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Challenges to Success in Higher Education: An Examination of Educational Challenges from the Voices of College-Bound Black Males

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In recent years, researchers have devoted much discussion to finding ways to increase the academic success of Black males in K-12 and higher education. Despite this emphasis, Black male enrollment in higher education stands at 4.5%, which is the same as it was in 1976. One factor noted by researchers for the stagnation among Black male college enrollment is their disproportionate departure from high school. Therefore, this qualitative study of college-bound high school seniors discusses four critical factors that contribute to Black males premature departure from high school. Implications for practice and future research are discussed.

Keywords: *education, college access, retention*

There is a great deal of evidence to demonstrate that all children are not valued equally, that some children are clearly valued more than other children, and finally that, African-American male children are valued least of all. It is not likely that schools, as they are currently structured, will ever look on the majority of children they serve as having unlimited potential—Governor’s Commission on Black Males. (Maryland State Department of Education, 2007)

INTRODUCTION

As the quote posits, the educational plight of the Black male is often associated with underachievement and underrepresentation (Carter, 2005, Scott, 2012). Although negative in context, the association offers a profound need to understand and address why such is the case. Researchers discussed the lack of scholarship on Black males who overcame their environmental obstacles, and became successful in graduating from high school and college (Harper, 2005; Palmer, Davis & Hilton, 2009; Parson & Kritsonis, 2006). Therefore, identifying challenges that Black males face could serve as a catalyst for developing support structures that deter high school departure (dropouts) and encourage college attendance.

Much of the research on Black male achievement presents troublesome statistics and often negative stories about their chances of academic success. The plethora of negative findings is alarming and often neglects the insight of students themselves and potential solutions for these obstacles. For example, Tatum (2006) highlighted self-concept and identity as two major internalized factors that influence the academic success for Black students. His findings posit that Black male students sometimes respond by disassociating themselves from school and acting-out in negative ways as coping mechanisms—for a lack of self-concept and identity. Additionally, several scholars discussed external factors that impede Black male student achievement. In some cases, these male students are disproportionately placed in special education classes (Nickson, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2006), where they are provided with instruction that fails to prepare them for higher education (Bailey & Moore, 2004; Hopkins, 1997). Moreover, Anthony, Kritsonis, and Herrington (2007) emphasized that a high percentage of Black males are taught by White females. Suggesting that in most educational settings, the Black male presence is custodial staff or sports instructors. Furthermore, Black adolescent males are constantly bombarded with stereotypical depictions of older Blacks as incompetent or lazy (Irving & Hudley, 2008).

Very few positive depictions are highlighted in the literature about Black males. Research from Irving and Hudley (2008) indicated a relationship between cultural mistrust and academic achievement, noting that an increase in mistrust facilitates negative academic outcome among Black males. Therefore, Brown (2009) and others (e.g., Bailey & Moore, 2004; Hopkins, 1997) urge the need for Black male role models in and outside of the classroom. However, it should be clear that a model that employs a “one-size-fits-all” approach contradicts the very essence of the issue (Brown, 2009). This study seeks to take into consideration the voices of high school graduates on this topic, in order to proffer potential solutions to augment the challenges that are faced by Black male students.

PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this article is to identify the challenges that college-bound Black males face while navigating through high school. Specifically, the participants in this study graduated from high school and were able to surmount the challenges faced by other Black males, and have all been accepted to a four-year university. Nevertheless, they reflected on challenges that had the likelihood of threatening their completion of high school. This study provides a unique opportunity for high school teachers, administrators, and policymakers to gain insight into the challenges that threaten the successful completion of high school for Black males. For the reasons provided, this article makes a compelling contribution to the literature. In the following sections the authors provide research methodology, findings, and recommendations. These recommendations offer insight to individuals charged with improving the academic success of students, specifically Black male students. Recommendations for future research on this topic are also presented. But first, a literature review to contextualize this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has firmly documented the critical problems that hinder the completion of high school for Black males; thereby limiting their participation in college (Adelman, 2006; Davis, 1999, 2004; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Flores, 2007; Joe & Davis, 2010; Rendón & Hope, 1996; Toldson, 2008). Specifically, myriad studies have indicated that Black males are more likely to be placed in special education and underrepresented in gifted or talented programs compared to their White male counterparts or other counterparts of color (Davis, 1999, 2004; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Rendón & Hope, 1996; Toldson, 2008). Interestingly, some of the schools that Black males attend do not have the resources to offer gifted or advanced placement courses (Adelman, 2006; Davis, 2004; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1997; May & Chubin, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999). As noted, the placement of Black males in special education significantly impacts their educational trajectory and is one factor that impedes their ability to complete high school (Davis, 1999, 2004; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Joe & Davis, 2010; Oakes, 1990, 1995). Brown and Davis (2000) and Davis (2004) explained that schools fail to meet the social and development needs of Black males. In fact Davis (2004) noted that some researchers have postulated that Black males perceive schooling activities as “feminine and irrelevant to their masculine sense of self” (p. 527). As a consequence, a growing number of schools have experimented with gender exclusive schooling.

