of Assent (for Participants who are Alumni)

#### ***Research Study: Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap: Creating Conditions for African American Student Success***

I have read all information pertaining to this research study. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study with the understanding that my identity will be confidential and that I am free to withdraw at any time without affecting any relationship with the institution that is the subject of this study or the one at which this study is being conducted. I also understand that supplying contact information is optional and that doing so reflects my interest in being informed of the results of this research study.

Participant's Name (printed)	
Participant's <i>Signature</i>	Date
Year of Western Graduation	Email Address (optional)
Principal Investigator's Name (printed)	
Principal Investigator's <i>Signature</i>	Date

## Appendix C

### December 22, 2008 Electronic Invitation - Alumnae

Dear Fellow \_\_\_\_\_ite,

My name is Pamela Williams Morgan (Class of 1967), and I am a doctoral candidate in the Instructional Technology Program at Towson University. As part of my dissertation project, I am conducting a research study designed to determine attributes, characteristics, and features of the high school program to which former and current students credit their academic and career success. I am using a research methodology called “Appreciative Inquiry” which looks at what is working in an organization, in this case our alma mater, for the purpose of developing a plan for the organization’s future that is built upon its past success.

To that end, I am inviting you to participate in two phases of my research study, “Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap: Creating Conditions for African American Student Success.” In the first phase, you will complete an online survey that requires you to reflect upon your high school experiences. Completing the survey will take no more than 30 minutes of your time. The link to the survey is provided in the consent statement that will be sent to you in my next email message. The findings from your survey responses will be used to develop a questionnaire that will be administered to current students who are enrolled in the Teacher Academy at \_\_\_\_\_.

The second phase of the study will engage you in posting your ideas or dreams for \_\_\_\_\_’s future that are informed by your successful past and that of the school’s. The current students will participate with you in posting their ideas and dreams for the school’s future. The online posting will require 30-45 minutes of your time over a one-week period during the last week of January or first week of February, 2009. Shortly before then, you will receive an invitation to join the Student Success Group on Yahoo Groups, the site on which you will post your ideas. Your collective ideas will be compiled in an action plan that will be shared with \_\_\_\_\_’s current Site Based Team for their consideration and possible implementation.

You are being asked to participate in this study with the understanding that your participation is entirely voluntary and that you may end your participation at any time. You will offer your responses to the survey confidentially. All individual records and results from the study will remain confidential. Only group data will be reported.

This study has been approved for implementation by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Towson University and by the Department of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability (DREAA) for the Baltimore City Public School System. If you have questions or concerns about this study and/or your participation in it, please contact me in your reply to this message or at (410) 704-4331. You may also contact Dr. Roxana DellaVecchia (faculty sponsor) at 410-704-2422 or Dr. Patricia Alt (Chairperson of the

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants) at (410) 704-2236. Survey results will be made available to you upon completion of the research project.

Should you elect to participate in this research study, please read and accept the consent statement that appears in the next email message that you receive from me. Once you accept my invitation, you may use the hyperlink provided with the consent form to access and complete the survey. I will share the results of the survey with you as well the questionnaire that current Western students will complete via the Student Success Yahoo Groups site. Once the responses for the questionnaire are received, I will invite you to participate in the online discussion of your dreams for our alma mater's future that will be conducted on the Student Success Yahoo Groups site.

Finally, if you are in touch with other \_\_\_\_\_ alumnae who would be viable candidates for this study, please forward their names and email addresses to me so I can extend an invitation to them. The survey will remain open until noon on Friday, January 16, 2009 unless all consenting invitees have completed the survey prior to that date. Thank you in advance for your cooperation, time and support.

Sincerely,

*Pamela*

Pamela Williams Morgan

Doctoral Candidate and Principal Investigator

PS: Just in case you missed it, \_\_\_\_\_ was recently named a Maryland Blue Ribbon School of Excellence by the State Superintendent and was named one of America's best high schools by *U.S. News and World Report*.

