

FROM THE SANCTUARY TO THE CLASSROOM:  
THE ROLE OF BLACK CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS IN  
SUPPORTING THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT  
FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

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Abstract: Education reform efforts are consistently being implemented in public schools across the United States to support students success. There is an increased need however for improvement regarding the educational achievement of African American students in K-12, public school settings. Ever since the times of slavery, the Black church had had an educational function in the lives of African Americans and at times, has served to increase their motivation and self-esteem. There has been ample research conducted involving the Black Church and its functional role in the education of African American students, however there is an increased need to locate and understand the ways in which Black Church partnerships specifically with schools in high poverty neighborhoods work to support the educational achievement of African American students. This research used a qualitative single case study as a means for data collection to determine how black church partnerships with schools support the educational achievement for african American students through student, school administrator and Black Church leaders perceptions. This research found that relationships, equity, community, and commitment work to support the educational achievement for African American students through partnerships with schools. The findings from this study offer contemporary insights into educating and empowering African American student while increasing their educational achievement through partnerships with the schools they attend.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	11
Problem Statement.....	12
Purpose.....	13
Research Question.....	14
Research Method.....	14
Definition of Terms.....	15
Significance of the Study.....	18
Summary.....	20
II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	22
The Black Church.....	22
Legislation to Address Inequalities for African Americans.....	46
School Partnerships for Student Success.....	58
Theoretical Framework.....	65
Social Learning Theory.....	66
Critical Race Theory.....	69
Summary.....	73
III. METHODOLOGY.....	74
Rationale.....	74
Research Questions.....	76
Epistemological Perspective.....	76
The Case.....	77
Research Sample.....	81
Data Collection.....	82
Data Analysis.....	88
Ethical Considerations.....	90
Trustworthiness.....	91
Limitations.....	92

Chapter	Page
IV. FINDINGS.....	31
Relationships.....	31
Equity.....	31
Community.....	31
Commitment.....	31
Summary.....	31
V. CONCLUSION.....	31
Section.....	31
Section.....	41
Section.....	41
Sub Section.....	41
Sub Section.....	41
Sub Section.....	41
Section.....	41
Section.....	41
REFERENCES.....	41
APPENDICES.....	41

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1- Trustworthiness Table.....	84
2- The Participants .....	94-95



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Partnerships between schools and community organizations have provided countless students in K-12 educational settings with access and opportunities to succeed in ways that students from diverse backgrounds may have never been afforded without them. School Partnerships are often a necessary tool to strengthen student academic achievement, especially in districts with limited resources (Epstein, 2013; 2011). For example, mentorship programs, between community organizations and schools, can provide much needed academic support for struggling students (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak & Shogren, 2015). Research supports the idea of incorporating mentorship programs for schools located in low socioeconomic urban areas to assist in closing the achievement gap for students (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak & Shogren, 2015; Epstein, 2013). Many families that reside in urban neighborhoods often have limited access to educational resources and positive role models that can help to assist educators in strengthening a child's academic performance. Partnerships often seek to provide these needed resources, such as mentoring and tutoring, to promote student success. It is through school partnerships that community groups, faith-based organizations, businesses and other groups are able to fund, donate and continue academic interventions and support to promote academic success for students.

Church/school partnerships are one type of partnership that provide a unique opportunity to enhance student achievement. Christian churches often rely on a verse in Scripture, Proverbs 22:6, that states, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when

he is old he will not depart from it” (The Bible, New King James Version). Proverbs 22:6 provides a foundation for partnerships between schools and faith-based organizations because this verse emphasizes the importance of early training as a predictor for success later in life. This verse may very well be the foundation which motivates Black Churches to establish and maintain partnerships with schools to support the educational achievement and college preparation for African American students in their congregations.

### **Problem Statement**

Research suggests that, despite legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), Race to the Top (RTT) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to promote educational achievement for all students regardless of race or socio-economic background, African American students in high poverty communities often underperform their Caucasian peers (Hackett, 2017, pp. 181-182; Ravitch, 2016). For example, high school graduation rates and college preparation are lower within the African American community nationwide than any other ethnicity (Douglas & Peck, 2013). Explanations for discrepancies between African American and majority peer performance have been presented. For example, low academic motivation has been shown in educational research to affect African American student achievement (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006). Along with low motivation, research indicates that there is a strong need for cultural connection and affirmation that is not always found in the classroom or home life of some African American students (Harper & Davis, 2012; Curry, 2010). While public school districts have made countless attempts to support the educational achievement of African American students, there is still room for improvement (Jordan, 2013). Specifically, even

though there are public schools across our nation that educate African American students using innovative pedagogies such as AVID, Head Start, and Gear Up, contextual and home factors often negatively influence learning (Keisch & Scott, 2015), leaving some African American students in need of more than just instructional support from their teachers to reach academic goals (Sianjina & Phillips, 2014). Thus, community solutions to supplement that of the home and school system must be sought (Curry, 2010). However, an anomaly exists when African American students in high poverty schools actually meet and sometimes exceed state standards and grade-level requirements. One potential explanation for this anomaly may be the influence of school/community partnerships, specifically partnerships between schools and Black churches in the community that provide the support, structure and encouragement that African American students need to achieve in school.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding, through the perceptions of school administrators, African American students, and Black Church leaders, concerning the influence of Black Church/school partnerships in supporting the educational achievement of African American students.

### **Research Questions**

#### **Overarching Question:**

How has this partnership between the Black Church in this community and this public school promoted student success for involved African American students?

1. What are church member and administrator perceptions concerning the influence Black Church partnerships have had on African American students' educational achievement?
2. What motivates African American students to become involved in the partnerships between Black Churches and their public school?

### **Research Method**

This qualitative case study seeks to locate and understand the world from the participant's perspective through meaning found in varied methods (Creswell, 2007, 2013). The participant and the researcher both play an active role in the development of the research. Qualitative research has a strong emphasis on developing an understanding through first hand, lived experiences of the participant. The participants' lived experiences in addition to researcher observations, artifacts, and researcher-guided dialogue work in conjunction to develop meaning to a particular social behavior(s) (Merriam, 1998). African American students have a voice and need to be heard (Mansfield, 2014) concerning their educational achievement. "Our students have something to say, and we owe it to them to listen to them" replied one African American educator, Jean Smith (2017), who feels that educators must listen to the students in order to improve their education and better serve them (2017). Therefore, this qualitative case study will gather data from multiple data sources to gain a better understanding of the influence of this partnership on the academic success of African American students.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Public Education*, for this study, refers to the individual schools which operate off of federal,

state and local funding in the United States (Sadovnik, 2007). Public Schools hold a responsibility to adhere to federal and/or state legislative, executive, and/or judicial policies that govern the educational services of students in kindergarten through twelfth grade in the United States (Longest & Huber, 2010). Public Education gives responsibilities regarding curriculum selection, pedagogical methods and instructional support to state licensed administrator rather than a parochial leader in a private school (Gathorne-Hardy, 2014) Public school sites often vary in instructional style, school specialty, grade level and populations of student being served. Collaboratively, public school leaders work to provide a free, thorough education for all students in the United States, regardless of racial and cultural differences.

*Educational achievement* can be thought of as the academic performance of students and their ability to set, reach and master their goals (Gorham, 2011). These goals can be personally and educationally based and set by the student, their parent or teacher and school district. The educational achievement of students includes increasing each student's ability to perform at grade level or even higher for students who are struggling in core subjects (Williams, 2015). Educational achievement will likely differ from student to student (Jordan, 2013).

*College preparation* refers to the planning and awareness about the processes associated with college entrance examinations and the core-subject competencies which work together to provide students with a positive college experience and education (Brown, & Schwartz, 2014; Brown & Schwartz, 2014, pp. 56-57). College preparation also looks at possible career planning options for

students once they have completed secondary, high school education. (Sianjina & Phillips, 2014). Students, whose parent may not have attended and graduated college, are less likely to have ample of knowledge to share with their children who graduate high school and go to college. Therefore, college preparation refers to the student's ability to understand college processes and perform successfully on college entrance exams (Sianjina, & Phillips, 2014; Drezner, 2013, p. 371).

*African Americans* also referred to as Black will be used in this study to describe any American of African descent (Ghee, 1990). It is important to note that the United States is home to African Americans of all ages who may also identify as Native American, Hispanic and other ethnicities. This study will use the terms Black or African American to describe the students, parents, church members, elders and educators who freely identify with the cultural heritage and ideals associated with individuals of African descent.

*The Black Church* can be thought of as any place of worship in the Christian faith which is home to a predominately African American congregation (Stuckey, 2013; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). Developed out of racial oppression and white supremacy, the Black Church has significantly transformed society for African Americans young and old (Taylor, Lincoln & Chatters, 200, pp. 505-506; Stuckey, 2013; Billingsley & Morrison-Rodriguez, 1998; DuBois, 2013). For over a century, the Black Church has been one of the only tools used to bring together the African American race in a positive light (Carter, 2016; Rubin, Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994). The Black Church is unique to African American culture and works in many areas of life. The Black Church has educated its members since its

formation during the enslavement years of African Americans (Brice, & Hardy, 2015; Floyd-Thomas, 2014). While there are countless denominations in Black Churches across the United States, this case study will use the Missionary Baptist denomination when referring to the Black Church. Many Black Churches vary in size, mission and purpose, but community and strong passion to ensure the educational achievement is important to nearly every operating Black Church (Williamson, 2015). In response to racial inequities of America's past, the Black Church has gone to major extremes to ensure excellent educational experiences for students of all ages (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990).

*School partnerships* are ongoing, collaborative relationships and activities involving a school, the leadership and instructional staff and another entity (Timmermans & Booker, 2006, pp. 100-101; Sanders, 1998; Scales, George & Morris, 1997). Possible school partners include; an educational institution, business, organization, faith-based organization school staff, parents and other family members of students at a school (Timmermans & Booker, 2006; White-Frazier, 1994). This involvement is strongly related to improved student learning, attendance and behavior. There is usually a common goal, mission or vision which helps to establish the relationship between the school and the partner (Timmermanns & Booker, 2006). Public school partnerships will ultimately look different depending upon the type of school, size, needs of the student administration's intended outcome.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it will provide additional information to educational leaders, building administrators and teachers concerning the influence of partnerships between schools and Black churches to support student learning. The public education system today as well as the demographics of students being served in public K-12 institutions is diverse (Middleton, 2001). This study will add to existing understandings in the literature about the importance of partnership efforts by focusing specifically on Black church/school partnerships. This research could, potentially, help to inform building principals, counselors, teachers and other educational professionals of ways to support the success of African American students by building a climate of trust, strength and motivation through partnerships with local Black Churches. The Black Church certainly serves as an example of how providing selfless support may positively affect the education of African American students (Poole, 1988). There is limited research rooted in understanding student perceptions of how Black Church partnerships can positively influence educational achievement and college preparation. The participants' perceptions could inform public school educators about the value in building and maintaining these faith-based partnerships.

As educators, it is our responsibility to make sure that all students are prepared for life beyond high school. Black Church and school partnerships, if understood by educational leaders, may greatly increase the educational achievement of African American students. The work is not easy, but providing strong partnerships to support students in low performing schools can make a positive difference in the educational achievement and college preparation of African American students.

### **My Position in this Research Study**

As an African American man, I am connected to the Black Church both spiritually and morally and have been since I was a young child. I have been an active member of a Black Church in a large urban city for more than 25 years of my life. During this time, I have been mentored, loved and inspired to be a leader and to be successful by countless African Americans members of the Black Church. I am passionate about preparing and motivating future African American leaders, educators and students of the next generation. The Black Church has been an instrumental part of my development and educational attainment.

However, despite my involvement in the Black church and former mentorship experience with members of the Black church, I understand that I am also the primary data collection instrument in this study. As a qualitative researcher, I must listen to the voices of participants, and I must be certain that the findings of this study represent the perceptions of participants in an active Black Church partnership (Mitra & Gross, 2009). Therefore, I will seek to remain objective as I listen to voices of participants so that the veracity and authenticity of the data collected may represent the perceptions of participants in the study.

### **Summary**

Public education reform remains a critical issue today and has a tremendous impact on the educational achievement and college preparation for African American students. Educational leaders from all ethnicities have the responsibility of preparing the next generation of students for educational success. History suggests that the presence of the Black Church in African American communities made a difference in advocating for equity, social justice and cultural preservation for African Americans (Barnes, 2005);

therefore, it is likely that the Black Church serves an important role in providing African American students a better life both now and in their future.

Chapter I presented an introduction, the problem statement, and purpose of the research. The research questions were delineated, and the research design of a qualitative case study was introduced. The significance of the study and my position as a researcher in this study were explained.

Chapter 2 provides the review of the literature pertaining to the historical and impacting role of the Black Church in the education of African Americans of all ages. The review of literature also critically analyzes society as it relates to inequity of African American achievement, legislation to address inequalities for African American student and partnerships for student success. Both Critical Race Theory and Social Learning Theory are the theoretical frames for this study, and they are explained in Chapter 2.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for this qualitative case study. A rationale for selecting a qualitative case study is presented, and the population and sampling techniques are presented in Chapter 3. Additionally, an explanation of data analysis is provided in Chapter 3.

The fourth chapter of this study will present the findings from the data collected and chapter 5 will provide implications for practitioners and educational researchers.

## CHAPTER II

### A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a thorough review of the literature for this study. The purpose of the study is to understand how Black Church and school partnerships support the educational achievement and college preparation of African American students through the perceptions of African American students. The review of literature includes a summary of the Black Church's beginning, inequity in African American student achievement, legislation addressing inequalities, school partnerships and concludes with the theoretical framework for this study

#### **The Black Church**

**The Origins.** The Black Church has a rich, culturally significant history in the United States of America for African Americans. The first Black Church was founded in Savannah, Georgia in 1788 (Karenga, 1982). There are three enslaved, but later free, African Americans credited to finding and establishing the Black Church: David George, George Liele, and Andrew Bryan (Stuckey, 2013). Despite an understanding that the first Black Church began through the efforts of these three men, there is some discrepancy as to the Black Church's actual beginning because the African slaves would worship together in slave houses many years before the actual establishment of the Black Church (Karenga, 1982). Before the official establishment of the Black Church, the slaves would form ring shouts, slaves forming a circle and dancing and praising God as a way of life to

cope with the brutality of slavery (Hopkins, 2000). Many slaves had to worship in secret because of the fear of potential threats from White slave masters that may result because of communion among slaves (Karenga & Karenga, 2007; Moore, 1991). Specifically, corporate worship may have brought about severe punishment for the enslaved Africans (Boles, 1988, p. 83) because of the fear of power gained through collaboration. Through several decades of lynching, beatings, and horrendous treatment of enslaved African Americans, White slave masters saw that fighting to eradicate slave communication and religious worship was a losing battle (Karenga & Karenga, 2007). The harder the White slave masters fought against such collaboration, the stronger connections formed among African American slaves, especially for those in the southern states (Moore, 1991).

For the African American slaves, God was their only source of liberation and hope for freedom from racial oppression and disenfranchisement (Boles, 1988, p.103). Even though the Bible was used to condone slavery practices, enslaved African Americans knew differently (Raboteau, 2004, p. 23). For example, enslaved African Americans found tremendous strength in the teaching of Scripture, as evidenced in their worship practices and use of song during worship services, to express their emotions. These practices continued even though the Bible was used to justify the horrendous conditions they often endured at the hands of their oppressors.

The Black Church, both before and after its official establishment, has made a strong impact on society for African American communities across the United States. The Black Church has been referenced as a spiritual family reunion or spiritual hospital, an educational institution and place where individuals are free to be themselves while acknowledging God in all they do (Stuckey, 2013). Equality and social justice have been

found as core fundamental values for the Black Church's existence and mission, and these values align with the principles of Christianity (Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013). The Black Church has been referred as its "own world" meaning that African Americans are able to make what is challenging and nearly impossible in society a reality for the church members and especially for youth (Corneilus, 1999, p. 90). For example, students and their families in the Black Church are educated and supported in many ways to encourage success in their goal setting and attainment. This idea is further carried out through continued education courses and seminars dedicated towards reforming Black culture and success in America. Even today, over one hundred years since its beginning, the Black Church continues many formative practices as a means to transform society for African Americans (Putnam, 1993).

**A Way of Life.** The Black Church is strongly connected to the personal identity for many African Americans in the United States (Cayton, 1970). Even though there are numerous denominations of churches that have all or nearly all Black congregations, Black Churches hold a significant place in daily life for African Americans (Barnes, 2005). Since God and the community of the other slaves was the only hope that African Americans had, the tradition of relationship and sense of community continues to assist African Americans in being successful in everyday life (Stuckey, 2013). Although society is more than a hundred years beyond the historic times of slavery and injustice, discrimination and inequity within educational systems are still salient in American society (Hopkins, 2000). The Black Church has supported and continues to support each of these areas in a relentless pursuit to ensure the success of the African American race.

Relationships are important in the Black Church. Relationships with others brings about strength (Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013). Slaves were broken up from their families as a way to break the slave's identity and strength found in the African American families. Since that time, relationships within the African American community have taken on a different approach. Fictive kin, relationships that form in the absences of biological connectedness, have evolved and positively influenced African Americans of all ages (Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013). Specifically, fictive kin relationships have made an impact on the educational achievement of students with younger generations of African Americans (Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013). If a student does not have a two-parent presence at home, then sometimes older African Americans will take it upon themselves to step in and provide nearly the same presence and support as that of a biological parent. This inner relational component continues to improve the wellbeing of the African American race.

**Community Involvement.** The Black Church has a respectable reputation for being an advocate for community involvement (Barnes, 2005, pp. 68-69). The Black Church seeks to inform and critically assess equality and fairness in society. The Black Church has always been the information center for many African American families primarily because it is the gathering place centrally located in many African American neighborhoods or communities.

Social justice and a fight for equality has been a challenge for African Americans since the Africans came, or were brought, to the Americas as slaves in 1619 (Marenga & Marenga, 2007), and the Black Church takes a global perspective in transforming the lives of African Americans at the state, city, regional, and local level. Many Black

Churches will unite with other Black Churches and participate in drives, community forums and peaceful demonstrations as a means of challenging the legislative bodies enacting laws that may result in inequity toward minorities (Lawson, 2015). There are often many challenges in society that impact the everyday lives of people living in a particular neighborhood, and the involvement of African Americans and their Churches continues to bring awareness of these issues.