Research has also found that the lack of minority teachers in general—and Black male teachers specifically—is another impediment to the success of Black males in high school (Bissell, 2000; Davis, 1999, 2004; Davis & Jordan, 1994; Fergus, 2009; Joe & Davis, 2010; Thompson, Warren & Carter, 2004). According to Davis and Jordan (1994), students’ sense of self is developed, in part, by the school’s curriculum and interacting with peers, teachers, and parents. Research has shown that Black male teachers serve as role models, mentors, and sources of inspiration and support (Fergus, 2009; Thompson, Warren, & Carter, 2004). Black or minority teachers in general tend to be more encouraging of minority students success in the K-12 systems

compared to some White teachers, who may not fully understand the culture of the students they are teaching (Davis, 2004). Furthermore, research has shown that minority teachers tend to instruct their classes using pedagogical strategies and practices that are culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Tate, 1995).

According to Ladson-Billings (1995) and Tate (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy promotes academic engagement because the instructor is incorporating aspects of the students' culture into their teaching and instructional practices. Similarly, Joe and Davis (2010) indicated that parental engagement, in the form of actively discussing educational issues with Black males, increases their likelihood of being successful. While minority teachers have been linked to the academic success and achievement of Black males, a copious body of literature report that Black males and other low-income racial and ethnic minority students are provided with teachers who are unqualified or lacking certification in the area they are instructing (Bissell, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Davis, 2004; Fergus, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 1997; Tate, 2008). This and other issues, such as, disparities in resource allocation, have propelled Rendón and Hope (1996) to remark:

. . . these are the very children that deserve the best the nation's educational system has to offer....Instead, to those who need the best . . . we give the least. The least well trained teachers. The lowest curriculum. The oldest books. The [least] instructional time. Our lowest expectations. Less, indeed, of everything we believe makes a difference. (p. 11)

As the quote illustrates, there is a need for more qualified teachers to teach in schools that have students who are academically challenged. Additionally, the lack of support that these schools receive regarding a high-quality curriculum to challenge the students, new books, and more instruction time does not mirror their need for more support in order to be put on a path toward higher educational success. The research indicates that these aforementioned challenges exacerbate the poor achievement of Black male students (Rendón & Hope, 1996).

Despite this important research, more research is needed that considers the voice of Black males as it relates to factors that challenged their efforts to complete high school. One qualitative study that is consistent with the purpose of this article explored factors that caused Black males to drop out of school and continue their education in a nontraditional context (Davis, 2006). While these articles are similar, this current article is different because it focuses on Black males who completed high school and entered college, but have reflected on potential challenges to their completion of high school. Given these nuances, similar to Davis' (2006) article, this current study, has the potential to offers critical context that could be beneficial to educators, administrators, and policymakers as they work to advance the success of Black male students in K-12.

METHODS

Design

This study employed qualitative methodology to collect and analyze data from college-bound high school seniors in order to understand the challenges that Black male students face while in high school. These data were collected from a study done by a non-profit organization. This organization was founded during a period of *de jure* segregation when Black students faced severe challenges in education. Specifically, Black students in the 1900s were often victims of unequal learning environments (e.g., poor education facilities), lack of financial resources, and lack of mentors who look like them when compared to their White peers. This non-profit institution helped to mitigate the challenges Black students faced by providing scholarships, mentors, and advocacy through research and scholarship, policy and political action, to ensure Black students were provided an equal and quality education. One way that this organization has achieved its goal to increase the number of students who attend and graduate from college is by providing financial

assistance to students. To improve the organization's practices overall, the 2011 scholarship application included a question for high school seniors inquiring about the challenges Black male college students face. The essay question follows:

. . . and as such we are concerned with the low academic achievement amongst African American male students. The most recent data from the Schott Foundation for Public Education indicates that only 47 percent of African American male students are graduating from high school as opposed to 78 percent for White males. Please write an 800 word essay addressing why YOU BELIEVE countless young African American male students are not graduating from high school. Please provide a recommendation(s) in your essay on what we . . . can do to address this crisis.