**Research Study: Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap: Creating Conditions for African American Student Success**

**Principal Investigator: Pamela Williams Morgan**  
**Dissertation Advisor: Dr. Roxanna DellaVecchia**  
**Institution of Higher Education: Towson University**

**Consent Statement**

I have read all information pertaining to this research study, including the phases of participation and the estimated time commitment. I consent to participate in the study with the understanding that my identity will be confidential and that I am free to withdraw at any time without affecting any relationship with the institution that is the subject of this study or the one at which this study is being conducted.

I accept your invitation to participate in this research study. I have indicated my acceptance by entering my name, date of acceptance, and preferred email address below and am returning this consent statement as a reply to this message.

---

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**Name (First and Last):**

**Date:**

**Preferred Email Address:**

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Please proceed to the online survey housed in Zoomerang.com using the following hyperlink to access the survey:

<http://www.zoomerang.com/Survey/?p=WEB228MXSC5KBW>

The program does not have an option for stopping the survey, saving your responses, and returning later to finish the survey. Therefore, I am urging you to begin the survey when you can devote 16-30 minutes of uninterrupted time to this task. The survey will remain open until noon on Friday, January 16, 2009 unless all consenting invitees have completed the survey prior to that date.

## Appendix D



February 9, 2009

Dear Fellow \_\_\_\_\_ite,

My name is Pamela Williams Morgan (Class of 1967), and I am a doctoral candidate in the Instructional Technology Program at Towson University. As part of my dissertation project, I am conducting a research study designed to determine attributes, characteristics, and features of the high school program to which former and current students credit their academic and career success. I am using a research methodology called “Appreciative Inquiry” which looks at what is working in an organization, in this case our alma mater, for the purpose of developing a plan for the organization’s future that is built upon its past success. You are being asked to participate in this study because you are a junior or senior who is currently enrolled in the Teacher Academy of Maryland (TAM) at \_\_\_\_\_.

Department of  
Educational Technology  
and Literacy

College of Education

Towson University

8000 York Road

Towson, Maryland  
21252-0001

t. (410) 704-2576  
f. (410) 704-2733

To that end, I am inviting you to participate in two phases of my research study, “Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap: Creating Conditions for African American Student Success.” In the first phase, you will complete an online survey that is housed in Zoomerang.com and requires you to reflect upon your high school experiences. The link to the survey will be

given to your Teacher Academy teacher, Mrs. \_\_\_\_\_, who will supervise your completion of the survey. Completing the survey will take no more than 30 minutes of your time. The program does not have an option for stopping the survey, saving your responses, and returning later to finish the survey. Therefore, \_\_\_\_\_ will have you begin the survey when you can devote 16-30 minutes of uninterrupted time to this task, preferably during a Future Educators Association (FEA) meeting. The survey will remain open until all students who have their parents’/guardians’ consent have had an opportunity to complete it. The findings from your survey responses will be compared to those provided by alumnae of the school to determine patterns in your experiences.

In the second phase of the study, you will participate with the alumnae participants in posting your ideas or dreams for \_\_\_\_\_’s future that are informed by your successful past and that of the school’s. The online posting will require 30-45 minutes of your time over a one-week period later this month—I receive all of your online survey responses. You will post these ideas on my Yahoo Groups site, “Student Success Group,” using a special

email account that I created just for the purposes of this portion of my data collection to protect your identity and your personal email address. In preparation for accessing the site, I will send an invitation to \_\_\_\_\_ at the special email address asking you to join the Student Success Group on Yahoo Groups. Once all ideas have been posted, I will terminate the special email account but will share the findings with you through \_\_\_\_\_. Your collective ideas will be compiled in an action plan that will be shared with \_\_\_\_\_'s current Site Based Team for their consideration and possible implementation.

You are being asked to participate in this study with the understanding that your participation is entirely voluntary and that you may end your participation at any time. You will offer your responses to the survey and post your ideas about the school's future confidentially. All individual records and results from the study will remain confidential. Only group data will be reported.