Community forums, building construction and economical reporting are all areas in which the Black Church is viewed as the town hall for many African American communities (Duncan, 2016). Education, and the lack thereof, is another area in which the African American communities will come together at Black Churches in efforts to improve the community through hosting seminars and trainings that cover a variety of specialized topics improving the lives of African American adults (Mitchell, 2010). Community fund raising projects are sometimes organized in Black Churches. Since the Black Church is founded on Christian principles emphasizing trustworthiness and the general welfare of mankind, the Black Church hosts fund raising projects and capital campaigns to improve society and living for African American neighborhoods, families and youth in financial need (Mitchell, 2010, p. 202). Students and young people also gather at Black Churches to have bake sales, car washes, or dinners in efforts to raise money to fund their educational and spiritual endeavors (Duncan, 2016). The Black Church supports all communities where African Americans reside, not just neighborhoods in close proximity to the Black Church hosting an event. It is necessary to note that those involved in Black Churches do not have to be a member of the church to be impacted or assisted by the Church's efforts to impact society. The Black Church's inner

motivation and desire to improve society through community involvement is found in direct relation to the past racial discrimination and inequity in quality of life embedded in the threads of the United States' history (Barnes, 2005).

**Educational Function.** Due to the injustice of slavery and the inhumane treatment associated with it, slaves would not be allowed to read or be taught anything other than knowledge needed for their technical work (Karenga & Karenga, 2007). There was usually only one African American preacher on each plantation who was able to read. Often, the preacher preached in a way that would make the fellow slaves obey (Karenga & Karenga, 2007) their White slave masters. The African American preachers were not allowed to share their full knowledge of the Word of God because White slave masters felt slaves would rebel against them if they were literate and knew the true meaning of Scriptures (Stuckey, 2013). The acquisition of knowledge has been referenced as power and there is still truth to this idea today (citation needed here). Education, such as learning to read, was something that slaves would sneak and teach each other. Slave masters did not want slaves to be educated for the fear that they would revolt and become defiant of the system put in place to keep them enslaved (Stuckey, 2013). In these ways, White plantation slave masters used education against African Americans to keep them from pursuing equality, and many educational inequities that occur today can be traced back to the days of slavery (Raboteau, 2004).

A lack of equitable education continues to weaken the success of African American students in public schools today (Harris, 2005). It is here where we find that inequity within education formed along racial lines in United States history. The education systems, both in the days of slavery and since, have not always been favorable

for African Americans. One inequitable practice, literacy tests, which were used to determine if African Americans could vote hundreds of years ago, helped to marginalize African Americans and reduce their influence in the political arena of the U.S. (Duncan, 2016). It was clear at that time that very few African Americans could read and, therefore, vote in elections (Hale, 2004). Since that time, inequitable public school practices continue to negatively influence African American students' education. For example, ability grouping and redundant testing are still being used today to label, segregate and further diminish the motivation and achievement of African American students (Stuckey, 2013). Historically, the public education system has not thoroughly served students of color due to some negative perceptions of the African American community by some White educational leaders (Hale, 2004, pp. 34-35). The Black church has and continues to bridge the education gap for thousands of African American students so that they can achieve to become highly educated, successful adults.

**Instructional Support.** Education, literacy and spirituality are inseparable in the African American community (Hale, 2004). The Black Church supports African American students through a variety of instructional measures. Countless Black Churches offer after-school tutoring programs that occur several times each week (Placenti, 2012). In many instances in cities across America, students will have their parents drop them off at the church where retired educators will give of their evening hours to help students with their homework (McCray, Grant & Beachum, 2010). Some tutors, whose background is in education, will provide additional instructional exercises geared to strengthen the core competencies in mathematics, reading, and language arts (Placenti, 2012). During the summer months, when most public schools are not in session, the

Black Church will join other Black Churches and host vacation Bible School for students in grade schools. These week to two week seminars are designed to encourage students through mental, physical and spiritual exercises to strengthen African Americans student's academic achievement and identity (Dantley, 2005). There is also an educational component which supports student's academic performance in the upcoming school year (Dantley, 2005). Parenting courses are taught, in Black Churches across the United States, by African American church ministers and leaders to educate parents about how to increase achievement for their children (Dantley, 2005). Retired educators, church ministers and leaders assist younger generations of African American parents and guardians to show them ways to support the youth's academic performance. Some of these efforts include showing academic interest, homework assistance techniques, and building relationships with school administration and teachers (Powell, 2008).

Current and retired educators along with other church staff and members work in collaboration to motivate, mentor and build relationships with the youth to make a difference in the lives of African American students (Douglas & Peck, 2013). Instructional mentorship programs often facilitate instructional support through reading intervention programs and competitions set up by youth ministers and leaders that encourage young African American struggling readers to improve their reading and comprehension (Poole, 1988). The mentors for programs like these are often college students in the Black Church who seek to encourage and motivate the younger members (Hope, Assari, Cole-Lewis, & Caldwell, 2017). The African American college students in the Black Church have a youthful approach which helps young African Americans see that reading success is, indeed, possible. Additionally, mentorship from college students

communicates to younger students that they can achieve educational goals because the mentor serves as an example of someone who looks like them who has been successful and is attending college (Powell, 2008). The duration and type of programs are specific to each church; however, one thing that is consistent is their perception of the need to improve public education for African American students (Jordan, 2013; Barrett, 2010).

**College Preparation and Support.** The Black Church supports high school students seeking higher education. Some Black Churches host college fairs where local and sometimes long distance colleges will come to present information and provide assistance to first generation college students about the college application process (Gorham, 2005). There are also many Black Churches who have developed courses to assist high school seniors to prepare for college entrance exams, such as the ACT and SAT, as they make plans for their lives after high school (Mitchell, 2010). The courses offered to students are free of charge, and students are able to work with current and former teachers, some of which have previously worked on committees to develop these college entrance exams (Mitchell, 2010). The instructors for these programs are also Black Church members who may or not be paid for their services. For the Black Church, many instructional aids that are in place and functioning are volunteer based. Black Church members' efforts come from the deep desire to improve the well-being and success of younger generations of African Americans (Curry, 2010)

In addition to informing students about the college process and entrance preparatory courses, scholarship offerings are found in countless Black Churches in the United States. Several Black Churches work collaboratively to raise money through fundraisers and general offerings from the Black Church members to provide

scholarships for current and aspiring college students (Barrett, 2010; Harris, 2005). Financial hardships have endured in many African American communities for countless years, and the lack of resources plays a role in hindering the advancement of educational endeavors for many African American students in K-12 settings. (McAdoo, 2007). Some Black Churches also provide annual stipends for African American college students in efforts to provide further financial support to students (McCray, Grant & Beachum, 2010). Annual stipends generally aid students with the high costs of textbooks, food, and school supplies (McCray, Grant & Beachum, 2010). Sometimes, once financial aid and scholarships have been used there is additional fees associated with college that leave students with additional stressors outside of their academic studies (McCray, Grant & Beachum, 2010). The reasoning behind this type of financial support is a relentless pursuit to end generational poverty, support higher educational achievement and transform society for the African American communities across the United States (McAdoo, 2007). The words of Malcolm X, “by any means necessary,” is esteemed with understanding the Black Church’s motivation to ensure academic achievement and college readiness for African American students (as cited in Douglass & Peck, 2013, p. 67).

#### **Continued Education and Professional Development for Black Education.**

The Black Church has placed an emphasis for those college students who aspire to be educators and for those who have chosen education as their profession (Howard, 2015). Professional development opportunities for African American educators seeks to have transformative effects on public education. The Black Church understands there are far too many classrooms across the United States with teachers who do not look like or

sincerely understand African Americans students and their needs (Harris, 2005; Drewry, Doermann & Anderson, 2001). The Black Church, as previously stated, has several retired and current educators with a plethora of knowledge in to support the education of African American students of all ages and academic abilities (Jordan, 2013). Large seminars and annual conferences, sponsored by several Black Churches working collaboratively, are often held in large cities across the United States in an effort to increase African American student performance (Drewry, Doermann & Anderson, 2001). In addition to relationship building and educational reform centered on the African American race, African Americans educators believe increasing the number of African American teachers and administrators will enhance the educational achievement and college preparation for younger students (Drewry, Doermann & Anderson, 2001; Rubin, Billingsley, & Caldwell, 1994). Some teachers and administrators who attend Black education conferences and seminars will present research they have also conducted regarding African American students and their education (Riggs, Musewe, & Harvey, 2014). This support system provides a time of refreshment for many teachers who are looking for way to improve their pedagogies that will ultimately benefit African American students. Conferences and continued education courses are a time for fun, fellowship, and networking as each one of these elements serves as a foundational block for the Black Church (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005). The goals of nearly all conferences held is supporting African American students to read on grade level, to be successful in all core-subject areas, and to prepare African American students for college (Sanders, 2013; Barnes & Wimberly, 2016).

Another intended outcome of these continued education and professional development opportunities involves an emotional tie. For example, older African American educators motivate students by showing them that there are successful teachers, leaders and business people who look like them and are quite successful because they have taken their education seriously (Robinson, 2008). Since the Black Church has always wanted African American students to be self-reliant and sufficient, workshops and seminars are held throughout the year to inform educators about strategies and tools useful to educate students. These efforts include informing educators about student engagement and classroom management (Taylor, Lincoln, & Chatters, 2005, pp. 504-505). Student engagement, student-teacher relationships and classroom management are some of the main areas which many teachers who do not identify as an African American encounter. Their inability to address these situations often has a negative impact on some African American students' performance (Robinson, 2002; Sanders, 2013). These topics are covered thoroughly and are deemed necessary by conference organizers. The African American educator and educational leader serves as an excellent role model and scaffold for African American students to improve their achievement both in and outside of the classrooms across the United States (Sanders, 2013; Placenti, 2012; Barnes & Wimberly, 2016).

### **Inequity in Academic Achievement of African American Students**

The unequal quality of education and opportunity to improve academically, for African American students in the United States, is quite disheartening (Altschul, Oyserman & Bybee, 2006, p. 1158). Public School districts spend millions of dollars each year on instruction, staffing, nutrition, transportation and many other operational

costs meant to benefit all students (Lipman, 2013). Many times, budgets will increase with the help of reform strategies by the United States Government, such as NCLB, Race to the Top and The Every Student Succeeds Act, in their efforts to equalize education for all (Jordan, 2013). However, despite these efforts, the academic achievement gap continues to grow wider with the African American students falling further and further behind (Keisch & Scott, 2015). Additionally, some public-school educators have reported that inequity is found in the everyday decisions made by educational leaders and their efforts to make decisions in the best interest of African American students (Hale, 2004, p. 36). Some of these everyday decisions include building consolidations in neighborhoods where large proportions of African American students reside leaving overpopulated class sizes for students who need additional 1-on-1 support from their teachers (Hale, 2004).

Research has shown that the number of African Americans graduating from high school, entering college and graduating with success in a timely manner is occurring less frequently than other ethnicities (Carey, 2008). The United States national graduation rate for African American high school seniors was 69% for the 2014 school year (McFarland, Stark, & Cui, 2016). Comparatively, for Caucasian students the graduation rate for the 2014 school year was 86% (McFarland, Stark, & Cui, 2016, p. 10). While the difference between African American and Caucasian students' graduation rates is 14%, the population of African American students in the United States is slightly less than 11% of the Caucasian student population (United States Census Bureau, 2016, p. 1).

Research is needed to determine how educational leaders can increase the educational achievement and college preparation for African American students. One African American principal in a large, urban district suggests that, not only do African Americans

fall behind their majority peers in K-12 education, but “the gap in college retention rates of African American students graduating high school and going directly to college is as disheartening as the high school graduation rates” (McCarron & Inkelas, 2006, p. 534). African American students rank 24% lower than Caucasian students across the United States for finishing their first year of college and enrolling for the second year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

**Teacher Attitudes Towards African American students.** The overall teaching staff morale is low in public schools serving large populations of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Low student motivation has also been noted to influence the achievement of African American students in the classroom. Research also suggests that teachers in high poverty, urban schools have negative perceptions regarding the abilities of African American students in their schools (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Some teachers who are tenured often do not take great interest in developing ways to build relationships with students of color and their parents (Keisch & Scott, 2015). African American culture is unique, and oral communication is something that is cherished in the African American community (Karenga & Karenga, 2007). Many times, teachers of other ethnicities have difficulty in understanding this cultural difference (Karenga & Karenga, 2007). Not all students are the same, and teachers who are unwilling to adapt and adjust their instruction and communication techniques for diverse student populations further negatively affect African American academic motivation (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Service teacher programs, like Teach for America, may fill the open teaching positions across the United States to lessen

the teacher shortage, but it does not solve the problem for African American student achievement and preparation for college (Bireda & Chait, 2011). A large proportion of teachers who serve as Teach for America teachers are White and come distinctively different backgrounds than the students they serve. While content preparation and effective teaching strategies are sufficed in training seminars, the cultural sensitivity and understanding are areas in which students still needed for African American students to be successful (Bireda & Chait, 2011). However, if teachers are not prepared for the student populations to which they serve culturally, then they are less likely to remain in the classroom (Heilig & Jez, 2010; Epstein, 2013). When teachers leave teaching in the middle of the academic year, it builds upon the existing inconsistency experienced by some African American students' home life (Hudson, 2015; Epstein, 2013; Goldhaber, Lavery & Theobald, 2015).

Service programs also have been found lacking in the ability to connect, educate, and motivate African American students so that they are achieving academically as well as their peers of other racial backgrounds (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin & Heilig, 2005). The level of nurturing support and instructional support must be found in a teacher to impact and support the achievement of African American students who may or may not have the reinforcement of parental and family support in their home life (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). Without understanding the African American culture, a teacher or educational leader cannot fully be committed to improving the educational achievement which serves to prepare student for the rigors associated with college preparation (Hale, 2004, p. 36; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016).

**Inequity in Public School District Spending.** Some educational leaders participate in decision making strategies which continue the inequity found in resource disbursement to improve achievement of African American students who attend low performing schools (Jackson, Johnson & Persico, 2016). High achieving schools where smaller concentrations of African American students attend are given abundance of resources, while lower performing schools receive limited support (Jackson, Johnson & Persico, 2016; Hale, 2004). Some educational leaders at the state, local, district and building levels engage in agendas that are self-seeking rather than student-oriented in order to please stakeholders and communicate excellence (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). For example, schools that continue to draw attention to a school district as prominent and known nationwide for its academic excellence will often be the first beneficiaries of funding, instructional aids, and nationally certified teachers. Other schools with less prominence will often be minimally supported because some leaders feel that those who are uninformed and have limited education will not challenge their inequitable decision-making (Howard, 2015). Educational decision makers at the district level are able to act unfairly because there are often weak systems of checks and balances in place that hold educational decision makers accountable for their moral practices (Ravitch, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2006). It is necessary to note that there exists an extreme scarcity of minority, particularly African American, leadership in school districts across the United States (Dunbar, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2007). This lack of representation may lead to further inequities.

**Racial Balance of Educational Administrative Staff.** Parents of African American students and political leaders agree it serves school districts an injustice to

operate with mission statements promising the success of all students while the leadership staff is not even representative of the diverse student population in the district (Sanders, 1998). In public school districts serving a multi-racial student body, there should be a racial balance of leaders at the state, district, and building level (Howard, 2015) to represent individuals within these districts. This practice would enable the students, parents, stakeholders, and community members to feel that all students are being represented each and every day in the decision-making practices where education is concerned (Ladson-Billings, 2009). The disproportion of African American educational leaders often motivates parents of African American students to be less interested in the education of their children because they feel their voices are often not heard or taken seriously (Rubin, Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994). Some African American adults feel that the limited African American leadership also affects the amount of “voice” given to students in situations involving behavior problems, causing psychological issues for African American students (Hope, Assari, Cole-Lewis & Caldwell, 2017).

**School Choice for African American Students.** Many times, the highly functioning schools are not attended by large populations of African American students (Ravitch, 2016). Strategically, some schools make strict requirements in regards to transfer applications, geographical boundaries and grade/skill requirements in order for the student to be considered for attendance (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). Some African American students simply do not meet the criteria, and these criteria are often composed by White educational leaders (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Ravitch, 2016). The criteria often times will include, but not be limited to, several letters of recommendation from previous teachers that are signed and sealed (Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2016; Conger;

2015). The student is often not allowed by the admissions committee to personally return the letter of recommendation, and sometimes a teacher will tell the student that he/she will write the letter of recommendation but fail to follow through (Conger, 2015; 2005). Some teachers feel the student will not be able to perform at the school, and the teacher may express these concerns in the letter or not even compose a letter on the student's behalf (Conger, 2015). Therefore, the student's application remains incomplete, and the student is denied admittance (Florian, Black-Hawkins & Rouse, 2016). Extremely high GPA requirements, often exceeding 3.0, are typically required for admittance into schools of choice (Conger, 2005) As far as attendance, some schools only admit students who have no more than two or three absences for an entire school year. These admission requirements can be overwhelming because many times students will have experienced illness, or in lower socioeconomic areas, students may not have transportation or be able to stand in the extreme cold weather to wait for the bus (Conger, 2005). These transfer policies only lessen the opportunity for African American students who come from low-socioeconomic neighborhoods to attend a high performing school because they have teachers who do not advocate for them to have the opportunity to challenging schools (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Additionally, many African American student parents are uninformed about the tedious processes for admission to top performing schools, so they do not send their children (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008). Even some parents who know about the admission procedures feel that their student will not qualify based off of past communication with their child's teacher, so they do not apply.

Many scholars agree that students, no matter their racial background, should be able to attend the school of their choice (Ladson-Billings, 2007). However, even though some students live within walking distance to schools that are high performing, they are not admitted because they do not fit a particular criterion (Deming, Hastings, Kane & Staiger, 2014). These transfers can be costly to a school district because buses have to travel excessively to transport students across town to another school because they do not qualify to attend the school near their home due to the strict application process and requirements (Goldring & Smrekar, 2002; Deming, Hastings, Kane & Staiger, 2014). Additionally, some African American parents often question the reasoning for this criteria for school's admission processes (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Bean, Bush, McKenry & Wilson, 2003). There are African American parents who are relentless in ensuring the success of their child and therefore challenge educational policy makers of their actions. Some African American parents have struggled to raise their children with a limited education and in a quest for social upward mobility and academic excellence of their child, many African American parents will challenge inequitable practices regarding school choice (Gordon & Louis, 2009; Bean, Bush, McKenry & Wilson, 2003).. The question remains, if all African American students are not given opportunity for advancement and continue to have a challenging educational experience, then "how will they be functional and successful in their life and possibly become the first-generation of college-graduates" in their families? (Quaye & Harper, 2014, p. 21).