The researchers worked with this organization to generate the scholarship essay question and to secure all the essays for review in this study. To retrieve the essays, the lead author was in constant communication with the organization and received permission to use the essays from both the organization and the students.

Participants

More than 70 male students applied for this scholarship and wrote the required 800 word essay. The students were requested to provide on their scholarship application their family's estimated gross household income. Six levels were provided and the students were requested to place a check in the appropriate box. These levels were: \$0–\$1999; \$20,000–\$39,999; \$40,000–\$59,999; \$60,000–\$79,999; \$80,000–\$99,999; and \$100,000 +. The students disproportionately fell within the second and third categories (e.g., \$20,000–\$39,999 and \$40,000–\$59,999; at 80%), with the next highest category being the fifth level e.g., \$80,000–\$99,999; at 15%). This provided an economically diverse pool of respondents. The researchers were unable to determine the percentage of Black male students who applied for this scholarship because students were not required to indicate their race. However, based on the headshots the applicants provided it is assumed that the majority of the students were Black males. Additionally, the applicants were from both urban and suburban school districts and all were from public schools. Students were fully apprised of this study and were given the option to participate in it or have their essay removed from the analysis. They were also requested to sign waivers, consenting to having their essays used if they chose to participate and 68 students consented.

A naturalistic inquiry approach (Guba, 1978) was used with the intent of gaining a deeper understanding of the challenges Black males face while in high school. All the participants were male high school graduates and had been accepted to a four-year college/university. Their intended academic majors included music, religious studies, engineering, and social work, to name a few. The participants were involved in myriad high school clubs and organizations, including chess, debate, and honors clubs, choir, band, and student government. Many were also athletes who participated in basketball, football, or track.

Materials

The essays were the primary method of data collection. For the data analysis, the authors first organized the data collected from the essays and used a direct interpretation approach where they “. . . look[ed] at a single instance and [drew] meaning from it without looking for multiple instances. It is a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways” (Creswell 2007, p. 163). Following this step, the authors looked for patterns and reoccurring themes presented in the data. The preliminary categories were (a) challenges Black men face within high school (e.g., lack of Black male teachers), and (b) challenges Black males face outside of high school (e.g., environmental pressures).

Procedure

After coding the data, the authors looked for any unplanned new themes that arose. Then the context of the cases was described in order better understand the data, which was then analyzed.

Before reporting the findings, the authors had four peer debriefing meetings to review. The findings and recommendations are presented in the proceeding sections.

Findings

The current analysis sought to gain understanding of the challenges facing Black male college-bound high school seniors. As noted, the data collection for this qualitative analysis used essays written by the 68 college-bound males. Initial review of the essays garnered two overarching themes to include the challenges Black high school college-bound males confront in school, and the obstacles students face outside of school. From there the researchers aggregated the codes with related themes. As a result, nine codes were determined as consistent throughout the essays. Some of the codes identified were the need for Black teachers, overcoming challenging environments, overcoming negative stereotypes, lack of parental involvement, and the lack of preparation. The researchers went on to cluster the codes to find four major themes among the responses. The themes identified are presented.

Skilled and culturally competent teachers.

I believe African American young men are not graduating from high school because there is a low presence of African American male teachers as role models to coach, train and mentor us while preparing us for the future.

One of the students in the study stated that the need for more African American teachers and mentors is of vital importance. This was a resounding theme among the respondents expressing the necessity for more Black male teachers and instructors in the classroom. In discussing a close family member, one respondent stated, "He didn't have male family members close to him to make sure he stayed on track, and he didn't have the African American male presence in his school to monitor, guide or took an interest in him." Another student expressed "if students do not have the basic academic skills, they often lacked academic confidence and are at risk of dropping out." He emphasized this by reflecting on a family member, stating his "[cousin] dropped out because he couldn't complete the class work and was ashamed to ask for help." Therefore, in addition to needing academic instruction from Black male teachers, the respondents believed that more Black male teachers would provide additional opportunities for mentorship and guidance.