This study is supported by \_\_\_\_\_, your Principal. Also, it has been approved for implementation by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Towson University and by the Department of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability (DREAA) for the Baltimore City Public School System. If you have questions or concerns about this study and/or your participation in it, please contact me at (410) 704-4331. You may also contact Dr. Roxana DellaVecchia (faculty sponsor) at 410-704-2422 or Dr. Patricia Alt (Chairperson of the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants) at (410) 704-2236.

Please share this letter with your parent or guardian as soon as possible. Should you elect to participate in this research study and your parent/guardian grants you permission to do so, please read the consent statement that accompanies this letter, complete it with your parent/guardian, and return the completed consent form to \_\_\_\_\_. Once I receive your completed consent forms, I will sign it and make a copy for your records. I will forward the survey hyperlink to \_\_\_\_\_, and she will allow you to access and complete the online survey.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation, time and support.

Sincerely,

Pamela Williams Morgan  
Doctoral Candidate and Principal Investigator

**Appendix E**

## Statement of Assent for Participants Who are Minors



**Statement of Assent  
(for Participants who are Minors)**

***Research Study: Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap: Creating Conditions for  
African American Student Success***

I have read all information pertaining to this research study. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study with the understanding that my identity will be confidential and that I am free to withdraw at any time without affecting any relationship with the institution that is the subject of this study or the one at which this study is being conducted. I also understand that supplying contact information is optional and that doing so reflects my interest in being informed of the results of this research study.

Student's Name (printed)	
Student's <i>Signature</i>	Date
Parent's/Guardian's Name (printed)	Daytime Telephone Number
Parent's/Guardian's <i>Signature</i>	Date
Principal Investigator's Name	Date
Principal Investigator's <i>Signature</i>	

**Appendix F**

## Online Alumnae Survey

**Pamela Williams Morgan Fall 2008**

---

**Research Topic:** Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap:  
Creating Conditions for African American Student Success

---

**Respondent's Demographic Information****Name:**

---

1 Last

---

2 First

---

3 Middle Initial

---

4 Maiden Name

---

5 Years of Attendance at Western High School

---

6 Year of Graduation

---

7 Current Occupation/Profession

---

8 Highest Level of Educational Attainment

---

9 College Alma Mater

---

10 **Do you consider yourself to be an African American?**

YES  NO

**SUBMIT** 

Survey Page 1



**Pamela Williams Morgan Fall 2008**

---

**Part I:**

Participants in this study are asked to respond to the following open-ended questions

- 
- 11 What is your definition of success?



- 
- 12 Do you consider yourself to be successful? Why? [If yes, proceed with questioning. If no, please stop completing the survey after answering this question.]



- 
- 13 What conditions for learning were in place that enabled you to be academically successful during high school?



- 
- 14 What was it about the school--faculty, curriculum, administration, and extra-curricular program--that contributed to your success?



- 
- 15 What was it about your high school experience that prepared you to face new challenges in leadership?



- 
- 16 What was it about your high school experience that prepared you to

face new challenges in post-secondary education?

- 
- 17 What was it about your high school experience that prepared you to face new challenges in technology?

- 
- 18 What was it about your high school experience that prepared you to face new challenges in life in general?



Survey Page 2



Pamela Williams Morgan Fall 2008

---

### Part II:

Please review the list of factors below. Using the accompanying scale, rate the extent of the impact that you feel each factor had on your success during your high school years and beyond.

---

## 19 Personal desire to learn

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

## 20 High quality teacher content knowledge

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

## 21 Use of multiple effective teaching strategies or methods

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

## 22 Teacher encouragement

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

## 23 Effective teacher-student relationships

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

## 24 High teacher expectations of students

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

## 25 Encouragement from a significant adult

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

## 26 Teachers' passion, practice and persistence

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

## 27 Safe, supportive environment at school and home

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
-------------------	--------------	----------	--------------	-------------------

1       2       3       4       5

---

28 Teaching styles compatible with learning styles

Very great extent       Great extent       Somewhat       Small extent       Very small extent  
 1       2       3       4       5