**Lack of Moral Integrity of Educational Leadership.** The schools with the lack of resources and funding are those schools that have been labeled by society as low-performing and are attended by large populations of African American students across

the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Scholars suggest that the students of these lower performing schools “should be the primary beneficiaries of the funding coming into school districts each year, but they are not and this only continues generational poverty and minimal college preparation” (Lipman, 2004, p. 125). Some scholars pose debates as to whether or not schools operate with racial equality and in the best interest of all the students involved in the school district (Ladson-Billings, 2007) The answer lies embedded in strategic ambiguity (Lipman, 2004). Some educational policy leaders at the state, local, district and building levels engage in agendas that are self-seeking rather than student-oriented (Ward et al., 2015, pp. 333-334). Administrators at the district level can be easily influenced to make decisions to please large district partners, individual school site stakeholders and even friends (Alim, 2004). For example, administrators may utilize a technology grant to provide a currently high performing school with a 1:1 tablet for students usage (Lipman, 2004). The school may already have sufficient supply of technological devices to augment instruction. A school in the same district may have the exact opposite demographic and student population and could benefit incredibly by having the grant at their building (Lipman, 2013). However, if the grant was given by a district stakeholder who would like to see it a particular building, then educational leaders will seek to please the stakeholder rather than advocating for the voices of students’ who could also benefit from the grant. These decisions are not also costly to the district, but they add to the inequity of resource allocation and building funding for students attending schools in low socioeconomic areas. Evidence supports this assumption as many low-socioeconomic neighborhoods across the United States are home to a substantial population of African American students (Keisch & Scott, 2015).

**Gentrification.** Current Public School districts continue to widen the gap in educational achievement among African American students through another practice, gentrification (Butler, Hamnett, Ramsden & Webber, 2007). Gentrification, by definition, is the purchasing of property in rundown communities of an urban city by large corporations in an attempt to restructure and build up communities (Lipman, 2004, pp. 27, 54). Gentrification has negatively influenced public education's efforts to reform and improve educational achievement of minority students (Keels, Burdick-Will & Keene, 2013) in a number of ways. Dr. Pauline Lipman (2004), an educational researcher and professor at the University of Chicago feel African American students continue to be educated in schools functioning at a level less than they are capable because of gentrification effects. While benefits of construction plans are communicated, indicating that new construction in a low-performing school neighborhood will bring in more revenue and make the city more attractive while supporting schools in underserved areas, these plans rarely ever benefit the students and schools that need the funding to improve instruction (Keels, Burdick-Will & Keene, 2013; Wilson, 2015). The rise in property taxes from new construction are not always disbursed in an equitable by school district leaders (Wilson, 2015). The formula for disbursement often divides all funding received and then allocates a certain amount based on unclear criteria to all public schools in that district rather than the low performing schools specifically (Wilson, 2015). This means that some schools that already receive more than an abundance of resources may have even more. Many African American educators argue and advocate that, "Lower performing schools should receive funding in abundance to improve their operational function" (Lipman, 2004, p. 56). Gentrification also drives out many African American

students and their families once construction projects are complete due to the drastically increased cost of living in their newly gentrified neighborhoods (Wilson, 2015). The reform strategies involving increasing money to low-performing schools where large populations of African American students attend have been a fallacy for many low-income communities (Lipman, 2004, p. 55).

**School Consolidation as Reform.** Multi-site consolidation of schools in low performing school neighborhoods continues to further the achievement gap of students of the African American race (Lipman, 2004, p. 139). Some schools that have significant sentiment to the people of the communities where the schools are located are often closed, leaving the cultural influences of the neighborhood shattered (Marsh, Chaney & Jones, 2012). Larger public school districts, normally out of greed, will consolidate to save the district money to use in other areas (Lipman, 2013). Consolidation is not only ineffective for low performing schools, but it shows students and their families in those communities that they are of less importance than other neighborhoods and schools in the district (Karaxha, Agosto, Black & Effiom, 2013, pp. 33-35). The cultural identity and heritage developed through generational attendance of student's older family members are lost when buildings consolidate. Communities where large concentrations of African American communities reside look to schools for events and opportunities to fellowship. This sense of community is lost if schools are consistently being shut down and demolished. It has been noted by other public school administrators that community support and involvement tends to decline when site consolidation practices occur in cities where there are schools shut down who promote significant cultural values (Karaxha, Agosto, Black & Effiom, 2013).

**Teacher-Student Relationships.** Student and teacher relationships are critical to the success of the learning environment for every school (Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Every school district is different, but research suggests that each can operate effectively and fulfill their mission statements when students feel valued and connected to their teachers (Larson, 2014). The teacher and student relationship is a consistent work in progress (Baquedano-López, Alexander & Hernández, 2013), and the strength of relationships is often determined by internal and external variables outside the school environment (Dereli, 2009). African American students, just as other ethnicities of students, need strong relational ties with their teachers to support their educational achievement and preparation for life after school (Baker, 1999). A teacher who acknowledges that building relationships with their students who may or may not look like them can be the one positive affirmation for an African American student (Barrett, 2010). This type of teacher could be a life changing agent for the student's personal life, the lives of their siblings, and other members of the community surrounding the school (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2006). All students can benefit academically from a supportive relationship from their teacher (Barrett, 2010).

It is becoming increasingly more difficult for educators to develop relationships with students because the needs of students are consistently changing (Baquedano-López, Alexander & Hernández, 2013). There are many variables when looking at the barriers to relational building. These variables include cultural competency, poverty and language (Lipman, 1995). Teachers that do not thoroughly understand the socioeconomic and cultural makeup of the students they serve may not be as successful in developing meaningful relationships of African American students in their classrooms (Lee, 2014).

Sometimes African American students do not have two parent households and strong positive reinforcements at home to augment daily instruction (Ferguson, 2001; Ravitch, 2016). Rather than receiving needed positive reinforcement in school, some African American students are reprimanded for misbehavior, labeled or tracked in ability groups (Lipman, 1995). These forms of student segregation only further build discord in the classroom for the student and the teacher (Wagner, 2014). Students are affected by these practices in many more ways. Psychologically, such behavior on the teacher's part can place a threshold in the student's own education and desire to work hard to strengthen core competencies in order to be academically successful (Wagner, 2014; Hale, 2014).

Many African American students are unable to receive an equitable education due to the changing dynamics of the teaching workforce (Simon & Johnson, 2015, p.3; Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2006). Research has shown that some African American students do not have access to education in buildings where the administration, teachers and staff are relentless in their pursuit for African American student achievement. Specifically, high rates of teacher turnover and pessimistic attitudes towards students of color (Nelsen & Nelsen, 2015; Simon & Johnson, 2015), experienced in many schools with high African American populations, preclude valuable learning opportunities for these students. There are schools serving large populations of African American students with building staff and teachers who are not committed and dedicated to the success of all students (Feng, 2014). Turnover among new teachers is at an all-time high due to a lack of relational building and limited knowledge on African American families, culture and potential barriers to education achievement (Feng, 2014; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013).

### **Administrator, Teacher, and Parent Collaboration and Communication.**

African American students and other ethnicities represented in public schools need strong support systems where authentic respect, cultural understanding and collaboration takes place among teachers, administration and parents/guardians (Baquedano-López, Alexander & Hernández, 2013; McCray, Grant & Beachem, 2010). Ongoing communication has been noted by previous research to have a positive impact of student performance both in and outside of the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 318-319). African American students and their parents often have something to say and many times their voices are unheard by administrators and teachers who simply do not identify with them whether it be racially or not (Ladson-Billings, G. 2007, p. 316). Many times, miscommunication is mistaken by lack of interest in student involvement and low motivation (Baker, 1999, p. 69). School administration and teachers must be approachable and welcoming to African American students and their parents before they can work to improve the student's educational achievement (Steele, 1992, p. 71). Parents of African American students are not always welcomed into the schools when their student is performing well, instead, they are brought in only when negative information about their student is being delivered such as academic interventions, poor behavior and failing in academic coursework (Steele, 1992, p. 73). This negates a healthy relationship and support system which negatively influences the student's need for a support network (Conger, 2005; Baker, 1999).

**Inequity of Instructional Practices.** Even though segregation has been declared unconstitutional, schools are still operating with some forms of a hidden forms of segregation that is not articulated or discussed publicly (Benito, Alegre & González-

Balletbò, 2013; Conger, 2005). Instructional practices such as ability grouping, or placing students in groups in schools based upon their educational performance for class periods at a time occur in public schools across the nation (Mickelson, & Heath, 1999). Some educators have found that these ability-based groups are mainly filled with minority students, while many Caucasian students remain in their originally assigned class (Conger, 2005, pp. 227-228; Webb, 1989; Lleras, C., & Rangel, C. 2008). The minority students placed into these groups include large populations of African American students (Lleras, C., & Rangel, C. 2008). This practice raises moral and ethical concern as to whether teachers and administrators seek to improve the achievement gap for all students in their decision-making processes. (Lleras, C., & Rangel, C. 2008). It is practices like these which consistently challenge the educational achievement of African American students attending public schools across the United States (Cazden & Beck, 2003).

### **Legislation to Address Inequalities for African American Students**

**Brown vs. Board of Education.** The pathway to equalizing public school classrooms, instruction and support has been a constant battle for African Americans in the history of the United States (Orfield & Eaton, 1997). The United States has made legal progress in establishing equality in classrooms nationwide; however, there is still a continual widening gap of achievement for African American students. Historically, African Americans were not able to be educated in the same classroom with White students. Even after the Reconstruction era preceding the Civil War, segregation, the name given for intentional separation of Blacks and Whites in the United States in public places including schools, has existed (Bell, 1980, pp. 525-527; Kluger, 2011)). In the 1950s, White students were educated with the best books, quality of school buildings, and

even the best training and payment of White teachers (Kluger, 2011). African American students were not afforded these same privileges. Many African American schools were headed by African American teachers who had the difficult task of preparing African American students for success with limited books, little to no funding and overcrowded one or two room school houses (Bell, 2004; Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). Although Black teachers had the upmost respect of African American communities, their work was much harder than those of Caucasian teachers due to limited governmental support and lack of funding (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004, p. 3). It was not until the United States Supreme Court decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education* that segregation based on race was declared unconstitutional (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954). This landmark case, however, changed public education in the United States forever. Schools would now have to integrate. The plans for implementation of this decision was given to the states, and implementation later caused tension because southern states were defiant in instituting their integration plans (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954; Hickenlooper, 2012).

The challenges of African American students to succeed was positively impacted by school integration in some way, but there is still a need for improved achievement (Zirkel & Cantor, 2004, pp. 13-14). Overall, the operation of some public schools today is still rooted in racial inequalities which continue to permeate through classrooms while widening the achievement gaps for African American students (Kohli, 2014). Examples of racial inequalities are further backed through educational leader's hesitance to change and prejudiced attitudes about African American students assimilating with White students (Hickenlooper, 2012; Zirkel & Cantor, 2004). The effects of racial

discrimination has and will continue to work against public educators if everyone is not committed to putting an end the inequities at their core (Bell, 2004).

**Civil Rights Act of 1964.** Since the time of the prominent Brown v. Board of Education case (Brown v. BOE (1954)), public education has attempted to impact education and the achievement gaps for African Americans through various ways (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Gillborn, 2005, p. 486). Another important law affecting the quality of education for African Americans is The Civil Right Act of 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was significant for the African American race as a whole because of its legal implications (Donohue III & Heckman, 1991; Gillborn, 2005). Under this Act, citizens of all ages are protected from discrimination based on race, color or national origin in programs or activities that receive federal governmental financial assistance (Civil Rights Act (1964)). Public schools are an example of a program that receives federal money for operation. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 made a strong commitment to enforcing the Court's decision in the Brown vs. BOE case involving schools (Hickenlooper, 2012). Specifically, some states were hesitant to adhere to the provisions set forth in the Brown vs. Board of Education decision by the Supreme Court. In response to their hesitance to comply, the government passed legislation to cut off funding in Southern schools that did not comply (Hickenlooper, 2012; Gillborn, 2005). Within just 4 years, from 1864 to 1968 there was a 30% increase in integration among southern states (Hickenlooper, 2012).

**Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.** While the Civil Rights Act of 1964 reinforced the ideals the Brown vs. Board of education emphasized, another act was later enforced to further define and address specific educational inequities among

students in K-12. Soon after 1964 and under the authorship of President Lyndon B. Johnson, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) emerged. Under the ESEA Act of 1965, the federal government began directing resources to schools to help ensure all children have equal access to a quality education (Jeffrey, 1978). This law was designed to help all students, including African American students (Jeffrey, 1978; Kluger, 2011). The law's original goal, which remains today, was to improve educational equity for students from lower income families by providing federal funds to school districts serving poor students (Thomas & Brady, 2005, pp. 61-62). This law's mission was to include African American students, even though racial tension still existed with the newly enacted public school integration (McLaughlin, 1974; Donohue III & Heckman, 1991; Thomas & Brady, 2005). However, the law's vagueness still enabled school leaders to continue inequitable decision making in the best interest of White students rather than all students (Donohue III & Heckman, 1991; Thomas & Brady, 2005). Since its initial passage in 1965, ESEA has gone under several revisions. With each revision, there is more definition given to the mission of the Act in addition to the rise of accountability for schools receiving this funding. The reasoning for the continued tailoring of the mission is because the United States government and federal agencies wanted to be able to assess how schools were operating with the additional funding given to them.

**No Child Left Behind (2002).** The most recent revision to President Lyndon B. Johnson's education reform bill, ESEA, is known as the No Child left Behind Act (NCLB) (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002). The No Child Left Behind education reform bill was signed into effect on January 8, 2002. This law was launched under the

leadership of President George W. Bush's Administration. Although the ESEA had many revisions, each reauthorization has brought changes to the program. The central goal of NCLB was to continuously improve the educational opportunities for children from lower income families (Leonardo, 2007, pp. 261-262; Simpson, Lacava & Sampson Graner, 2004).

Although No Child Left Behind includes several federal education programs, the law's requirements for assessments, accountability, and continuous school improvement are the most fundamental components of the education reform policy (McCann, 2015). No Child Left Behind currently requires each state to assess students in mathematics and reading on a yearly basis for third through eighth grade students as well as tenth, eleventh and twelfth graders (McCann, 2015). States must also test students in the third through eighth grade, and again in the tenth and twelfth grade for science (McCann, 2015). Each school has the responsibility for providing accurate assessment results for students with respect to identifiers regarding specific student subgroups, including low-income students, students with disabilities, English language learners, and major racial and ethnic groups (McCann, 2015; Simpson, Lacava & Sampson Graner, 2004). Some educators argue that mandated exams are a good practice for leaders to understand growth patterns of students, but all students must have equitable learning opportunities in order to perform well on exams (Simpson, Lacava & Sampson Graner, 2004, pp. 68-69). Public educators have also expressed that constant changes of NCLB and the ambiguity of the procedures and measurement has been seen as a waste of instructional time and have proven ineffective for measuring student achievement (Harrison-Jones, 2007; Hursh, 2007). Even though NCLB has some positive impacts to public education, African

American students, specifically, are still achieving lower educationally and are less prepared for postsecondary education than their White peers (Hursh, 2007, pp. 296-297; Simpson, Lacava & Sampson Graner, 2004).

**Race to the Top.** The Race to the Top (RTT) legislation was an education grant initiative aimed to support reform initiatives related to instruction and student-centered learning (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The efforts of this initiative were intended to personalize instruction and learning tailored exclusively to the needs of all student populations represented in a school (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Under the Race to the Top, individual schools would apply for the grant monies administered by the government in efforts to positively impact student performance among all students (Onosko, 2011). Developers of this platform, including US Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan and Former President Barack Obama, held an expectation that there would be accountability and action to effect positive change in the nation's lowest-performing schools (National Education Policy Center, 2010). These low performing schools are home to groups of students who are not making progress and whose graduation rates are low in comparison to high performing schools (Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein & Prine, 2015). Race to the Top guaranteed to serve as an innovation laboratory, an advancing new way to educate students through a personalized approach (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The Race to the Top competition invited applicants to demonstrate how they can personalize education for all students in their schools; however, many of these plans were never executed (Saltman, 2015). Schools had to apply for funding with RTT. There was a strict application process and a complex criteria system for schools to

complete in order to determine whether they would receive grant money to implement into their school (Onosko, 2011).

The Race to the Top-District program was also aimed at making a difference in the classroom level, empowering the all-important relationships to be strengthened between educators and students; however, there is still improvement needed (National Education Policy Center, 2010). The teacher plays an important role in the RTT because overall accountability and evaluation of effectiveness is examined from the student's mandated assessment results (National Education Policy Center, 2010; Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein & Prine, 2015). Although the vast majority of states have competed to win the grants, Race to the Top has also been criticized by politicians, policy analysts, thought leaders, and educators (Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein & Prine, 2015). Public and charter school teachers argued that state tests are an inaccurate way to measure student proficiency, despite the fact that learning gains on these exams are only one component of student assessment systems (Weiss, 2014; Dragoset et al., 2016; Onosko, 2011). Another concern for educators is the ambiguity associated with the use of government funds because the school has limited autonomy to actually use the funding in the best interest of the student body (Onosko, 2011). The student needs will differ with each building (Dragoset et al., 2016). Teachers are then operating with reluctance to use governmental funds as reform because of the U.S.'s reputation of granting additional funding into schools and not continuing this assistance from year to year (Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein & Prine, 2015). Some teachers even felt that the reform would not last long before another mandate or strategy would emerge (Wiggan, Scott, Watson & Reynolds, 2014; Russell, Meredith, Childs, Stein & Prine, 2015). The morale of teaching,

instruction and willingness to have their voices heard by policymakers was challenged with this reform strategy in addition to the minimal impact made to African American student achievement (Wiggan, Scott, Watson & Reynolds, 2014, pp. 82-83).

**Every Student Succeeds Act.** Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, and it represented good news for schools in the United States (ESSA, 2015). This Act reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), the nation's national education law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students. Although this reform law sought to improve equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students, African American students still need additional support (ESSA, 2015). ESSA requires that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will prepare them to succeed in college and careers. However, there is a rise in African American students who are not achieving with the high academic standards mandated by ESSA due to ability level and other external factors (Petrilli, Griffith, Wright & Kim, 2016). ESSA has attempted to improve equity in all schools by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students (Petrilli, Griffith, Wright & Kim, 2016). One of the main ways the government has sought to fulfill this plan is increasing the funding given to school districts based on the number of low performing schools within each district (Au & Hollar, 2016). The problem with this funding allocation is that additional government funding from ESSA is being spent across entire public school districts and not just those low performing, high need, schools as the ESSA suggests (Au & Hollar, 2016; Petrilli, Griffith, Wright & Kim, 2016). Unfortunately, some schools that already receive sufficient financial resources are given

more funding, while the lower performing schools still struggle to raise achievement (Au & Hollar, 2016). ESSA is also committed to providing vital information to educators, families, students, and communities through annual statewide assessments that measure students' progress toward those high standards (Petrilli, Griffith, Wright & Kim, 2016). One argument for this idea is that the parents and caregivers of students in high poverty, lower performing schools, rarely ever understand the vernacular of the educational research conducted in the first place (Au & Hollar, 2016; Petrilli, Griffith, Wright & Kim, 2016; DuFour & Marzano, 2015). The principals, teachers and staff have not always been the most welcoming to parents. In articulating the need for parental support and advocacy for making parents partners in education leaves many parents uninformed about the educational achievement of their child (DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Ladson Billings, 2006).