The respondents identified several reasons to be engaged by Black male educators, which included the lack of males in their households. It was noted that, "Also, being without a father can at times put a different type of pressure on the male; a type of pressure that gives him this feeling that as a man he needs to help provide for his mother." Other males expressed the same sentiments and went on to state that it was impossible as a teenager to provide for others when "they haven't been taught the role of a man." What makes matters more challenging, a respondent informed, "It also doesn't help that teachers are primarily females and the number of Black male teachers are limited." Another student stated,

Ofentimes, students gravitate towards people who look like them for mentorship. This opportunity is often [not available for] . . . African American male students due to the lack of African American male representation employed in the school system.

It should be noted that the respondents did not demonstrate resentment toward the female instructors; however, they emphasized the lack of Black male presence that was not associated with sports or student discipline. One male noted, "While most of the female teachers are good, it's a different mindset when dealing with a male, especially an African American male." Another respondent agreed and stated, "I am not saying that women are not capable of raising a young male on their own, however males need males to show them the correct way of being a man."

High standards and academic opportunity.

While I am not shunning the teachers and faculty members of my old high school, I do believe more could have been done to try and motivate the students to reach a standard of excellence in which we can all achieve.

Low expectations, miscommunication, and ineffective teaching are the ingredients for a self-fulfilled prophecy, which is highlighted from one of the male respondents in the quote. The students in the study noted that being motivated was important to their success because it gave them a sense that the instructors had an interest in their success. The respondents in the study expressed great understanding of the need to connect with the individuals they were instructed by; specifically Black male instructors. One male stated:

By encouraging African American males to do better in school and graduate from high school, we can more effectively eliminate the insults and rumors of black males being dumb and worth nothing more than 'cashiers and drug dealers.' I am optimistic that we can achieve and overcome these stereotypes and inspire more African American men to graduate from high school.

The respondents in this study indicated a need for schools to provide relevant and challenging course work, which increases student expectations of engagement. They informed that reaching a standard of excellence was not just a job for the teachers, but a goal for the students to work toward as well. One of students in this study commented, ". . . we care more about becoming the star athlete, exercising our bodies instead of becoming the smart student exercising our minds." These thoughts were supported by the perception from school leaders that Black male students were only good for becoming athletes or hip-hop stars. What comes next is a turn toward some "perceived" attention that provides a safe haven for these males to express themselves in the "streets" or media. It was found that, "These children are being influenced towards the wrong path by many undesirable role models portrayed by the media and in our community itself." This participant went on to proffer that students begin to mimic these deeply imbedded portrayals and in turn lose focus of the importance of education. This was further supported by a respondent who said, "Most people my age are influenced by the wrong crowd because they feel like they need protection, and that's the only way to get it." Another stated, "We need to diminish the effect of the ideas that the media has portrayed and help them realize that there is only one way out of the poverty or a difficult situation, which is working hard for an education." Several students expressed that education did not seem like a priority for them or their families. One student stated, ". . . I am in school because I have to, not because I am learning." This could be due to the fact that many students may not see the importance of education or have to deal with home responsibilities (e.g., working to paying bills, babysitting, etc.). Whatever the reasoning is behind this dilemma, undeniably education not being a high priority for these students has played a role in the high dropout rates among African American males which often creates an acceptance of academic mediocrity. As suggested in the findings regarding Black male instructors, mentorship and motivation from Black males could assist with the challenges these male students face.

Mentorship.

As a career, my aspiration is to become a surgeon. Many factors influenced this decision, but the one that catalyzed my desire the most, originated from reading the biography of Dr. Ben Carson the well-known neurosurgeon at Johns Hopkins University hospital in Baltimore, Maryland.

The responses from the male participants all seemed to echo the need for mentorship and positive images of Black males in society. They stated that there is a lack of visibility of people who look like them, or African American males that are performing in the areas where they wish to be one

day. One student professed that the only African American men he recalled in his school was the gym coach and the custodian, leading him to seek external mentorship.

One student commented,

For example, a minister at my church made me feel more comfortable by taking the time to talk to me about my academic potential which boosted my self-confidence. He has since become a positive role model in my life along with my parents.