---

29 Consistency in instructional approaches and strategies

Very great extent       Great extent       Somewhat       Small extent       Very small extent  
 1       2       3       4       5

---

30 Collaboration among teachers instead of competition

Very great extent       Great extent       Somewhat       Small extent       Very small extent  
 1       2       3       4       5

---

31 Quality professional development or teachers' continued learning

Very great extent       Great extent       Somewhat       Small extent       Very small extent  
 1       2       3       4       5

---

32 Operating on established or agreed upon norms for group interactions

Very great extent       Great extent       Somewhat       Small extent       Very small extent  
 1       2       3       4       5

---

33 Encouraging students to identify their aspirations for the future

Very great extent       Great extent       Somewhat       Small extent       Very small extent  
 1       2       3       4       5

---

34 Employing positive use of peer pressure

Very great extent       Great extent       Somewhat       Small extent       Very small extent  
 1       2       3       4       5

---

35 Encouraging students to become allies for each other by expanding their knowledge and understanding of people who are different

Very great extent       Great extent       Somewhat       Small extent       Very small extent  
 1       2       3       4       5

---

36 Offering early interventions and adequate resources that empower students to devote their undivided attention to learning

Very great extent      Great extent      Somewhat      Small extent      Very small extent

1      2      3      4      5

---

37 Portraying culturally relevant/representative role models in prominent positions in the educational setting

Very great extent      Great extent      Somewhat      Small extent      Very small extent

1      2      3      4      5

---

38 Involving parents actively as partners in the educational process

Very great extent      Great extent      Somewhat      Small extent      Very small extent

1      2      3      4      5

---

39 Offering students a positive social context

Very great extent      Great extent      Somewhat      Small extent      Very small extent

1      2      3      4      5

---

40 Integrating factors above into the mainstream curriculum and programming, instead treating them as add-ons

Very great extent      Great extent      Somewhat      Small extent      Very small extent

1      2      3      4      5



**Appendix G**

## Online Current Student Survey



Pamela Williams Morgan\_TAM  
Students\_Spring 2009

---

**Research Topic:** Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap:  
Creating Conditions for African American Student Success

---

**Respondent's Demographic Information****Name:**

---

1 Last

---

2 First

---

3 Middle Initial

---

4 Years of Attendance at Western High School

---

5 Expected Year of Graduation

6 Career Goal or Intended Profession

7 Name of the Middle School You Attended

8 Expected College Choice

9 **Do you consider yourself to be an African American?**

YES NO



Survey Page 1



**Pamela Williams Morgan\_TAM  
Students\_Spring 2009**

**Part I:**

Participants in this study are asked to respond to the following open-ended questions

10 What is your definition of success?

- 11 Do you consider yourself to be successful? Why? [If yes, proceed with questioning. If no, please stop completing the survey after answering this question.]



Survey Page 2



Pamela Williams Morgan\_TAM  
Students\_Spring 2009

### Part II:

Please review the list of factors below. Using the accompanying scale, rate the extent of the impact that you feel each factor had on your success during your high school years.

- 12 Personal desire to learn

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent

1    2    3    4    5

- 13 High quality teacher content knowledge

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent

1       2       3       4       5

**14** Use of multiple effective teaching strategies or methods

Very great extent     Great extent     Somewhat     Small extent     Very small extent  
 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**15** Teacher encouragement

Very great extent     Great extent     Somewhat     Small extent     Very small extent  
 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**16** Effective teacher-student relationships

Very great extent     Great extent     Somewhat     Small extent     Very small extent  
 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**17** High teacher expectations of students

Very great extent     Great extent     Somewhat     Small extent     Very small extent  
 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**18** Encouragement from a significant adult

Very great extent     Great extent     Somewhat     Small extent     Very small extent  
 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**19** Teachers' passion, practice and persistence

Very great extent     Great extent     Somewhat     Small extent     Very small extent  
 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**20** Safe environment at school

Very great extent     Great extent     Somewhat     Small extent     Very small extent  
 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