### **School Partnerships for Student Success**

School Partnerships can positively influence and make a lasting impact to students in public schools (Curry, 2010). There is a consistent need for schools in low performing districts to partner with other organizations to provide support to students facing challenges with their academic performance and college preparation (Sanders, 1998, p. 386). There is a major decline in the engagement and academic motivation of African American students in particular (Jordan, 2013). Many students may not have the necessary support or assistance with homework and extracurricular activities due to the student's home environment. The dynamics of the schools are changing as with the population (Sanders, 2013). For many families that reside in low socioeconomic neighborhoods, there is often limited access to educational resources and positive role

models to assist parents in strengthening their child's academic performance (Lee, 2002, p. 7). All students need to be able to grow, develop and have equal opportunity to succeed (Lee, 2002). There is more evidence to explain how school partnerships involving students in K-12 can make a lasting impact on a child's educational achievement and success in their post-secondary education (Jeynes, 2007). An attitude of willingness is one that will serve any leader well when understanding how to build and seek partners for their school (Jordan, 2013).

When school leaders and teachers work to build partnerships, these partnerships can help the build self-esteem of their students and provide a sense of empowerment (Epstein, 2001; Jeynes, 2007, pp. 83-84). Members of society often want to give back by becoming involved in the educational matters of students through various ways (Ravitch, 2016). Specifically, in urban education, where African American students are often not performing at their full potential and are in need of a positive role models to succeed (Ladson-Billings, 2007), trained mentors, school volunteers, and community leaders could make a tremendous difference in students' lives through partnership efforts (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Literacy, math and student development are major areas where school partnerships can provide additional support to augment instructional time and build up the next generation of youth to become confident members of society (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak & Shogren, 2015). The children of today are our future and we all must realize that educational leaders should take every opportunity to maximize relational and educational support opportunities as often as possible (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Another area in which school partnerships assist students in achieving and being successful in school is discipline and self-respect (Sanders, 2014). Students who regularly make poor behavior choices are likely to improve when outside influences, sometimes with others who identify with the student on a personal level, may work to improve the poor behavior into a more appropriate behavior conducive to the learning environment (Dilworth-Anderson, Burton & Johnson, 1993). Previous research has shown that student behavior has significantly improved by having community presence on a regular basis (Ice, Thapa & Cohen, 2015). In addition, technological devices donated by willing corporate partners has cut down the suspension rate by 75% in one elementary school in a larger urban school district (Ice, Thapa & Cohen, 2015). Specifically, when students understand that they must act in appropriate manner to participate in the activities and planned events with community partners, students tend to make better choices behaviorally speaking so that they do not lose privileges (Ice, et al., 2015).

Mentor programs through many public-school partnerships have also made a lasting impact on the development and personal self-image to African American males in grades Kindergarten through 12th grade (Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003). The media's negative portrayal and emphasis of young African American males can create a sense of self-inferiority and a deflated self-image (Bean, Bush, McKenry, & Wilson, 2003, pp. 547-549). Many African American school leaders feel there is need for African American students to see other African Americans of all ages who care about them and are interested in what they are doing in their educational endeavors (Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). Some African American households are disturbed, broken and not healthy for the student's development (McGowan, Palmer, Wood & Hibbler,

2016). A positive male role model who expresses interest in the psychological and educational well-being of a young African American male can work for the good of the student (McGowan, Palmer, Wood & Hibbler, 2016; Noguera, 2014, pp. 114-116; Gordon, Iwamoto, Ward, Potts, & Boyd, 2009). In response to needs resulting from many one parent households, it is helpful to have these resources that may not otherwise be offered to students at no cost to increase the educational achievement and well-being of African American students (Noguera, P. 2014; Sanders, 2003).

**Service Organizations.** Partnerships with service organizations often benefit educational leaders and their reform efforts to bridge the achievement gap between White and minority students (McGowan, Palmer, Wood & Hibbler, 2016; Epstein, 2001). When education decision makers understand the ways in which the service organizations support African American students, they can work to bring about a culture change in the building or district rooted in improving student academic performance (Roehlkepartain, 2009; Epstein, 2001). Service organizations are those organizations that work with youth without charge to the student. Additionally, service organizations are generally non-profit organizations who look to donate their time, resources and services as a way to rebuild and improve the quality of life for those in need (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome & Ferrari, 2003; Roehlkepartain, 2009).

There are currently programs found in a variety of service organizations to address the educational inequalities which appear in public schools (Billingsley & Caldwell, 1991). Service organizations, such as the Salvation Army, AmeriCorps and the Boys and Girls Club of America, are committed to supporting youth through many acts of benevolence (Graham, 2014). Some programs offered by these organizations include

but are not limited to ACT/SAT Preparatory courses, reading buddies, math partners, mentorship programs and tutoring sessions (Graham, 2014). It often benefits educational leaders to establish school partnerships with these service organizations to bridge the achievement gap within the African American student communities (Anderson-Butcher, Newsome & Ferrari, 2003; Hill & Bush, 2001). Research suggests that school leaders should plan and establish a mission and goal with respect to their staff before beginning any outside influence to their building (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). The leader's decisions should align with a desire to better serve the demographics and instructional needs significantly represented in their buildings (DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Fullan, 2007, pp.164-165). Partnerships with service organization may look different within each partnered organization, and the needs of the students at the school will also likely vary (Roehlkepartain, 2009). School partnerships with service organizations rarely ever have a financial cost to the individual school or school district with the partnership (Lipman, 2004).

**Local Business Partners.** Local businesses and commerce organizations are also a valuable entity to assist students in improving their academics from a motivational standpoint (Graham, 2014, p. 1). Businesses, depending upon the type, often have financial resources to provide funds to school for instructional assistance and scholarships to students who are graduating from high school and wanting to attend college (Bryan & Henry, 2012, pp. 408-409). The costs associated with college keep students from attending, so every amount of money given to students through partnerships helps (Sudarkasa, 1997; Gordon & Louis, 2009). Students in business partnered schools will often have to undergo an application process and meet some

criteria for the scholarships provided by businesses (Bryan & Henry, 2012). This application process helps to build responsibility and motivation to be successful. Overall, school partnerships with local businesses can work well for the academic achievement for not only African American students, but all students (Epstein, 2001). Business partnerships are also large contributors to developing students for the workforce by providing technological devices, sometimes in large quantities, to assist schools serving students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Jackson, Johnson & Persico, 2016; Sanders, 1998). Due to the socioeconomic standing of some African American students, innovative technology made available to students helps to augment traditional classroom instruction (Jackson, Johnson & Persico, 2016).

Building principals have also reported that school partnerships with banks and other financial institutions have supported students by issuing savings bonds for students who are consistently improving and making progress in instructional areas, especially in math (Sanders, 2014). In addition to these previously discussed measures, many businesses financially contribute to the partnered school's goals, missions and needs set forth by the principal and teachers of the partnered school (Sanders, 2014). The distribution of these funds is often in addition to the school district's budget allocations for the school (Hargreaves, 2003). Just as service organization partnerships appear differently at each school based on needs, so do business based partnerships and the schools to which they partner (Epstein, 2011; Hargreaves, 2003). Just as with service organizations, there is rarely ever a financial cost the school or the district within a school partnership with a business or related entity (Summers et al., 2005).

**Faith-Based Institutions.** Faith-Based organizations also partner and sponsor public schools seeking to improve their community presence and impact the educational achievement of students in Kindergarten through twelfth grade (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Faith-based organizations have a different perspective than other partnerships with different organizations designed to transform students' lives (Sanders, 2014). Regardless of the student's background, many faith based organizations look to the well-being and mindset renewal of students that, they believe, will provide hope and, therefore, promote higher achievement in all areas of academics (Gorham, 2005). Faith organizations have and continue to support education through backpack drives, college visits, tutoring programs, mentoring and community activism (Taylor, Lincoln & Chatters, 2005, pp. 504-505; Rubin, Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994). While there are many forms and types of faith-based organizations, one commonality is the desire to improve society by assisting the youth to be successful (Lickona, 2009). Many churches of various denominations support students through hosting back to school supply drives, vouchers for ACT/SAT Exams, and many college preparation fairs as well (Sanders, 2014).

There is a slight sense of hesitance in educational leaders connecting with churches and religious organizations because of the diverse religions being practiced within one school building (Baum, 2002). Legally, administration must be cognizant that no student is made uncomfortable do to religious activity (Baum, 2002). Clear communication and thorough articulation on the goals of the partnership between the principal, school staff member and the representatives for the organizations partnering with the school should take place prior to the initiation of the partnership (Shapiro, & Stefkovich, 2016; Lickona, 2009; Baum, 2002). This type of procedure will protect the

school, the administration, teaching staff and the district from litigation and offending students and parents who are not comfortable with an overbearing influence of Christian values (Baum, 2002).

### **Theoretical Framework**

For this study, both critical race theory and social learning theory are proposed theoretical frames to further explain the current underachievement and lack of college preparation of African American students in the United States. Critical race theory, CRT, draws from the role of race and racism in American culture. The evidence of racism being exercised both blatantly and subliminally throughout public education provides credibility on how Black Church partnerships with schools can positively influence the lives and support academic achievement for African American students. Critical race theorists (Ladson-Billings, 1995) suggest that racism, itself, is systematic and not individual. Therefore, in order to solve racial issues, solutions must be implemented in the actual system where racism exists (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For this study, the system is public schools. Social Learning theory focuses on the examples and the acquisition of knowledge from others through social interactions between the teacher and the learner.

**Social Learning Theory.** The Social Learning Theory, from the work of Albert Bandura (1977) and Richard Walters (1977), can further explain how African American student perceptions may inform the researcher about how the Black Church partnerships with schools work to model intended behaviors that will ultimately ensure educational achievement and prepare students for college. Social learning theory also posits that learning is a thought process that can take place in social contexts with or without reinforcement (Bandura, 1986). Bandura's concept of modeling has ethos when African

American students have the guidance of Black Church members and leaders who have encountered the same life experiences as the students (Jordan, 2013). When Black church leaders and members instruct students and work one on one with them, they can impact them positively (Jordan, 2013).

Observational learning in a social learning environment, like that of a church and school partnership, would not be successful if four components are not found (Bandura & Walters 1977; Wenger, 1998). The four operational processes include attentional, retention, production and motivational (Bandura & Walters 1977) processes. The model must work to grasp the attention of the learner, which is the first process of observational learning. The learner is more likely to pay attention to a model that he/she respects, favors and highly regards or is connected with culturally or in some meaningful way (Wenger, 1998; Meece, Anderman & Anderman, 2006). The retention process involves the learner's memory of the modeled behavior. This process takes on methods of enactments, verbal codes, and visual imagery (Bandura & Walters 1977). Whether spoken word or a recollection of events, the retention process will be subjective to each individual learner's perception. The production, also known as reproduction phase, is the third process. This process entails the learner producing the behavior and/or actions observed by the model from the learner's memory (Bandura & Walters 1977; Bandura, 1986). The learner is more likely to reproduce modeled behaviors that are perceived as favorable, effective and respected by other members of society. The final process, motivation, involves the learner's tendency to repeat the modeled behavior in the first place (Bandura & Walters 1977; Bandura, 1986). The learner's likelihood to repeat a

behavior relies on the extent to which the learner feels that the modeled behavior(s) are worthwhile and of great benefit for him/her in any area of life (Kelland, 2015, p. 7).

When applied to this research, Black Church partnerships with low performing schools can serve African American students well in improving their educational achievement and preparation for college through the modeled behaviors of Black Church members, ministers and leaders (Hope, Assari, Cole-Lewis & Caldwell, 2017, pp. 1-3). The first process, attention, would be esteemed when African American students see successful Black Church members being present and playing an active role in their achievement in the classroom to improve their learning and performance (Bandura & Walters 1977; Hale, 2004). The connection formed with the students is important for the church and school partnership. The second process, retention, would see African American students remembering the fundamentals and ways of support offered through the church and school partnership in the presence and absence of the Black Church members on a daily basis (Bandura & Walters 1977). This idea would mentally remind students to work hard to achieve whether they are being helped by the Black Church on that given day or not (Hope, Assari, Cole-Lewis & Caldwell, 2017). The production phase enables the teachers, administrators and Black Church partners to see how students are improving and making positive strides towards raising their achievement and understanding the processes and requirement for competency with college preparation (Kelland, 2015, p.7). This process would rely solely on the modeled behaviors and the delivery of African American students to produce learned behaviors when they are well received and the consequences are favorable to their teachers, school leaders and even relationships with others formed in the Black Church partnership (Hope, Assari, Cole-

Lewis & Caldwell, 2017; Kelland, 2015). The fourth and final process, motivation, would be the assessment performed by all stakeholders, including the students themselves about their overall production of learned behaviors through the support structures set forth in the Black Church partnership and their school (Kelland, 2015). The analysis to meet this process may be through teacher observation, test results, college acceptance letters, comparisons with GPA's and reduction in disciplinary infractions of African American students (Kelland, 2015).

**Critical Race Theory.** Critical Race Theory, derived out of legal studies, examines society from a critical perspective in order to bring social change and justice for marginalized groups of people (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1995). Critical Race Theory was formally introduced in the work of Derrick Bell (1987) and Alan Freeman (1987) in efforts to reduce the likeliness of racial injustice. Due to the fact that the focus of the study is African American students and the Black Church there is the potential for themes to arise that could be analyzed through Critical Race Theory, specifically the incidence of counter-storytelling and interest convergence. Aligning with this study, critical race theorists would argue that African American students in public school settings are not as prepared, supported or even offered the same opportunities as those students identifying as Caucasian. This belief is, in part, because of the limited amount of support and quality of schools serving large populations of African American students (Brayboy, 2005, pp. 427-429; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Critical race theory is founded upon five tenets (1) counter-storytelling; (2) the permanence of racism; (3) whiteness as property; (4) interest convergence; and (5) the critique of liberalism (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Sleeter, 2012, pp. 491-493).

The first tenet of CRT, storytelling, would include the student perceptions of the African American students, educators and Black Church members in the critique of public education and the support found in the partnerships with schools to support achievement. Critical race theorists pose that through storytelling, the oppressed or marginalized groups of people are able to emancipate themselves and educate others about their personal experiences with the injustice or inequity found in society (Sleeter, 2012, pp. 492-493; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). The tenet of storytelling will come directly from the student perceptions gained through various data collection techniques discussed in the methods section.

Tenet Two, the permanence of racism, indicates that individuals acknowledge and understand how racism is still present today and how, sometimes, it is found secretly embedded in some educational leader's decision making strategies which continues the tradition of inequity in public education among other ethnicities (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Brayboy, 2005; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). This idea is found in the decisions made regarding schools serving large populations of African American and the limited reform strategies sought after to improve the educational achievement and college preparation specifically for African American students.

Tenet Three "Whiteness as property" contends that Whiteness guaranteed legal entitlement to property and to freedoms that non-Whites did not have. The history of the United States in nearly every operational function has this ideal present in some aspect; public education is not excluded. Steele (2012) contends that "over time, Whites accumulated property through this overtly racist and legalized system, passing property on to their children. Thus, Whiteness became linked with property and took on legal

protections of property rights” (p. 492). While laws in the United States apply equally to everyone, Whites sometimes use property, power, and expression of favoritism and looking to their own race as the only competent race to maintain systematic racism (Bell, 1987; Sleeter, 2012; Delgado, 1995). It appears that many Whites “own” the education system in many large public school districts across the United States, and, therefore, they create and enforce their idealistic education system and all other must follow. The provisions and access to a high-quality education is enjoyed and embraced by white students, teachers and administrators, while many non-White students fail to have the same educational achievement improvement and post-secondary education preparation (Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009; Gillborn, 2005; Hale, 2004).

The 4<sup>th</sup> tenet of critical race theory, interest convergence, is the idea that operational decisions should and are made in the best interest of White people. Applied to public education in the United States, White educational leaders and decision makers ensure that White students are the beneficiaries of the best education possible along with access and resources to ensure academic excellence and thorough college preparation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Sleeter, 2012). Sometimes, decisions that are made at the district level are not always the best option for African American students and the schools where the largest populations of African American students are attending (Vaught & Castagno, 2008). This ideology is seen across public school districts today because decisions regarding instruction and access to resources are made in the best interest of Caucasian students, while students of other races must comply with the decisions made by district leaders, even if the decisions are inequitable (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). If decisions are made which help African Americans

specifically, interest convergence would say that the decision must be in the interest of Caucasian students as well before implementation (Sleeter, 2012; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Gillborn, 2005). Decisions at the district level are not always racially equitable because there is a lack of African American district and building level leadership in many public districts to advocate in the best interests of African American students (Ladson-Billings, 2003). Possible improvement strategies such as rebuilding communities and encouraging communal participation in schools are likely to evolve if more ethnic representation at the district administrator level emerges (Ladson-Billings, 2003).

The final and 5th tenet of CRT is “critique of liberalism.” CRT theorists hold this tenet to have three components: the idea of colorblindness, the neutrality of the law, and the idea of incremental change to improve (McCoy & Rodricks, 2015; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). If education decision makers could agree to adopt a colorblind decision-making process, then all students would likely be able to successfully achieve educationally and prepare for college. Educators should be critical of liberalism and value the lived experiences of all students and how their lived experiences have shaped them (McLauren, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 2003). When decision makers maintain this perspective, they are likely to increase the educational achievement and preparation of African American students for post-secondary education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lipman, 2013).

### **Summary**

The challenge to improve the educational achievement and college preparation for African American students can be impacted through wholesome community partnerships and involvement. While this is a challenge, it is one worthwhile for educational leaders.

There is more research need to understand how the Black Church partnerships with schools can work to improve the educational achievement and college preparation for African American students. This chapter surfaced previous research with respect to theory and practice relative to understanding the Black Church, inequity in African American student achievement, legislation addressing inequalities, school partnerships and two theoretical frameworks for this study.

## CHAPTER III

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter provides a thorough description of the study's research methodology. The purpose of this study is to understand how Black Church partnerships with schools support the educational achievement of African American students. The chapter will further explain the rationale for research approach, description of the research population, overview of the research design, methods of data collection, and proposed method for analysis and synthesis of data. In addition, ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness are addressed. This chapter will conclude with a brief summation.