There is a perceived notion that these males have an intention to do the right things, and achieve, but the lack of positive influences to do so creates challenges for them. Another respondent said educators should, "Motivate them and give them reasons to want to graduate from high school. Be available to mentor them." Another stated, "I believe this is the case due to the lack of early and constant exposure to successful, professional role models." Therefore, the need for more mentors, as portrayed by the respondents, could not be understated.

Family and community support.

I know the importance of an education because now, both of my parents wish they would have finished school. I think this is the reason they stress the importance of graduating to me.

Many of the resounding themes in the findings revealed that the males felt education was not a priority for some of their peers or their parents. This is alarming because scholars have sited parent expectations are a significant predictor of the college enrollment of African American male participants. One respondent declared, "Unfortunately, as peers we do not encourage each other to learn and do well. I see it in my classroom everyday—the ones who want to learn are distracted and taunted by the ones who don't want to learn." With the perceived pressure from peers, the respondents reported having to mask their intelligence for fear of being ridiculed by others. Another respondent reported, "Then we have students whose main priority is to graduate, but people always belittle them. No matter how much they focus on their goal, they always get put down."

The challenges of being in the classroom were reported to continue beyond the walls of the school house, where many expressed a lack of parental support. Some respondents stated that students have to take on various responsibilities such as paying bills and watching their younger siblings, which leaves education a second priority at best. In some cases the respondents acknowledged that their parents were not intentionally minimizing their education, but were caught up in trying to provide for the family. One respondent said, ". . . many African-American parents whose income are significantly less than Whites, must work longer hours to make ends meet or simply cannot take the time off work because their incomes are based on hourly wages." These findings indicate that regardless of the academic background and credentials of parents, parents' positive active involvement increases the likelihood of those students completing high school and enrolling in college.

In fact, the respondents felt it was important to understand the stories of family members and community people who had challenges with education, as a motivation to do the right thing. A respondent informed that the, "Voices of the people who dropped out should be heard." Another said, "As an active participant in my community, I began to realize the source of the issue: the actions of individuals within society who influence and instill certain perceptions in the minds of young children."

To assist those parents who were trying to support families on small incomes, a respondent acknowledged that, "Parental experts can be brought in to teach working parents how to balance their work schedules with a child's education." By this, a sub-theme was determined that community involvement could help parents and children make the right decisions about their education. In the cases reported these Black males are living in low socioeconomic status (SES) and high-risk neighborhoods. One respondent stated, "By the time they enter high school, school

doesn't hold much meaning for them." This participant highlighted the effects of growing up in an environment that is plagued with violence, drugs, and parents with low income and minimal education. Another reported, "Particularly, the influx of gangs has been readily on the rise; this has been the number one cause for issues, such as the lack of education interest in African American youth."

The respondents have reported that poorly maintained or underfunded schools and instruction from undertrained personnel creates trust issues for students to feel they will get the education they need. One respondent acknowledged that, "the schools in more affluent neighborhoods typically have newer facilities, air conditioning, state-of-the-art computer technology, updated textbooks, more course curriculums, college credit opportunities, top band equipment, more extra-curricular activities, and better transportation." They went on to acknowledge the disparities that exist with respect to their own schools, some of which were in non-affluent neighborhoods. Thus another respondent felt, "Some African Americans do not believe that an education is necessary to survive in this world." Therefore, all efforts should be taken to augment the challenges these students undertake in order to inspire and encourage education as a priority to these students and their parents.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Recall that the first purpose of this analysis was to identify critical factors that contribute to Black male premature departure from high school. Examining the factors that contribute to this phenomenon allows for a more complete understanding of the challenges Black males undergo within the K-12 system. The analysis of the data exposed four critical factors that contribute to the Black male's premature departure from high school: (a) lack of skilled and culturally competent teachers; (b) low educational expectations; (c) lack of mentorship; and (d) lack of family and community support. These salient factors contribute to the number of students who never complete high school.

The voices of the students in this study elucidate how more attention should be given to the success of Black high school students. One major factor that emerged from this study is the need for more Black male teachers. Several students mentioned that if they had a Black male teacher, he could have positively impacted their confidence and self-esteem; thereby making them less likely to dropout. Practitioners should keep this in mind as they consider their hiring and placement of teachers.

Additionally, a major theme that several students expressed was the need for more Black male mentors in their neighborhoods. One student stated, ". . . Black men should commit to return to his neighborhood, his high school, his church and make an investment in the next generation. A man that comes from your neighborhood carries more influence and credibility than a man who never been before." Schools should invest significant energy into developing mentorship programs. Even if the mentors are not from that particular community, the need for mentorship cannot be overstated.