**21** Supportive environment at school

Very great extent     Great extent     Somewhat     Small extent     Very small extent  
 1                       2                       3                       4                       5

22 Safe environment at home

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

---

23 Supportive environment at home

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

---

24 Teaching styles compatible with learning styles

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

---

25 Consistency in instructional approaches and strategies

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

---

26 Collaboration among teachers instead of competition

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

---

27 Quality professional development or teachers' continued learning

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

---

28 Operating on established or agreed upon norms for group interactions

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

---

29 Encouraging students to identify their aspirations for the future

Very great extent	Great extent	Somewhat	Small extent	Very small extent
<u>1</u>	2	3	4	5

---

30 Employing positive use of peer pressure

---

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent  
 1     2     3     4     5

- 31 Encouraging students to become allies for each other by expanding their knowledge and understanding of people who are different

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent  
 1     2     3     4     5

- 32 Offering early interventions and adequate resources that empower students to devote their undivided attention to learning

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent  
 1     2     3     4     5

- 33 Portraying culturally relevant/representative role models in prominent positions in the educational setting

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent  
 1     2     3     4     5

- 34 Involving parents actively as partners in the educational process

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent  
 1     2     3     4     5

- 35 Offering students a positive social context

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent  
 1     2     3     4     5

- 36 Integrating factors above into the mainstream curriculum and programming, instead treating them as add-ons

Very great extent    Great extent    Somewhat    Small extent    Very small extent  
 1     2     3     4     5





Pamela Williams Morgan\_TAM  
Students\_Spring 2009

- 
- 37 Who would say is the significant adult with whom you have had a meaningful relationship that has contributed to your success in high school? Please identify the person by the role he/she plays in your life, **not by name**. (For example, school administrator, teacher, parents, sibling, etc.)

- 
- 38 Is there anything that you would like to share about your high school experience that the format of this survey did not permit?



## Appendix H

### Interview/Survey Protocol



**Research Topic: Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap: Creating Conditions for African American Student Success**

**Principal Investigator: Pamela Williams Morgan**

### Interview/Survey Protocol

Respondent's Demographic Information			
<b>Name:</b>			
<i>Last</i>	<i>First</i>	<i>Middle Initial</i>	<i>Maiden Name</i>
<b>Years of Attendance at _____ High School:</b>		<b>Year of Graduation:</b>	
<b>Current Occupation/Profession:</b>			
<b>Highest Level of Educational Attainment:</b>			
<b>College Alma Mater:</b>			
<b>Do you consider yourself to be an African American?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No			

Part I: Participants in this study are asked to respond to the following open-ended questions:

1. What is your definition of success?
2. Do you consider yourself to be successful? Why? [If yes, proceed with questioning.]
3. What conditions for learning were in place that enabled you to be academically successful during high school?
4. What was it about the school—faculty, curriculum, administration, and extra-curricular program—that contributed to your success?
5. What was it about your high school experience that prepared you to face new challenges in leadership?
6. What was it about your high school experience that prepared you to face new challenges in post-secondary education?
7. What was it about your high school experience that prepared you to face new challenges in technology?

8. What was it about your high school experience that prepared you to face new challenges in life in general?

Part II: Please review the list of factors below. Using the following scale, rate the extent of the impact that you feel each factor had on your success during your high school years and beyond:

- 1 – To a very great extent      3 – Somewhat      5 – To a very small extent  
 2 – To a great extent      4 – To a small extent

1. personal desire to learn
2. high quality teacher content knowledge
3. use of multiple effective pedagogies
4. teacher encouragement
5. effective teacher-student relationships
6. high teacher expectations of students
7. encouragement from a significant adult
8. teachers' passion, practice and persistence
9. safe, supportive environment at school and home
10. teaching styles compatible with learning styles
11. consistency in instructional approaches and strategies
12. collaboration among teachers instead of competition
13. quality professional development
14. operating on established or agreed upon norms for group interactions
15. encouraging students to identifying their aspirations for the future
16. employing positive use of peer pressure