#### **Rationale for Qualitative Research Design**

This qualitative case study sought to locate and understand the world from the participants' perspective through meaning found in data collected from multiple sources (Creswell, 2013; 2007). The participant and the researcher both play an active role in the development of qualitative research. Qualitative research has a strong emphasis on developing an understanding through first hand, lived experiences of the participant (Merriam, 1998). The participants' lived experiences, in addition to researcher observations, artifacts, and researcher-guided dialogue, work in conjunction to develop meaning to a particular social behavior(s) (Merriam, 1998).

Qualitative case study research employs multiple data collection techniques to reveal one or all of the previously stated goals of qualitative inquiry. A case study looks

closely at individuals, small groups and large groups of participants that align with a specific context defined by the researcher (Merriam, 1998; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The researcher then collects data from the participants using a variety of methods including participant and direct observations, interview protocols, tests, examinations of records, and collections of writing samples.

### **Rationale for a Case Study**

This research employed a single case study in order to understand how one Black Church partners with a school to support the educational achievement of African American students. A case study uses a system that is bounded by time, event and setting to explore a phenomenon in order to illustrate a problem or solution to an existing problem (Creswell, 2013; 2007; Stake, 1995). A case study is an appropriate design when questions such as “how” and “what” are being studied (Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) noted that a single case study design is an appropriate design for understanding and interpreting educationally based phenomena (p. 18). When applied to this research, a case study design will be used to understand, from the participant’s perceptions, how Black Church and school partnerships support the educational achievement of African American students. The utilization of a single case study design will enable the researcher to focus on the following research questions in addition to taking in the account the context of real world application and practice.

### **Research Questions**

#### **Overarching Question:**

How has this partnership between the Black Church in this community and this public school promoted student success for involved African American students?

1. What are church member and administrator perceptions concerning the influence Black Church partnerships have had on African American students' educational achievement?
2. What motivates African American students to become involved in the partnerships between Black Churches and their public school?

This research uses purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research when the researcher selects participants and sites for the study because they can purposefully contribute to the research problem or phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). Selection criteria are more fully discussed in sampling techniques described below.

### **Epistemological Perspective**

**Constructivism.** Constructivism, an epistemological perspective, is appropriate for this study because I believe that each of the participant's knowledge about reality is personally constructed and based on their interaction and personal interpretations of partnership efforts (Crotty, 1998). Each participant's perception is personally constructed based on the influence the Black Church and school partnership has had on the educational achievement and college preparation of the students involved. Multiple meanings will likely emerge because everyone's personal experience is unique and personalized. I expect that each participant will, in some way, have a different lived experience with the Black Church/school partnerships according to his/her role and specifically what types of support was found and meaningful to his/her educational achievement and college preparation.

It was necessary for me to become involved in the reality and personal interaction for a variety of participants in order gain a solid understanding about the support found in the Black Church and school partnerships relating to African American student achievement and college preparation. I understand that my personally constructed reality envelops my perspective as a researcher, and the same will likely be for each participant. My position in the study, and resulting limitation, is described more fully below.

### **The Case/ Study Sites**

#### **Study Population**

The case identified in this study is one historically Black Church that partners with one high school in the second largest public school district in a southwestern city in a Midwestern state in the United States. To protect anonymity of all participants, the name of Joyful Noise Baptist Church is selected to protect the disclosure of the Church's actual name. The actual name of the High School will not be disclosed; instead, the fictive name is Successful Preparation High School.

**Joyful Noise Baptist Church.** This Church is located in a large urban neighborhood with historical precedence for many African Americans in the city. Joyful Noise Baptist Church is operating in its second building not far from its first location which began in 1912. The Church was burned completely down in response to racial tension brewing between Whites and Blacks in the early years of the church's existence. In fact, rioting was evidenced which makes the geographical location of both the former and current building significant to the history of the church. This Joyful Noise Baptist Church has been instrumental in supporting students both in K-12 grades and in college. There is one senior Pastor and three associate ministers. Joyful Noise Baptist Church has

over 40 auxiliaries and ministries to strengthen, impact, and support all of its members and the community in which the church is located. Joyful Noise Baptist Church hosts a college ministry, youth ministry, and children's ministry all of which are directed by current and retired educators. The church has a member roll exceeding 500 members (Joyful Noise Baptist Church, 2017). The average Sunday attendance is 330 members. Joyful Noise Baptist Church is home to a diverse age population (church website, 2017). Thirty percent of the church's membership is 50-80 years of age (church website, 2017). About 40% of the membership is 20-50 years of age (church website, 2017). Approximately 25% of the congregation is under 20 years of age and 5% is older than 80 years of age (church website, 2017). The Church has also prepared and nurtured countless successful African American students. Joyful Noise Baptist Church places a strong emphasis on education and the attainment of its members (personal interview, 2017). The founding and former minister were in some way connected to education whether by occupation or through acts of benevolence (church website, 2017). Evidence of the influence of the church has ethos in the fact that several members of the congregation both in the past and now, are doctors, attorneys, judges, principals and teachers.

Joyful Noise Baptist Church currently has a partnership with one high school. The school is located in the same large urban city and is located within a 5-mile distance of Joyful Noise Baptist Church. The partnership with this school began 40 years ago when the pastor at the time had children who attended the school and saw the need to support African American students who had recently gone through school integration (personal interview, 2017). The partnership founded by Joyful Noise's pastor at the time has grown

and taken on additional facets including scholarships, school grants, and ACT/SAT prep classes. Since the time of the partnership's beginning, there has been a close relationship and consistent amending of support provided to sure effectiveness and efficiency to impact this city's community and its families.

**Successful Preparation High School.** Successful Preparation is a public high school, one of nine, in the second largest school district of a southwestern state. The school is named for a notable African American, an abolitionist and scholar dedicated to impacting positive change for the African American race (District Website, 2017). The school has a rich history and served as an all-Black high school before racial integration was enforced in the 1960s-70s (District Website, 2017). For the past two academic years, Successful Preparation High School has enrolled an additional 265 students due to a recent consolidation of schools in the district in a nearby area of time. Successful Preparation High School has also recently undergone restructuring and has become a school with a focus on science and technology (District Website, 2017). This reform strategy was instituted to increase the school's graduation rate of 68%.

Successful Preparation High School serves students in grades 9-12. The total student population in the fall of 2016 for Successful Preparation High School was 1,117 (District Website, 2017). The enrollment figures for Successful Preparation High School are as follows; 9<sup>th</sup> grade: 287, 10<sup>th</sup> grade: 245, 11<sup>th</sup> grade: 281 and 12<sup>th</sup> grade: 304. An estimated 84% of the 1,117 students receive either free or reduced lunch price qualifying the school as a high poverty, Title I school (District Website, 2017). The ratio of students to teachers at Successful Preparation High School is 21:1 (District Website, 2017). The ethnic breakdown of the student population Preparation high is as follows: African

American 41%, Caucasian 41%, Multiracial 7%, Hispanic 6%, Native American 3%, Asian 4% (District Website, 2017). There are three certified teachers, one guidance counselor and the school registrar employed at Successful Preparation High School who are members of Joyful Noise Baptist Church (personal interview, 2017).

There are three low-income apartment complexes and many rental properties in the immediate community that are homes to many of the students attending Successful Preparation High School (personal interview, 2017). Approximately 76% of the student body live in a 4-mile radius from the school, making it the home school for many students living in this area (District Website, 2017). Even with the commitment to academic excellence for all students through a multi-faceted support system, the partnership with Joyful Noise Baptist Church has sought to impact the success of African American students specifically for the past 45 years.

### **The Research Sample**

This research used purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research when the researcher selects participants and sites for the study because they can purposefully contribute to the research problem or phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2007, p. 125). I conducted fourteen interviews total, one initial and one follow up interview for the purpose of member checking with each participant. I purposefully sampled students who are over 18 years of age who have successfully completed high school and who have participated in partnership activities, Black Church members who have participated in partnership efforts, and school personnel who have participated in partnership efforts. There were varying characteristics among participants as related to

their length of time as a member in the Black Church, role in the Black Church partnership, age and gender.

This study sought to recruit at least three participants who were currently students at Successful Preparation High School or who have recently graduated from the school. These students have also been involved in the Church/School partnership activities. Students' lived experiences and perceptions gives ethos to the constructivist epistemology and provides the researcher with pertinent information regarding the specific ways in which the Black Church partnership supports their educational achievement in the classroom and their preparation for college.

This research recruited two participants who are members at Joyful Noise Baptist Church. The leadership insight they have was beneficial to the study to provide an understanding of how church members can support educational achievement and why the Black Church seeks to partner with the school. The concept of modeling through social interaction was found in the data from Black Church leaders.

I also recruited at two participants who are Successful Preparation High School staff members, one counselor and the principal. Their insight and experiences with education and politics enabled me to understand administrator perceptions of the role the community has in the educational achievement of African American students. The recruitment of participants and data collected continued until saturation was noted with a minimum sample size of 7 participants.

### **Data Collection**

This research employed multiple data collection methods to provide a solid, accurate account of the case being studied (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 1994). I contacted the

Church office and scheduled a meeting with the Associate Teaching Pastor of Joyful Noise Baptist Church and the principal of Successful Preparation High School prior to the data collection process to ask for their permission to participate in the study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) requires that each participant completes a consent form to protect the individual. This study complied with all procedures aligning with the provisions set forth by IRB.

There are four main types of data collection techniques adopted by qualitative researchers: observation, participant interviews, document analysis and audiovisual materials. This study used three of the four techniques noted by Creswell (2007): observation, participant interviews and document analysis. Researcher observations of the participants were recorded as field notes and added to the data collected from interviews and artifacts to be used in the analysis of this study. Based upon the literature, any event, social interaction, program and component of the black church partnership may be appropriate for observation. Including this information aided me, as the researcher, in understanding partnership efforts in the natural setting of the case being studied (Merriam, 1998). Participant interviews, for this study, was conducted using an open-ended semi-structured interview protocol in order to provide an opportunity to interpret the significance of the phenomenon through the participant's point-of-view (Creswell, 2007; Merriam 1998). Open ended questions enabled me to more fully understand the participant and their views regarding the phenomenon studied (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2005). On the other hand, closed-ended questions would not have provided me, the researcher, with an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of those involved in the Black Church and school partnerships and the impact to educational achievement for

African American students (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2005). Closed ended constructed interview questions would have not allowed me to follow up with unexpected or unanticipated responses from participants, if employed in this study. The flexibility to ask “follow up” questions helped me understand the participants meanings more fully (Rubin, & Rubin, 2011, pp. 149-151).

Document analysis for this study included official programs, flyers, administrative reports, and/or records that established the underlying meaning, while gain understanding of partnership efforts between this church and the school (Casey & Houghton, 2010; Creswell, 2007). For this study, certificates of completion, academic awards, scholarships, photographs and published articles of the Black Church and school partnership are appropriate examples of the documents that were analyzed. Audiovisual materials refer to the analysis of activities such as examining photographs, videos, and other personal gifts given to students by the Black Church partners (Creswell, 2007). Audiovisual materials are personal property and are not always available for an extended amount of time; therefore, it will not be used in this study (Creswell, 2013).

**Interviewing.** Interviewing is a valuable assessment tool because it allows the participant to share their experiences, attitudes, and beliefs in their own words (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Interviews were useful for this study because allowing participants to disclose their perceptions about their experiences and connections to the Black Church helped me understand how partnerships support the educational achievement and college preparation of African American students in these schools. Interviews can be either structured, semi-structured or unstructured (Creswell, 2013). Structured interviews are typically very controlled, with fixed, pre-planned questions and

semi-structured interviews involve some planning, but there is freedom to vary the course of the interview based on the participant's responses (Creswell, 2013; 2007).

Unstructured interviews are the least rigid, and involve little to no pre-planning (Creswell, 2013; 2007). This study used individual, semi-structured interview protocol, where the same open-ended questions are asked to all participants. This approach facilitated interviews that were easily analyzed and compared. However, I remained open to unanticipated responses and will ask follow up questions for clarification if the participant's meaning is not clear. According to Creswell (2007), researcher challenges with interviews involve the ability to negotiate questions that deal with sensitive issues, and complete transcriptions. I was aware of how interview questions were phrased, as not to lead to subtle responses or explanations from the participants in this study. The interview protocol is available in Appendix A, and the interview questions were crafted to allow for each participant to communicate his/her perspectives. The interview protocol for this study is comprised of open-ended questions that seek to gain understanding regarding the support offered by Black Church partnerships with schools. Each question was carefully constructed for clarity and pertinence of the overarching research question, supplemental research questions and theoretical framework for this study. There are questions built into the protocol that directly relate to each participants' role in the Black Church and school partnership.

All participant interviews were recorded and stored on a removable disk drive. The interviews were transcribed immediately after the interview ended, and the transcription was saved to an electronic file in preparation for data analysis. Line transcription was used to have a word for word account for each participant interview.

The captivation of pure speech also provided ethos the constructivist epistemology and the critical theoretical frame. The researcher also took necessary field notes before and after each interview. The use of field notes further assisted me in further understanding the meaning of participant responses.

**Document Analysis.** Document analysis is the collection of written materials in a variety of forms to help the researcher establish a stronger understanding of the phenomenon being studied that may not be easily observed or expressed through participant interviews (Creswell, 2013). Participants were asked to bring any artifacts significant to the Black Church Partnership with the school to the interview. The researcher also located and reviewed documents relevant to the Black Church and school partnerships. These documents included advertisements for involvement in partnership efforts at both the Successful Preparation High School and the Joyful Noise Baptist Church, programs certificates, published materials such as newspaper articles, and web published information retrieved from school and church websites. This form of data collection has been seen as a challenge for researchers due to the access to find pertinent written materials aligning with the case being studied (Creswell, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). There are three primary types of documents used in document analysis:

1. **Public Records:** Public records are the written or published accounts of an organization's activities and programs. Examples include meeting notes, student transcripts, mission statements, annual reports, policy manuals, student handbooks and strategic plans.
2. **Personal Documents:** Personal documents are first-person accounts of an individual's actions, experiences, and beliefs. Examples of personal documents

would include calendars, e-mails, scrapbooks, blogs, Facebook posts, duty logs, incident reports, reflections/journals, and newspapers.

3. Physical Evidence: also known as artifacts, physical evidence can be objects found within the study setting. Some examples would include flyers, posters and agendas.

Each of these types of documents were utilized in the data collection process.

**Observation.** Observation is an instrumental part of the data collection process. Observation in this study allowed me to build an in-depth understanding of how the Black Church partnerships with schools support the educational achievement and college preparation for African American students. Observation examples for this study included; tutoring sessions, mentorship activities and intervention strategies articulated within the context of the school/church partnerships. Once I conducted an observation, field notes were written either by hand or typed using a laptop or iPad. All field notes were written in a standard format that identified direct quotes through spoken word, a rich description of the setting and personal reflection of what was observed (Creswell, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 1998). This protocol was used for each and every observation in this study. In addition, the date, time, location and title of the event was recorded along with field notes.

It is important to note that even though I may have been inclined to participate or become involved in the natural setting being observed to the point where I may interfere with the normal processes occurring, I worked to limit my involvement (Creswell, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008; Merriam, 1998). This was extremely challenging, but I have remained mindful of the potential of influencing the findings in the research. I have

remained in the position of a passive observer to serve the research well to be accurate and pure (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Creswell (2007) stated, “Observing in a natural setting “is a special skill that requires addressing issues such as the potential deception of the researcher in a strange or familiar setting” (p.134).

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of data in this case study has resulted in a thick, rich description of participant perceptions of the influence of the Black Church/school partnership on student success. Findings are presented to address the overarching research question and each of the secondary research questions found. This study used the data analysis technique of Merriam (1998) who expressed that data analysis is “the process of making sense out of the data”. The analysis for this study involved “consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read it is the process of making meaning” (Merriam, 1998 p. 178).

First, all interviews conducted were transcribed. The transcription process used a Microsoft Word document with numbered lines while the researcher transcribed recorded interviews for each participant. Each participant was assigned his/her own separate Word document. Secondly, all transcribed interviews were coded. There was more than one round of coding performed from the data collected to ensure thorough understanding. Due to the meticulous construction of the interview questions, some responses elicited long, personal stories from the participants. Metaphors and figurative language were found in responses to the interview questions. Data of this intense nature also required thorough review and analysis throughout the coding process (Merriam, 1998). The process of coding is an intense method of continuously revisiting the data while

confirming or disconfirming evidence in response to personal reaction (Saldaña, 2015). This careful analysis will also support the validity of the research (Saldaña, 2015; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Coding occurred more than once to further condense data.

Once all data collected from participant interviews are coded, I organized the coded data into small themes. Once emerging themes of the data collected were identified, I consolidated the themes into 5-6 larger themes to provide a rich, thick description of the influence of the church/school partnership on student learning. I triangulated the data by analyzing each source of data (interviews, documents, and observations) for confirmability of the findings (Merriam, 1998).

I drew conclusions from the interpretations of the findings in addition to making implications and providing explanations (Patton, 2002). I also developed these interpretations clearly so that the reader can easily understand the case and the phenomena being studied (Yin, 2013; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

While the analyzing process was underway, I referred back to participants as needed if there are any areas of uncertainty in the data collected from each participants. This way generalizations were omitted. This process is referred to as member checking (Saldaña, 2015; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Traditionally, the member check is used in order to assess the accuracy with which a researcher has represented a participant's subjectivity (Koelsch, 2013, p. 168). The member check has been esteemed as an important component of validation in qualitative research.

The credibility of the study is established through my systematic search for competing explanations and interpretations. I surfaced any and all significant overlaps in the findings of the study and the cited literature regarding the phenomenon being studied

(Crotty, 1998). Through my interpretation of the findings, the readers of this study may be able to understand how the Black Church and school partnerships support the educational achievement and college preparation of African American students.

### **Ethical Considerations**

It is necessary that ethical considerations must be in place beginning with protecting the anonymity of each participant in the study (Yin, 2013; 2015; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Each participant in the study were assigned a pseudonym, which was used as an identifier throughout the entire data collection and the presentation of the study's findings as it relates to how Black Church partnerships with school support the educational achievement of African American students.

The Institutional Review Board, IRB, at Oklahoma State University approved the study's protocol to ensure ethical standards are exercised in working with human subjects. Informed Consent, which ensures that the participant understands the procedures involved with their participation of the study will be used. Finally, transcriptions of the interviews, along with the digital recorder were kept in a locked drawer in a locked office. This further protect each participant's confidentiality and anonymity. The transcriptions and record files will be kept for three years after the completion of the study. After the three-year timeframe, all files will be properly discarded.