Furthermore, schools should implement a curriculum that is aligned with student culture and is relevant. Several of the students mentioned the need for a more relevant curriculum. One respondent argued, "What we learn in history about African Americans is very minimal, and doesn't tell the whole story." Others acknowledged the short amount of time spent each year on Black history.

Lastly, students called for schools to set-up tutoring programs to address more academic preparation for our young men. One way this could be done is by fostering partnerships with local non-profit organizations. Several of the students discussed that more students, particularly African American male students, need to acquire basic academic skills, including reading, writing and math skills. By increasing the student's basic foundational skills, their chances of doing well and completing high school are increased, and the students' self-esteem will increase along with their academic abilities.

Implications for Practice

Based on the findings from this study there are at least three implications for high school personnel to consider. These three implications are supported not only by the research findings from this study, but also from prior research by scholars in the field.

The first implication for practice is teacher hiring practices. Several of the respondents noted that more teacher diversity was needed. A number of the respondents mentioned that they had few African American teachers and some even stated that they never had an African American male teacher. Scholars have researched (Anthony, Kritsonis, & Herrington, 2007; Tatum, 2006) the positive impact that African American teachers have on Black students. Based on these studies and this one, if schools have a low number of African American teachers, they should improve their percentages by increasing the number African American male teachers on staff.

One way to accomplish this goal is by creating partnerships with local colleges and universities to establish pipelines for male teachers of color. Specifically, Black male students who are interested in becoming teachers could work with the local high schools in order to

- expose them to the profession,
- provide them opportunities to hone in on their intended career, and
- allow them to be an added resource for the high school students.

Additionally, staff should be encouraged to take classes, workshops, or lectures that address issues of cultural sensitivity. By doing this, high schools could become more culturally sensitive and inclusive of its students, especially for Black males.

Another practical implication for high schools to consider is to develop mentorship programs. The findings from this study indicate the importance of mentorship in a student's life. Mentorship has often been characterized as a significant ingredient in the development of individuals as they navigate their careers and life goals (Brown, Davis, & McClendon 1999). Oftentimes, people gravitate toward people who look like them for mentorship (Brown, Davis, & McClendon, 1999). This opportunity is often denied African American male students due to the lack of African American male teacher representation in their school. Therefore, mentorship programs can be developed, which not only uses teachers within the school, but also looks to school–community partnerships.

Lastly, schools should look for ways to increase parental involvement. The findings from this study indicate that more attention needs to be granted to parental involvement. One way to increase parental involvement is by conducting seminars in the community and at the school to address various parent and student needs. For example, parents can attend a seminar on college admissions and financial aid. These seminars could be done through a town hall meeting. High school administrators could partner with college administrators to expose parents and students to the importance of parental involvement, and gather the concerns of parents and students alike. By creating a better relationship with the parents and students, high school administrators could make more informed administrative decisions for the students they serve.

Future Research

As discussed, the authors focused on student essays to better understand the challenges Black male students face while in high school, which could affect their transition to and completion of college. However, this study presents at least four limitations, which could help guide further research on the subject.

First, the students in this study were applying for a scholarship, many of whom had competitive grades and were accepted to several colleges. Therefore, further research should consider analyzing essays written by students who were not as academically engaged to better understand their challenges. Second, further research should seek to interview teachers about their perceptions of the challenges high school students face and compare their answers to those of the

students. This study would help indicate if there are disconnects between student and teacher perceptions toward high school obstacles—and provide evidence if the difference is academically detrimental to students. Third, these authors did not conduct follow-up interviews with the participants to gain further insight about their views, which further research could proffer. Fourth, and finally, only essays from students in the Metro-DC area were used, which includes parts of Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia. Therefore, the transferability of the information on students in other parts of the country is limited. Further research could seek to expand the scope of the student essay to include students in other states. Despite these limitations, this study provides an invaluable contribution to the existing literature surrounding Black education. The findings from this study shine a light on the need to improve the diversity of teachers in the field, mentorship opportunities, providing academically relevant and challenging subject matter, and parental involvement, to name a few. These findings expand our knowledge base and provide tools to help us improve the rates in which Black males graduate from high school and attend college.

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