17. encouraging students to become allies for each other by expanding their knowledge and understanding of people who are different
18. offering early interventions and adequate resources that empower students to devote their undivided attention to learning
19. portraying culturally relevant/representative role models in prominent positions in the educational setting
20. involving parents actively as partners in the educational process
21. offering students a positive social context
22. integrating practices such as those identified above into the mainstream curriculum and programming, not as add-ons

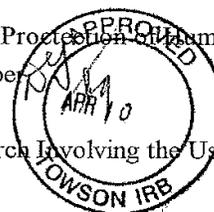
## Appendix I

### Towson University Institutional Review Board Approval



#### **APPROVAL NUMBER: 08-A062**

To: Pamela W Morgan  
 From: Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Deborah Gartland, Member  
 Date: Thursday, April 10, 2008  
 RE: Application for Approval of Research Involving the Use of Human Participants



Office of University  
 Research Services

Towson University  
 8000 York Road  
 Towson, MD 21252-0001

t. 410 704-2236  
 f. 410 704-4494

Thank you for submitting an Application for Approval of Research Involving the Use of Human Participants to the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Participants (IRB) at Towson University. The IRB hereby approves your proposal titled:

*The Role of the Academy in Addressing the Racial Achievement Gap in Education*

Please note that this approval is granted on the condition that you provide the IRB with the following information, revisions, and/or documentation:

Copy of the DREAA approval needed

If you should encounter any new risks, reactions, or injuries while conducting your research, please notify the IRB. Should your research extend beyond one year in duration, or should there be substantive changes in your research protocol, you will need to submit another application for approval at that time.

We wish you every success in your research project. If you have any questions, please call me at (410) 704-2236.

CC: R. DellaVecchia  
 File

## Appendix J

## School System Approval Letter

CITY OF BALTIMORE SHEILA DIXON, Mayor		BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM DIVISION OF RESEARCH, EVALUATION, ASSESSMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY 200 East North Avenue, Room 201-203 Baltimore, MD 21202
------------------------------------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

September 4, 2008

Pamela W. Morgan  
8918 Church Lane  
Randallstown, Maryland 21133

Dear Ms. Morgan:

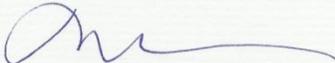
The Division of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability (DREAA) has reviewed and approved your application to conduct a research study titled, *Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap: Creating Conditions for African American Student Success*, in the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS).

Therefore, you are now authorized to contact the principal at Western High School for permission to begin the implementation phase of your study. The study must be implemented as proposed and you must notify DREAA of any changes. Approval is valid for one year and will expire on **September 3, 2009**.

Upon the completion of this study, please provide DREAA with a copy of your study results.

I wish you success in your study.

Respectfully,



Benjamin I. Feldman  
Research, Evaluation, and Accountability Officer

BIF: icd

 Printed on recycled paper with environmentally friendly soy based ink.

**Appendix K**

## Correspondence Updating University IRB

**Memorandum**

To: Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
Deborah Gartland, Member

From: Pamela W. Morgan *PWM*

Date: Monday, September 15, 2008

Subject: Requested Copy of DREAA Approval

Reference: Approval Number 08-A062

Thank you for granting conditional approval for me to conduct my dissertation study pending receiving approval from the Department of Research, Evaluation, Assessment, and Accountability (DREAA) for the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS). I am pleased to convey to you a copy of the DREAA approval letter that was recently forwarded to me by DREAA's Research, Evaluation, and Accountability Officer, Benjamin Feldman (see attached).

I also wish to inform you that based upon the recommendation of my dissertation committee, the title of my study changed, but the study that you approved in your memorandum dated Thursday, April 10, 2008 remains the same. The original title was *The Role of the Academy in Addressing the Racial Achievement Gap in Education*. The revised title is *Beyond the Racial Achievement Gap: Creating Conditions for African American Student Success*. Again, the proposed study and research protocol are unchanged.

Thank you again for granting approval of my application.

Attachment: as indicated above

C: Roxana DellaVecchia, Dissertation Advisor  
File

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