### **Trustworthiness**

Establishing standards of credibility and dependability are a critical focus for the researcher in producing a useful qualitative study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 77). To produce a credible, qualitative study, three methods will be employed

**Triangulation.** Triangulation is a powerful technique that facilitates validation of data through cross verification from two or more sources. Triangulation, when applied to this research, speaks to the use of multiple methods or data collection sources to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena (Patton, 1999). Triangulation also has been viewed as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. For this study, participants were selected purposefully, but each has a variety of characteristics and have diverse connections with Black Church and school partnerships. The use of observation field notes from researcher observations was used as data. Document analysis, the use of personal or written artifacts and materials that further explain the phenomena being studied (citation needed), were used in as data to be analyzed. The multiple diverse data collection methods for this study worked to ensure that triangulation is reached.

**Member Checking.** Once the initial interview was conducted, I transcribed the interview. I then returned the interview transcripts to each participant for their reading and editing the transcription for accuracy. This exercise, as previously stated, is known as member check. Member checking will allow the participant to make any corrections or add additional information that may be useful for the study (Saldaña, 2015; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). This will not be another interview, but a way to further provide clarity to the original interview. This worked to eliminate any bias of making faulty generalizations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008, p. 77).

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity refers to the researcher's awareness of his/her own personal biases, experiences, and values, which are brought to the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 213). Reflexivity also allows the researcher to fully immerse in the research and be

able to recognize, reflect and suppress personal attitudes towards the data analysis or participants (Creswell, 2013). This will work to build an unbiased study that is balanced. Even though I have been affiliated with Black Churches in same city and education of African American students, I remained aware of my personally constructed beliefs as create a biased-free research process. In order to minimize the opportunity for bias in this study, the I employed the “member check” and each participant was able to view his or her own transcribed interview. This raw data offered the participant the opportunity to perform a self-check to further insure dependability of the study before the thick, descriptive analysis is composed (Jin, 2015).

*Table 1*

Trustworthiness Table

Credibility Strategy	Examples of Activities	Section
Triangulation	Multiple Sources of data: interviews, observations; and documents	Methodology: Data Collection
Thick, Rich Description	Profile of each participant, the school site and the partnering church; In-depth description of interactions and observations; Embedded direct quotes from participant interviews	Findings
Peer-Debriefing	Continuous informal discussions with peers to discuss issues of concern and authenticity of the data collected; feedback on interviews and observations; Consideration of alternate explanations	Methodology: Data Collection
Confirmability	Bracketing and reflexive thinking was applied throughout in order to put personal experiences and reflections aside.	Data Collection and Analysis

Member-Checking	data verification with participants to ensure that data was properly collected and a true reflection of their responses	Data Collection and during Analysis
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### **Limitations**

As with any research study, this study includes limitations. Because the study design is a qualitative case study, the findings could not be generalized beyond the scope of this study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The intention of the study is not to be generalizable to all Black Church partnerships with public schools. However, this study may become a resource to educational leaders, schools, churches and other community members because of its rich description. Joyful Noise Baptist Church is just one Black Church out of thousands that may have different ways in which they support African American student to succeed. The Black Church may not be the only way in which school leaders can increase the achievement of their African American student populations. There may be other partnerships that support the educational achievement of African American students and their college preparation.

As the researcher, I did not add to the information given or add words to the participant's perceptions expressed through the interviews through. I did not have prior knowledge to the relationships between the participants and their experiences with the Black Church partnerships from our cultural connectivity, Black Church membership, and life experiences. While observation and composing field notes, I only wrote what I saw and did not attempt to interpret or generalize what I observed from the participant's perspective. I situated myself in a place that did not draw attention away from the activity or event I observed. This enabled the phenomena being studied to be captured by the

researcher in its natural setting. For document analysis, I looked through the lens of the research, as I am informed by the participant how the artifact is significant to the partnership between the Black church and school partnership. These identified measures will minimize research bias and authenticity of the data collected.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the purpose of the study of understanding the how the Black Church partnerships supports the educational achievement and preparation for college of African American students through a single case study design. This case study encompassed a constructivist epistemological stance and theoretical frameworks of critical race theory and social learning theory. The epistemological and theoretical perspectives guided the researcher in locating and understanding multiple meanings of the participants, who all have diverse background in K-12 education, Black Church affiliation and personal experience with educational achievement. Each of these components will support the development of themes in connection to this study's purpose. The findings and the interpretation sections of the study are written clearly in conjunction with the study's purpose.

Ethical considerations are taken into account by having informed consent and approval from the Institutional Review Board. The credibility of the study is increased by the study's usage of a multiple Churches, member checking, triangulation of the data and researcher reflexivity of the study. It is necessary to note that this study is not generalizable for all Black churches in all cities in the United States, but it will provide assistance for educational leaders in urban school districts and ideas for future research inquiry.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding, through the perceptions of school administrators, African American students, and Black Church leaders, concerning how Black Church and school partnerships work in supporting the educational achievement of African American students. This chapter will present the findings in this case study with a descriptive analysis detailing each theme that emerged. Participant responses expressed in interviews, documents shared by participants, and my observations during the data collection process will provide ethos for the themes that have emerged in this study. Chapter 5 will provide a thorough discussion of the findings with respect to the study's research questions. Chapter 5 also includes a discussion of the selected theoretical frameworks, limitations in the study and suggested areas of future research.

#### **Case Description**

Findings in this chapter include a description of participants in this study and explanation of four themes that emerged in this case study involving one Black Church partnership with one high school in a large urban school district. The themes in this study began to emerge through the analysis of participants' responses to the questions posed in

the interview protocol, field observations, and through document analysis. The four emerging themes in this study; relationships, equity, community, and commitment.

**Successful Preparation High School.** Successful Preparation High School is a public high school, one of nine, in the second largest school district of a southwestern state. The school is named for a notable African American, an abolitionist and scholar dedicated to impacting positive change for the African American race (District Website, 2017). The school has a rich history and has been looked down upon by society for its minimal success efforts of supporting African American student achievement and college readiness for the past several years. Successful Preparation High School, is considered the most “at risk” high school in the large urban city, where this study took place. While society has looked down upon this school for its student population and minimal achievement overall, several Black Church leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church seek to change this. Despite tremendous and yearly increasing budgetary cuts to education, the amount of support is limited to increase the educational achievement for student of any background at Successful Preparation High School. Successful Preparation High School is home to 1,117 students and 41% of the population is African American. With progressive planning and implementation of continued efforts of the E3 partnership with Joyful Noise, the school is slowly improving, at the same time that the student’s perceptions and motivation is increasing.

**Joyful Noise Baptist Church.** Joyful Noise Baptist Church began in 1912. Joyful Noise Baptist Church is an African American Baptist Church that is located in close proxemics to the Successful Preparation High School. Joyful Noise Baptist Church has a large congregation, comprised of current and retired, professors, principals, teachers,

counselors and other leaders. There is a strong focus on education for African Americans and a strong desire for them to succeed at all stages of life. Joyful Noise Baptist Church has a rich history of preparing doctors, lawyers and other notable community figures in the past years. The senior pastor, who has been in his role for over 20 years, came from an entire family of educators. The pastor recently graduated with his second doctorate in divinity, which further models college graduation and educational excellence for the students and church members associated with Joyful Noise Baptist Church. Joyful Noise Baptist Church has and continues to place ample attention to the educational function in the life of their mission to transform society. Joyful Noise Baptist Church has over 30 auxiliaries and ministries which work collaboratively strengthen, impact, and support all of the students in the partnership with Successful Preparation High School and has since its beginning four decades ago. There are currently over 150 active members of the Joyful Noise Baptist Church who serve as tutors, mentors and other staff in the partnership with Successful Preparation High School. This is roughly ½ of the average weekly attendance at Joyful Noise Baptist Church. Every year the number of members participating in the E3 partnership efforts are increasing.

**The Partnership.** The partnership between Successful Preparation High School and Joyful Noise Baptist Church is a multi-faceted partnership offering multiple opportunities for students to engage with community members and volunteers connected with Joyful Noise Baptist Church that work collectively to support their education. Successful Preparation High School has an activity period that convenes during the last hour of the day. Students can choose from a variety of extracurricular activities, sports and organizations designed to enhance students' ability to be well rounded young adults

in society. The Partnership with Joyful Noise Baptist church is named “E3”. E3 is an acronym for the words Empower, Encourage and Educate. The Senior Pastor of the Joyful Noise Baptist Church and the principal of Successful Preparation High School collectively decided this over 10 years ago. The partnership has existed in some capacity for the past 40 years. It has only been in the last decade, that this multi-faceted support system has been in place. Students are able to select the E3 partnership as their organization of choice for activity period. Activity period meets every Tuesday and Thursday during the 7th period, the last period of the instructional day. Students sign up the second week of school and remain in their activity, club or organization for the remainder of the year. Students at Successful Preparation High School learn about the E3 partnership and other clubs and organizations through forum which takes place during the first week of school. This enables the students to be prepared to make their decision for their activity by the second week of classes. Any student is able to participate in the E3 partnership; however, all students are either African American or biracial with African American being one of their racial identifiers. This has operated this ways since the partnership’s beginning. Every year, the E3 partnership efforts with Joyful Noise Baptist Church and Successful Preparation High School has at least 50 students.

The E3 partnership offers weekly tutoring sessions on two evenings per week while school is in session. Tutoring is held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, same as the activity period meeting dates, from 4:00pm-5:30pm. Students come to the assigned areas for tutoring and work one on one with tutors who are available in each core area taught in Successful Preparation High School. The tutors are made up of Joyful Noise Baptist Church members, who volunteer their time, and then Joyful Noise Baptist Church pays

college students, who live in the community, to come in and tutor students in the partnership. This effort is to ensure that all students in the partnership are able to have someone there to ensure their educational success. The role of the school administrators at Successful Preparation High School and staff at Joyful Noise Baptist Church is limited to just the planning effort no occasional check in to ensure that everything is running smoothly with the partnership leaders. There are faculty and staff members at Successful Preparation High School who are also members of Joyful Noise Baptist Church who come to the E3 tutoring session to help out. Tutoring give students the opportunity to have one on one instructional intervention time with a tutors who is in some way is related to the education by occupation of an advance, college student. Students in the partnership are able to further understand and build their confidence through the efforts of their tutor, which also increases their academic success in their core subjects.

This partnership effort also provides students with the opportunity to have mentors, who work to build character with students and give them a sense of psychological and emotional support. The mentors for the students in the partnership will meet with their mentor during the activity period on Tuesday and Thursday. Mentors, made up of Joyful Noise Baptist Church members of all ages, also meet with their student (mentee) outside of the normal activity period time. Mentors will often times spend time with their mentee doing activities such as basketball, movies, school shopping, going out to eat, etc. to enhance the student's development. Many students attending Successful Preparation High School come from broken, households, and have weak relationships with those who care most for them. The mentors for students in the E3 partnership seek

and have been successful in supporting participating students by being a person who is dedicated to their well-being and development.

During the weekly activity period meetings for the partnership, the Black Church Leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church will also schedule prominent leaders from the community to come and speak to the students regarding being successful and achieving academically. This is designed to embrace student's individuality to be the person they were created to be, while achieving in their academics to make their community and parents proud of them.

Each year students are also introduced and educated on matters pertaining to higher education. Students practice for the ACT/SAT Exams using the resources and online software offered to them by the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Clubs and also the YMCA who are local organizations who assist Joyful Noise Baptist Church in supporting the educational achievement for African American students. Students who need assistance paying for the ACT/SAT Exams and other ongoing school related needs are able to receive scholarships and stipends as they continue their regular attendance and engagement in the partnership efforts on a weekly basis. Students in the E3 partnership efforts are included in the youth activities and trips that occur during the summer months like the Historically Black College and University Tour (HBCU) trip, which is an annual trip for high school students at Joyful Noise Baptist Church to learn about college and their cultural heritage. With each growing year, the partnership efforts continuously reach student audiences in a plethora of ways.

The Leaders and members at Joyful Noise Baptist Church also host a series of drives and fundraiser to continue their efforts throughout their community and inside of

their Church. There are several drives and giveaways to student such as school supplies, backpacks and even limited numbers of tablets to assist students at Successful Preparation High School in achieving academically, especially since the school is located less than 5 miles from the Joyful Noise Baptist Church.

### **Study Participants**

There were seven participants in this study. Three of the participants in this study were students attending Successful Preparation High School. In order to protect the identification of the student participants in this study, each student participants were given the following pseudonyms; Mark, Mary, John. Two participants for this study were educational leaders employed at Successful Preparation High School, and their pseudonyms are Joy and Matthew. The final two participants for this study were leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church, and their pseudonyms are Isaac and Grace. Below in table 2 is a table which provides a depiction of each participant.

*Table 2*

The Participants

<b>Name of Participant</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Role in the Partnership</b>	<b>Other Pertinent Information</b>
Mark	11 <sup>th</sup> grade student at Successful Preparation	A Student in the partnership for 1 year.	African American male, age 18. Transferred to Successful Preparation High School in 10 <sup>th</sup> grade
Mary	12 <sup>th</sup> grade student at Successful Preparation High School	A Student in the partnership for 4 years.	African American female, age 18. Attended Successful Preparation High

			School for all 4 high school years.
John	12 <sup>th</sup> grade student at Successful Preparation High School	Student who has been actively involved in the partnership for 4 years	African American male, age 19. Attended Successful Preparation High School for 4 years and is a member with their family at Joyful Noise Baptist Church
Isaac	Businessman, Associate Teaching Pastor and member at Joyful Noise Baptist Church.	Partnership Director with Successful Preparation High School for 8 years, involved for 10 years	African American male, age 46. Member of Joyful Noise Baptist Church for 40 years. Attended Successful Preparation High School as a student.
Grace	Retired School Principal and teacher and is currently the Director of Education Programs at Joyful Noise Baptist Church	Partnership Coordinator and Tutor with Successful Preparation High School for 6 years, involved for 15 years	African American female, age 66. Member of Joyful Noise Baptist Church for 33 years. Grace's children attended Successful Preparation High School.
Joy	Principal, Successful Preparation High School for the 4 years.	Partnership facilitator for the past 4 years. Works with Isaac and Grace each year to evaluate the partnership efforts and planning short and long term goal for each upcoming year.	Caucasian female, age 41. Urban, turnaround school administrator for 15 years.
Matthew	Guidance Counselor/Dean at Successful	Partnership facilitator for the past 7 years.	Caucasian male, age 38. Urban, turnaround

	Preparation High School for the 7 years		school administrator for 8 years.
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Each participant’s perception and life experiences communicated through observation and dialogue from the interviews were coded and analyzed in order to provide an authentic representation of their perception. Each of the four themes have sub-categories that are connected to the larger theme. Each of the seven participants in this study agreed to remain in contact with me after the interview and to provide further clarity to their responses and conversations in follow meetings, if needed. There were two interviews conducted with each participant, one initial interview and one follow up interview where I worked to gain clarity to previously collected data. My reasoning for the second round of interviews with each participant was to ensure authenticity of the perceptions collected in the data. I met with each student participant at a neighborhood library located four block from Successful Preparation High School. I met with the Black Church leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church. Both school leaders met with me at Successful Preparation High School. This exercise of member checking allowed me to provide veracity of each participant’s perception in the case study. The sub-categories guided me in thoroughly analyzing the four overarching themes. These four themes work collectively to provide an understanding how the Black Church partnership with this school works to positively influence the educational achievement for African American students.

### **Relationship**

Relationships, the most recurring theme, was thoroughly saturated in the data collected in this study. Each of the seven participants in this study referenced some form of relationships in their responses to the protocol questions. Relationships, primarily

derived from the partnership with Successful Preparation High School plays an instrumental role in preparing the African American students to succeed both in and outside of the classroom. From the student's perspectives and the older adult participant perspectives, relationships have and continue to be important for educational achievement in the African American student community in this school. Public education, as a whole, can be lonesome for a student who is struggling with their academic studies due to the minimal support coming from their home which aligns with what was found in the interview with Isaac, a Joyful Noise Baptist Church leader. Isaac also commented:

The church has and continues to step in and fill any inadequacies through love and nurturing relationships with Black Church leaders, members and God exhibited his love for all of his children, and in return it is our duty to love one another and help our children in every area of their development. In doing so, we are exercising good Christian principles that identifies a 'right' relationships with God.

One student participant in this study especially expressed his support of establishing, developing and maintaining a solid relationship with African American students in order to increase their performance in the classroom. John, a Successful Preparation High School student shared:

I have a great relationship with my tutor which helped for the past two years now, I don't have the help I need from my parents because they are working all the time. I don't honestly know if I would be passing my math class if it had not been

for the relationship I have formed with my tutor....and even other Black Church members in this partnership.

As I observed a summer school tutoring session for students who were involved with partnership with Joyful Noise Baptist Church, I could see strong relationships that must have evolved over time. These relationships were built as the school year progressed and through each child's communication with his/her tutor. As I listened to the conversations among the students and their tutors, I would hear personal questions being asked in relation to their academic progress, their biological family and their extra-curricular activities. I was told by one Black Church leader, Grace, that "The family in the African American community possesses strength and transformation and these types of relationships are needed for our young people". I also overheard Grace say to another Black Church leader at the same tutoring I session which I observed that "the media presents the academic struggles facing the African American communities, you know we gotta get these babies ready for the world that is not in favor of their intelligence and abilities to be successful."

The types of relationships found within the partnership which were also reflected in the data collected included two types. The two types of relationships expressed from students and Church leaders are Fictive Kin and Mentor Relationships. Matthew, a Successful Preparation High School Leader, referenced the positive influence supportive mentors have for an "at risk" school where a:

large number of African American students falling behind their peers' in their achievement in core subjects. It really makes a difference and works to ensure the

mission and vision of the school are being met by the school's leaders and community stakeholders.

**Fictive Kin.** Family is so important in the development of African American youth and all three student participants in this study referenced this idea in the interview how the partnership with their school in the Black Church has a "family-like feel" as Mary, a Successful Preparation High School student shared. Fictive Kin, expressed by Joy, one of the school administrators at Successful Preparation High School who stated in an interview,

the relationships that I have seen formed through this partnership, have helped the students to trust and improve their motivation towards their classroom. I can't help but think of the concept of fictive kin when trying to understand how these relationships formed in this partnership supports the African American students educational experience

Joy went on to say:

some students do not have supportive family members and they really need this type of relationship that I am simply not able to provide in any other way than this partnership. School leader's hands are tied with what we can and cannot do to increase parental involvement and child rearing, so this really helps us in this area.

I saw just how the concept of fictive kin is intertwined in the life of the school partnership with the church. There is some sense of belonging that is present in family relationships which helps students succeed in their educational matters. This was found in the responses from the Black Church leaders especially. Both Black Church Leaders

expressed to me in their interviews about how they view the students who participate in the partnership are like the kids they birthed and for the younger church members who serve as mentor and tutors treat their student as their sibling, meaning brother or sister.

Grace, a Joyful Noise Baptist Church Leader participant, told me:

the Black church was founded out of Black's desire to unify with other Blacks to celebrate God and grow together in knowledge, love and serving each other as the Lord has called us to do as his children. This partnership is no different from that desire, this is why we naturally refer to our students as our own biological kin.

My observation and perspective of The Black Church's relationship component of fictive kin was also found, as I attended The Back to School Bash that was held at the Successful Preparation High School just one week before the school year begins. I learned from the Church leaders that this event is geared toward welcoming new students to join the partnerships and for all students to receive school supplies for the year. It is such a fun time for students to bring their families out and even some of the staff members of the school come out to show their support of the partnership. There is food and plenty of laughter at this event. The students both new and returning are smiling giving hugs, high fives and several pictures were taken, as if this event was a family reunion. I was able to tell that some students and their families knew some of the church members who were leaders in the partnership. I was able to hear some of the conversations among the church members to the students which included them calling the students "son" and "baby girl" and embracing them. The meaning of fictive kin has ethos here, especially when Grace commented and shared with me at this event while hugging a student she had worked

with the last year, “you know in the Black church we treat one another as family, we are family and this is just the love we share with one another”.

I found that all three of the student participants from Successful Preparation High School were familiar with the concept of fictive kin from their descriptions of their relationships with Black Church members, but the student participants did not refer to those types of relationships using the verbatim term; fictive kin. Mary, a Joyful Noise student participant in particular made the point that it was by her mentor who she referred to as “mother/madea” that she was able to make it through one of her math classes. Her fictive mother who would consistently check in with her at least three times a week to learn of her experiences and challenges with math class. She commented:

we talk over the phone and she always wanted to know when I was having trouble with my studies and if she knew someone in our church that could help me, she would contact them and have them help me. My relationship with madea, who I am not really related to, has been so valuable to me and I attribute my success to God, of course and her.

Another student participant, Mark, shared with me in an interview a picture of he and his mentor out at bowling alley having a game night. This picture was meaningful to the participant because it showed how their mentor who kept in regular contact them supported them in being “active and celebrating accomplishments in a fun and exciting way. Mark commented that his mentor “ he’s just like the brother I never had, in every way and I really mean that”.

During my interview with John, I found that he too held a deep respect for his tutor which he viewed as his fictive mother. John shared his biological mother died at an

early age and he was lost and felt so empty inside. His tutor and fictive mother was a dear friend of his biological mother. They spent a lot of time together especially before his biological mother died. John always looked forward to seeing his fictive mother while growing up, but they did not attend the same church as his tutor attended Joyful Noise Baptist Church. John shared:

She helped me in ways I would have never been helped by anyone else other than my real mother. She is even helping me currently get ready to go to college. She is there all the way to support me. This is something I won't never forget and I am forever grateful for her.

This relationship was key in his academic development. John commented with joy and great excitement to tell me about his experiences with having fictive relationships and how they are so valuable to young African American students and their educational achievement.

**Mentor/Mentee Relationships.** The Black Church leader participants and the School Administrator participants both alluded to the importance of mentors and the impact they have had on the students' motivation to succeed in their academic matters during their interviews. It appears that both Black Church leaders worked with the school during the formative years of the partnership to develop a mentorship component to help African American students have a person of trust to support their education. The mentors come into the school three times per week and work with students. The two administrator participants in the study both expressed that behaviors in and outside of the classroom have greatly improved since the mentor program has been in place at the school. Mark commented, "the mentors really work to build strong role model relationships and give

our students a sense of belonging and trust too I feel...”. The students sometimes need this support I learned because the school leaders at Successful Preparation High School shared that many African American students came from broken, single parent homes.

One of the Black Church leader participants in this study shared with me that they previously worked in education as a teacher as an administrator before they retired. They went on to share that a mentor program within their congregation helps to impact a student’s ability to see themselves in a better way. Isaac made it clear that mentor/mentee relationships have also:

aided many older African Americans in making a positive difference in the African American students lives, we must do this, this is our calling as followers of Christ... this is what I believe also, I mean we have to do this, relationships are key.

Mark also reflected upon his mentor from the previous year and his eyes began to water he shared that he was still mourning because his mentor had just recently died due to recent complications with a chronic illness. Mark shared that:

my mentor made the difference in my life especially because I had no other male role model in my life because my father was absent, however I know this upcoming year I will have another tutor and mentor to help me...but I still miss him, I tell you, he made the difference.

I later learned from my observation at the school during activity period where mentors from the Black Church were engaging with their mentee at what appeared to be a current college student who was so grateful for having a middle aged African American male to take on a “fatherly” role in his life. This college student, who was a mentor, went

on to tell his mentee that his mentor helped him become the man he is today. This mentor went on to say that all young Black men especially could have the privilege to have mentor touch their life in some way. I heard him tell his mentor that his father was not present in his life and his mentor helped him to develop as a young Black man. As I continued to observe I was able to clearly see how a mentor can and continues to build self-esteem in the student and enables them to see a person who is successful in their career and have achieved a solid, high level of education. Each student present with their mentor had a smile on their face and was completely engaged with the team building exercises and activities which were taking place.

As I walked down the halls of Successful Preparation High School, I was clearly able to see how relationships are significant to the African American student's achievement during the instructional day. The mentors and tutors affiliated with the partnership between Joyful Noise Baptist Church and Successful Preparation High School greeted their students with handshakes, hugs and engaging in non-education conversation as a way to establish and maintain a nurturing relationship working to ensure the well-roundedness of the student. These gestures were also paired with facial expressions of smiles, surprised eyebrows, laugh and nods of understanding.

Both the African American student participant's and Black Church leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church in this study esteem the Black Church Partnership with Successful Preparation High School for its propitious impact on relationships for students. The findings in this case consistently communicated that relationships are seen as a force to bring strength to the development of students which will positively affect their educational achievement, as referenced by church leaders. African American

student's educational achievement is significantly influenced by the relationships that are formed and maintained with other African Americans both by with fictive kinship and mentor/mentee relationships.

### **Equity**

The second theme which emerged in this study is Equity. Equity in schools is a topic in public education that brings strong emotion in citizens across our nation as noted by the participants in this study desire to partner to support the educational achievement for African American students in this community. The word equity will likely mean something different depending upon who you speak to, as it did from the student perceptions, the administrators at Successful Preparation High School and the leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church in this study. I have seen through this study that issue of equity is complex because each individual will likely have a personally constructed definition for what it means and how it is applied in their life. Equity, from this study, is divided into three parts; Inequitable Decisions-making, At work with Limited Resources and Ineffectiveness with Teacher Assignment and Selection.

The partnership between Joyful Noise Baptist Church and Successful Preparation High School is rooted in making an equitable impact in the life of African American students. This idea was communicated from the interviews conducted from Joyful Noise Church leaders. Isaac expressed that:

Our young Black sons and daughters are seen every day in the news and the media for their poor choices but what about the good choices and successful ones...I know that equality is not found as it should be and therefore we, meaning the Black Church have to fill in the gaps that have existed since slavery to make

sure that our black kiddos succeed and that they are commended for their efforts to do the right thing. We have to work relentlessly to... equalize educational opportunities for excellence for our young people from members from our church family in order to prepare them for a bright future.

Isaac held a stern look throughout the interview as he continued to share his deep concerns and frustrations with inequitable treatment for the future generations of African American students in this community, primarily because he sees that school districts seem to focus on higher performing schools, especially those in more affluent neighborhoods. Isaac talked as if the efforts of the government to impact student's achievement has consistently failed to prepare African American student achievement.

For student participants in this study equity was in part one of the reason the students became involved with the partnership because they felt that this was the school and community's way of making the schools operate in a more equitable manner. All three student participants in this study in some way mentioned equity when answering the question, *What motivated you to become involved with this partnership?* Mary, a student participant boldly commented by saying:

You know, a lot of these schools around here aint right. I applied to go to another school because it was better and I was not accepted. I knew I had the grades and all but still was not accepted... it not fair, you know? This school was actually my home school and is limited in their support for students like me wanting to go to college. The partnership however was just what I needed to help me further prepare for college and have similar support from my people as some white students have in schools out south or those in rich neighborhoods they live in.

Mark replied, without hesitation to this same question with, “our school don't have the same stuff other schools have, they not right towards us...that's for sure”. John shared that he was motivated because his parents told him, “I need to get involved because the church is one thing that has always helped to fight the right way for African Americans to bring about change and have a good life”.

**Equitable Decision-making.** Many people across our nation would agree that equity is not found with all school districts as it should. Isaac shared with me that:

Well, I know that there are hidden agendas of policymakers at the national, state and local level which are working against our young people and this continues the trend of inequity for students in public school districts all throughout this part of our city.

I learned from observation how one of the annual services held at Joyful Noise Baptist Church directly effects the operational functions of the partnership with Successful Preparation High School. The service I attended was an afternoon service on a Sunday, after the conclusion of the two morning worship services at Joyful Noise. This service is referred to as “The Successful Preparation Campaign”. The campaign raises money to provide participating students with additional technological resources for students and it also prepares the church financially for continuity of the partnership with Successful Preparation High School in the upcoming year. The church's efforts to supply students with technological devices helps students in the partnership who do not have access to computers and tablets at their homes. I was able to see thousands of dollars collected in a matter of moments which Isaac told me shows how serious the church is in supporting the education of students. Black Church members wrote checks and some

would share a microphone and use it to announce how much they were giving. There was plenty of hand clapping and celebratory praise as collection plates were passed. I was later told by Isaac that this tactic was employed to encourage others to give as much as they could to help the students. I was informed at this event, by Isaac, that the funds raised at this service is a way in which Black Church members also work to equalize the amount resources being sent to low performing schools. This service is an attempt by the church to support students in the partnership complete their homework assignments, apply for colleges and prepare for college entrance exams through the Naviance software company. Naviance is an educationally based software system with an online preparation course for college entrance exams. Some school districts will use Naviance for credit recovery and guidance counselors with use this software to track student progress with their college planning. The license to use this software is annually renewed by the church members at Joyful Noise Baptist Church, Grace informed me.

Several Joyful Noise Church members were disgusted with the admission policies and rationale for admission decisions enacted by the district leaders to which Successful Preparation High School belongs. The school district employs a challenging admission policy to attend high performing, magnet schools. Grace showed me a letter at the conclusion of this same church service previously discussed, which was from the school district that Successful Preparation High School belongs, denying her nephew who held a 4.0 grade point average and met the qualifications. The reasoning for the denial was the school had reached its capacity for the ethnic group belonging to the student. Grace stated:

Even though there are two schools that are in in this community that are nationally known for academic excellence, there are some strict application processes involved for students who attend these two schools. Some students live around the corner from the school and they still must follow the complex application process in order to be considered to attend and you know, most don't even get in and I know they meet the criteria... it is just not right. This is viewed as discrimination in the African American community.

Isaac, also baffled at the decision-making strategies employed by the selected district in this study commented to the question, *Why do you feel the Black Church partners with this schools?* by saying:

African American students who live within walking distance from some of the best schools in Tulsa cannot attend because they do not fit a criteria, this is disheartening. How are we able to decide who can and cannot go to the school of their choice when there are students of other racial backgrounds who I know for a fact that are failing right now and attending high performing schools?... Nobody seems to be able to answer this.

Isaac expressed his frustration educational decision-making efforts of educational leaders in the school district to which Successful Preparation High School belongs. Isaac's desire to reform educational achievement for African Americans is innately rooted in his racially inequitable past childhood experiences with education in the same city where Successful Preparation High School and Joyful Noise Baptist Church are located.

Grace had communicated a similar frustration to that of Isaac with inequity and lack for African Americans achievement in education due to the past reputation of racial

discrimination and injustice in the city where Successful Preparation High School is located. Grace commented, “Decision-making by school district and building administrators is political... it appears to me to be a continual act of racial injustice”, Grace added in the interview when discussing why she became involved with the partnership with Successful Preparation High School more than a decade ago.

**Working with Limited Resources.** Matthew shared:

For so long, there has been a negative reputation for all but a few schools in this part of the city for having limited supplemental support and honestly our school does not have all it needs for the students we serve to effectively meet the mission set forth by our district.

I asked my participants to talk about the resources they see in schools that are working well for the students in addition to the areas of weakness that need improvement in an attempt to spread equity. Found embedded in the data was a consistent trend of each participant discussing how the limited access to resources continues to decline for schools in the community surrounding Successful Preparation High School who serve a drastically diverse student population.

The School District in which Successful Preparation High School is a part of has consistently communicated that there are meager amounts of funds available to fund additional resources to support the academic achievement for students in all schools. Joy, a school leader at Successful Preparation High School stated:

North (name of city) schools face many challenges and funding is one of the major ones. The decisions about the ways school districts use tax dollars is not always in the best interest of schools with large populations of African American

students... as I am sure you can tell from this school. This is a fact, because I have lived it by teaching for the past 13 years and being a principal here for the past 4 years.

Even the students made it clear that they understand how hard the Black Church has worked to provide them with an opportunity to succeed with the resources they need. John elaborated on this idea when asked, *Why do you feel the school partners with the church?* John stated:

The Black Church partners with us and I was told by my grandmother who is friends with one of the church members at Joyful Noise that this partnership also works with local businesses to bring in funds to provide schools that are considered failing be able to assist the students and help them succeed. They do fundraisers, clothing and school supply drives to make sure students can do good in school and have all the stuff we need to do good...make em' proud.

Isaac expressed the Black Church's commitment and *why the Black Church partners with this school* by firmly stating:

eradicating inequity whether perceived or in actuality by stepping in no matter the cost. Whether you are a retiree, stay at home parent or an adult with flexible working schedules, Blacks give their time in some schools because they take the educational of young Blacks seriously because historically Black students have not always been able to obtain an equitable education... we must supply them with the tools they need to succeed. I honestly could not rest at night knowing I am not helping the young people in my neighborhood to be all they can and succeed.

Each year, the church members at Joyful Noise Baptist Church take groups of high school students on a Historically Black College and University, aka HBCU, Tour Trip. There are several weekend trips that are taken during the summer months and winter and spring break for students. I learned from Grace that the Historically Black College and University Tour trips:

enable students to see the colleges that were once the only higher education option for their grandparents, great grandparents and their ancestors of African descent. This opportunity enables the student to understand how far we have come as African Americans to have equity in our educational pursuit as African Americans to that of other ethnicities of people in America.

The students enjoy these trips and this helps them to begin to prepare for their college plans upon high school graduation as Grace also shared. The students who are apart of the partnership efforts with Joyful Noise Baptist Church and Successful Preparation High School are encouraged to participate in this trip. Some students who have graduated from Successful Preparation High School and are currently attending one of the colleges/universities that the current students are visiting, they usually arrange a time to come and speak to the student groups to further provide encouragement. “This works to also provide current high school students with another example of the success of a student whom they might remember and possibly be friends with”. Nearly all of the students in the partnership between Joyful Noise Baptist Church and Successful Preparation High School participate in this opportunity. The students appeared to be engaged during the trip and this was shown through their attentive behavior to guest speakers who spoke during the college visit. The respect for the adults and appreciation

through great behavior and respect were communicated by students during the entire trip. Joyful Noise Baptist Church provide two Charter Buses and in addition to the college tour, students are able to fellowship with each other. Joyful Noise Baptist Church pays for the hotel expenses, the meals and transport of all students on each trip. From observation, it was clear that not only do students engage their minds in developing college plans, but they are able to see up close how much of a reality college is for them by touring the college campuses and speaking with college staff about the college entrance procedures and services desired to help them transition successfully. Isaac told, “Our youth need this, I am so glad that we work to provide this opportunity for them, it really makes a difference in keeping students actively engaged in bettering themselves”. John shared in response to these college visit efforts of Joyful Noise by stating “I was impressed with all college has for me. I cannot wait to get there. It feels good to know that others are out there to help me. My parents they didn’t go to college, I gotta go!”.

**Teacher Selection and Support.** For my participants, the teacher selection process and the onboarding support is somewhat defunct in the opinion of the church leaders and the students. Along with this idea is the cultural disconnect and lack of minorities teachers in the workforce with the district. As I observed at back to school night for Successful Preparation High School, I learned that less there were only four African Americans staff members present and the majority ethnicity of the teaching staff is Caucasian.

Grace spoke and Isaac agreed during a tutoring session at the Joyful Noise Baptist Church, that some:

teachers simply do not understand our babies that they are serving ...they seem to barely try too anymore. There are countless petty, poor behavior infractions which are made by some teachers at some of these schools in this community. Parents of children in these schools feel like their students are being individually reprimanded and by teachers for redundant reasons”. Isaac shared “it is our duty in the Black community to come together and provides ways and help educational decision makers on ways to build stronger schools. We need to transform these schools. Our students need direction and teachers who will build a relationship them. It is clear to me that some of the teacher recruitment strategies need some work to improve, that’s for sure.

As I read and understood the budget and staffing reports from Joy, an administrator at Successful Preparation High School who provided me with these documents during her interview, funding is another reason that school districts similar to the district where Successful Preparation High School belongs, turn and rely heavily off of service teaching programs, like Teach for America which I discussed in the Literature Review. Joy further discussed that Teach for America brings teachers who are generally not from the area of the school they serve in low performing, urban neighborhoods. “As a turnaround principal, I prefer to develop local teachers, but we simply are not recruiting the number of teachers needed to fill teaching vacancies”. Joy then later expressed why she is an advocate for the partnership. She stressed that the partnership supports her passion for creating a highly supportive climate for students because “these service teaching programs offer school district teachers who are alternatively certified and have not graduated from traditional teacher preparation coursework in college... Many times

service teachers do not always stay with teaching profession. This leaves the district with a high turnover rate and temporary staff members for a school wanting to build a climate of trust and commitment for students”.

Matthew also brought it to my attention that students at Successful Preparation High School face cultural challenges and barriers when it comes to building a long-lasting, supportive relationships with their teachers. This idea alone is one reason why Matthew feels that Successful Preparation High School continues the partnership with Joyful Noise Baptist Church. Matthew further gave clarity to this idea of supportive relationships by sharing, “It really would help our students if we could get some teachers from our own city here at this school to support us, you know some teachers that are familiar with the demographics of the student population”. Looking forward, Matthew communicated his desire to involve Joyful Noise Baptist Church leaders, specifically those who are former educator to come into the school to attend professional development seminars for current Successful Preparation High School staff to share their experiences as it relates to developing and maintaining relationships with students. Matthew even wants to work with Joy to develop a revised student conduct handbook in the next couple years and he feels that Joyful Noise Baptist Church Leaders would be included on the committee for their superior influence on the lives of students at Successful Preparation High School. Matthew stated:

The presence of the Joyful Noise Baptist Church members coming into the school really positively impacts the schools’ climate of developing meaningful relationships and respect for all students, not just those who are African American with their teachers, administrators and the entire circle of learning.

I later learned just how the students felt about the instability of the teaching staff and why the students are happy to have Joyful Noise Baptist Church members and leaders support from Mary who stated:

If the teachers do not feel like they are comfortable accepting a teaching job at our school, then they should decline from taking it because we can tell that they don't want to be here teaching us or that they feel like we are all don't want to be successful. Hey, it's crazy but I can tell if a teacher cares about me truly or not, it doesn't take much effort most of the time to see.

Grace shared her thoughts about this matter by saying, "I am not saying that all students and teachers operate this way in North (name of city), but due to the self-image of North (name of city) schools, there is an increased low moral for teachers and the relationships that they have with their students".

The Joyful Noise Baptist Church leader participants in the study, in some way, expressed that public-school districts do not always employ the most equitable recruitment strategy for hard to staff schools. The Black Church leaders and school leaders felt that public school district leaders should have ongoing support of teacher support initiatives and programs. Black Church leaders consistently shared through interviews that minimal improvement to reducing teacher turnover has been achieved in the district to which Successful Preparation High School belongs. Grace stated firmly, "Solid recruitment plans will likely reduce new teacher turnover and perhaps improve the low teaching morale existing in public education, but there is limited literature on this idea".

## **Community**

The third theme found in this study is community. Each participant in this study mentioned the importance and involvement of community as it relates to the Black Church and its support for African American students. It is believed by African Americans that taking care of the younger generations of African Americans is in part a community effort, not a single responsibility of one person or group of people. Isaac commented:

There is not a greater organization than the Black Church. The Black Church, you know, is a community that represents strength and it even works to promote city wide support to ensure the success of African American students. I say this because everyone coming together in these nearby neighborhoods to help our African American students.

This very idea was consistently referenced in conversations with both Grace and Isaac who both spoke extensively about the community impact of Joyful Noise Baptist Church's mission to prepare African American students success at Successful Preparation High School. Grace later replied in an interview:

the work we do at the church is not a one-person effort, it is a community wide effort. There is absolutely no way that we could support the students in the ways we do if we did not have other partnerships in these neighborhoods to support the students at Successful Preparation High School like we do currently.

The theme community is divided into two different components to provide a clearer understanding, one being a community within the community and collective instructional practices.

**The Community Within the Community.** Joyful Noise Baptist Church operates as a “community within a community” as noted by the Grace in this study. Grace even referred to her church as a small community that seeks to impact the young and old people in the larger community surrounding the church which includes Successful Preparation High School. The Joyful Noise Baptist Church community’s motivation for the partnership efforts with Successful Preparation High School are seen as a part of their Christian responsibility, as I learned from the Graduation Sunday observation at Joyful Noise Baptist Church.

Graduation Sunday, an annual event at Joyful Noise Baptist Church where both high school and college students are celebrated for their achievement and graduation at their respective institutions. Joyful Noise Baptist Church members present each student with a monetary stipend to support their continued education plans. Students are adorned in their caps and gown from their respective schools. Each student’s names are called by an educator (Joyful Noise member) serving as an announcer at the service and the congregations and parents celebrate with shouting, praise and standing ovations for their student’s achievement. Graduation Sunday at Joyful Noise Baptist Church is conducted similar to an actual commencement performed by an educational institutional.

Successful Preparation High School students are invited to attend, even if they are not members of Joyful Noise Baptist Church and are just apart of the partnership. I was able to understand just how important celebrating student achievement in such an elaborate way by others in the church community support student’s motivation to continue success in their future educational endeavors from my observation. Isaac shared that this event is one way in which:

the church community comes together in a way to support the educational accolades of our students. We must give God first praise and then the students for their achievements because there is limited positive enforcement of the larger society to acknowledge when the students are worthy of commendable endeavors. Community impact also meant taking action for the Successful Preparation High School leaders who were dedicated to implementing and executing programs in the designed to improve student achievement for African American students by using outside resources such as this partnership. Matthew expressed when asked if he had *any other information to add as it related to the educational achievement of African American students from a school leader's perspective*:

The community surrounding this school has really sought to impact our African American student's ability to understand and improve their academic abilities and attitudes towards their education. I know as a school leader that you must be open minded to using inexpensive measures to build trust and respect in the school's community where you serve. I know this has worked well for me as I have been here for over 6 years.

Joy pondered and responded to the question, asking *Why does the Black Church partner with schools?* Joy took a historical stance and replied:

it appears to me that the Black Church is a community of its own that seeks to serve the larger community which includes the surrounding schools. I think of it as the central force to which many areas of life are improved within the Black family. African Americans, as a race, were not always afforded the opportunity to read and write and these issues still exist today. I feel this is one of the main

reason why the Black Church seeks to partner with schools. You know it has only been through working with them that I have developed this perspective, because I was not familiar with the Black Church to this degree of depth before coming this school.

With a response like this, one could easily see that there is community found within the Black Church and a strong responsibility for preparing African American students to succeed from community efforts from past injustices and limited educational advancement.

Isaac, like Joy, also reflected upon the past historical position of African Americans and how African Americans presently worked with the community to support the youth so that they do not fail to be successful students and highly educated adults. Isaac made it clear to me that he is committed to working with his church family to provide opportunity for African American students. He shared:

I have been and will continue to be apart of this partnership. I am committed to uniting together to impact our youth because if we don't, won't nobody else do it... society writes them off and has since we first came to America as enslaved Africans... we have to do something...the churches, like ours have to support our youth....

As I observed one of the after-school tutoring sessions at the beginning of the year at Successful Preparation High School, I was able to see how the student and tutor interactions with one another seemed like a small community inside of a larger school community. Successful Preparation High School has a specific part of the building with classrooms and a smaller auditorium that the partnership with Joyful Noise Baptist

Church uses when they are on campus working with students. The additional space, now occupied by the partnership, was used previously used for a middle school that the district closed over 10 years ago.

Black Church leaders, members and even parents coming together to strengthen the education for African American students has progressively impacted the desire for students to understand that they must achieve in order to be successful. This was found from listening to one of the student participants in this study. Mark shared:

the Black Church coming together with other members of society worked to improve and it made the difference in my education. It helped me build self-esteem and enabled me to turn my educational performance around for the good... it's like we have our own community... I know for a fact that I would not have made it through my AP Chemistry class without this Black Church partnership and the help they have gave me”.

**Collective Instructional Approaches to Succeed.** The Black Church works with other service based organizations like the Boy and Girls Club of America (the branch of the Boys and Girls Club of America that participates in this partnership is a local city chapter in the same city where Successful Preparation High School is located), which has recently implemented a new career coaching program to high school students create a solid plan for their life after they graduate high school as it relates to their occupation. While this is similar to the college preparatory component to the current partnership between Successful Preparation High School and Joyful Noise Baptist Church, there is a distinct difference. The Boy and Girls Club of America normally occupies the auditorium for the partnership meeting times to provide students with guest speakers who are

selected by the participating students. Guest speakers share what they do in their occupation and inspire students with similar interest to pursue the same career path. The goal of the Boy and Girls Club of America is getting students thinking along the lines of careers that interest them as they make plan for the right colleges for their intended occupation. African American students need the community to support them. Grace expounded on this notion by saying:

Young people need to know that the community wants them to succeed. Our young folks have our word, but we must make sure that if we talk the talk, then we must walk the walk, I know we cannot mislead them because they are our future. We must remain committed.

I was able to see how Joyful Noise Baptist Church uses other community members and organizations to relentlessly support their mission and the partnership with Successful Preparation High School at their Back to School event. One of the local colleges came to the event to show their support. The college conducted raffles to give away iPads, voice recorders, calculators and other items to support classroom achievement. The college also provided nearly 200 backpacks filled with supplies for the students who attended. The college also spoke to students and gave out an application fee waiver to high school seniors so that they could apply to the schools free of charge. This truly put smiles of many students and parents faces, as I later learned that there is a seventy-five dollar and one hundred dollar application fee for most college admission applications.

Mary shared how she understands the community's support from this partnership when she stated:

I just love my tutor and my mentor from last year. They both work together to make sure that I am great at math and staying encouraged. I was not able to receive the same understanding in my science class like I have with my mentor and my tutor who both were teachers for many years. It is so good to see that my community can help me, it really makes me feel good.... many people talk bad about the community, but there is some good still....

The partnership with Joyful Noise Baptist Church has given participating students at Successful Preparation High School a chance to increase their academic weakness through the multifaceted instructional support system with other community members who do not belong to Joyful Noise Baptist Church. John shared that his mentor knew a gentleman that taught his advanced math class at local college. His mentor contacted him so that he could provide John with free tutoring sessions to ensure that he would be ready for his final exam last spring in his Pre-Calculus class. John stated, “You know it is a blessing as my family would say, to have someone in your life that seems to know just what you need to be successful”.

I observed at a recent tutoring session how two local nonprofit organizations assist the partnership efforts with Joyful Noise Baptist Church and Successful Preparation High School to provide students in the partnership with opportunities to have student memberships in the community centers that are nearby the school. These efforts seek to further positively impact the student’s ability to grow and develop to be well rounded young adults ready for the work upon graduation. The Young Men’s Christian Association, the YMCA, is just one of the organizations that was familiar which I saw at the event helping to the students and to support their physical development by giving

them free student memberships to the local YMCA location that is located three and a half miles from the Successful Preparation High School.

Another organization that impacts the efforts of the Joyful Noise Baptist Church is the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Clubs. Grace shared with me about the impact the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Clubs have made to their partnership efforts, which further work to support the achievement of students attending Successful Preparation High School. Grace stated:

The Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club provides students with the opportunities to have reduced and free memberships in order to have the opportunity to build their self-esteem and access to opportunities that are not normally available for the student populations attending the school.

Some of these opportunities Grace spoke of include; back to school supply giveaways, college entrance application fee waivers, student computer lab time and physical education and nutrition courses for students and their families. Some students who may not have a place to go to wait for their parents to get home from working long hours may find themselves in afterschool programs at the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Clubs. Some students, even become employed at both the YMCA and the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Clubs as a way to assist students in landing their first part time job and begin to support their goals and desires to become more responsible young adults.

Our students need this support and I honestly cannot emphasize this idea that the community has to come together if we want to impact the change we need to end passivity and limited achievement for our young people.

This multifaceted support works well for partnerships students at Successful Preparation High school because many of the students participating in this partnership live within walking distance to the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Clubs and the YMCA, which Grace shared.

The Joyful Noise Baptist Church congregational members along with local community organizations has and continues to influence the partnership at Successful Preparation High School. Each of the participants in this study are expressed how responsibility of student success is a shared responsibility. Even school leaders at Successful Preparation High School feel that their attempt to support achievement for all students is not a responsibility of one person, but a “community effort”, as Matthew indicated to me during an interview.

### **Commitment**

The fourth and final theme emerging in this study is commitment. The Black Church leader participants at Joyful Noise Baptist Church and the school administrators at Successful Preparation High School are all clearly committed to making positive strides in making sure that the African American students have access to opportunities to grow and further enhance their learning. In return, the commitment efforts of the leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church and the administrators at Successful Preparation High School have been and are consistently well received by the student participants in this study. The commitment of the Black Church, its leader and members in consistently serving the students at Successful Preparation High School gives ethos to two emerging sub-themes. The two sub-themes found in the data aligning to the commitment theme is service and time. Service and time equally represent the consistency, continuous

improvement and impact of the educational achievement for the African American students attending Successful Preparation High School.

**A Servant's Responsibility.** Service has been shown from the Black Church leaders perceptions as well as the school leaders perceptions as one of the main characteristics emphasized in the partnership with Successful Preparation High School by Joyful Noise Baptist Church to bring about transformation for the educational achievement for African American students. Joyful Noise Baptist Church leader participants both mentioned the importance of leaders in the Black Church serving both as a role model for students and as a follower of Christ in their interviews.

Isaac shared with me at of the tutoring sessions which I observed that he feels that his leadership in the church, both by being an associate minister and a youth leader at Joyful Noise Baptist Church, that he needs to live a life of serving others. He told that:

Jesus is his ultimate role model and he feels that it is by Jesus' life that he feels he should seek to provide students with this same type of sacrificial service to support them in having a successful education and thorough preparation for the future". He later showed me a picture of Jesus washing the disciple's feet. He made known that this picture represents the mission of leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church and how they work to serve students. He felt that the picture, "shows how we should look to the needs of others and not just our own and this means our young people too... this is where my heart is.

Joy, who has been a principal in turnaround schools now for over a 5 years, responded to the question, *What factors motivates you to participate in the partnership with the Black Church?* by saying that:

school leaders must be willing to serve the students, teacher, family and other staff members in ways that enhance their growth and development. I know as a building administrator, I have a challenging position but, I am here to serve all of the students in this building in any way I can. This is why we partner with the church. You and I know that I am not African American and I just am not as familiar with the cultural connection that is clearly and actively supporting students from the African American ethnic background.

Matthew also spoke about how commitment is key to being successful in the classroom as it relates to a student's ability to grasp and gain a solid understanding of the subject matters being taught in the classroom at Successful Preparation High School. I posed the question, *How does the partnership influence the educational achievement and college preparation African American students in this school?* Matthew expressed that:

students have to be committed to their studies and put in the time to study and somehow the Black Church members coming together in relentlessness through this partnership, have grabbed their attention in ways we as school staff have yet to discover to change their attitudes towards their learning... it gets challenging of course because young people want to do other things besides study... they gotta stick with and the church makes sure they do.

This research also found that the continuous drive of the Black Church members belonging to Joyful Noise Baptist Church to transform society continues the support behind this partnership with Successful Preparation High School. Grace explained, both in interview and follow-up encounters that:

the dedication of the members in the Black Church cannot be broken when it comes to helping our young folks. Our mission and primary outcome of our passion is rooted in reforming our community and transforming society by building up and developing young African Americans that are highly educated, motivated and prepared to be the next generation of leaders. We need this, God knows we do... we cannot just sit around and let them go astray, we can't and I won't.

**Time.** Time is something so valuable for the educators, teachers, and partnerships in education who work to support the educational achievement of African American students. Joyful Noise Baptist Church does not rush students in helping them understand their coursework during tutoring session. One particular tutoring session I attended ended later than planned because a couple of students were having some difficulty understanding their coursework. I have seen how some of the tutors have even prepared additional lessons before they came to the tutoring session began to further help their student work on concepts that may have been introduced in previous sessions. This means that the tutor has worked outside of the time of the tutoring session to prepare additional materials to augment normal instruction taking place in the classroom. The tutor is not obligated to do this, but the tutors are committed to their student, Isaac continuously informs me of this.

Joy further communicated an alignment with my observation when she commented to me about *how the Black Church support African American student's education?* Joy stated:

the partnership that we have this church has shown nothing but great patience with our students. The church and its members take their time to help the students, it is not a rushed event. The ongoing exchange of communication helps students build confidence in their academic matters...they have begun to take school seriously and this is consistently becoming better each year... a real relief.

The continued support and understanding about how time is appreciated by educational leaders at Successful Preparation High School was communicated when Matthew responded to the question, *How does the Black Church support African American student's education?* Matthew responded:

(name of the church) does whatever it takes, I have assisted them doing home visits, calling students and even working with parents to help students succeed. The time spent by (name of church) is incredible. This is an all-volunteer based partnership and I am impressed and so appreciative for the support and time taken with our students... this works to make a positive change.

Joy expressed her appreciation to the time commitment of the partnership when asked *What aspects of the partnership are most influential for student learning?* Joy stated:

the one on one support from retired and sometimes current professors, teachers, former and current principals and even finance personnel in Cooperate America who give of their time to work one on one with students to support the achievement in their instructional core areas. This is something that teachers at this school simply cannot do during the instructional day, large class sizes and at a time when student and staff are equally available for long periods.

The student participants in this study heavily referenced the concept of time and how it is spent in supporting their achievement. All three student participants reflected in some way about their experiences with time. Mary spoke firmly about her experience with how the Black Church supports African Americans education. Mary replied:

Our school has a terrible reputation and the teachers and staff try to help us, but still I know I rarely get it. in the ways that we need in order to succeed. Me and my friends know that teachers don't want to come out here to teach us, so the teachers we do get are not always the best.... We feel this as students. There are only a few teachers that have the time or willing to take time and help us to the point we understand what was taught...so we get good grades.

John was asked the question, *How does the Black Church support African American student's education?* John replied firmly:

The Black Church really just does what we wish our teachers here at this school would do. That is CARE! The Black Church has several members come into the schools several times per week to volunteer their time mentoring us talking to us about issues we may be having and sometimes they are not with just school... We are able to prepare for college and learn about all the stuff you have to do to be ready. Also, we have time where tutors will come and tutor us... and this is what I love about the partnership. My grades are really getting good now, I really am motivated to stick with my studies!

Mark remembered a time when he needed help and the Black Church partnership with his school was there to help, even though it was outside of the time dedicated to the partnership's efforts with the school (during the normal instructional school day). Mark

replied from his past experiences to the question, *What difference did it make in your learning?* Mark shared:

This partnership has enabled to me see how members of the partnership are always available to help me. I remember last year, I needed some help one time on a Sunday and had a big project in my history class and I was stuck and needed help. My parents were working and I called on my mentor and he made time to help me that evening and even though I didn't have a ride he came and got me and help me get what I needed so I could complete my project for class. I am so glad that people here care for us.

Isaac wanted to be sure that he left me with a clear picture of his mission in leading this partnership from the Church's perspective when he answered the question, *Is there any other information you would like to provide me as it relates to Black Church and school partnerships? If yes, please share.* Isaac told:

We take time and are committed to going the extra mile to prepare students for success in every area of their life, spiritually, academically and preparing the for a life of success... The Church wants every student to succeed and we will take the time, the money and the instructional support to impact the achievement of African American students. This is our desire and the senior pastor stresses this to me and the congregation quite often... we have an account at the church that is regularly increasing to prepare future black highly educated black members of society.

## **Summary**

The Black Church has impacted African American students lives in serval ways since its existence. This single case study between one Black Church and a public high school found that Relationships, Equity, Community and Commitment were significant themes found in the data from observation, document analysis and participant interviews. Each of the larger four themes had sub-themes which further provide specific detail to the specific ways each larger theme aligns with the theoretical lens for this study and works to positively influence the educational achievement for African American students. The participants in this study each expressed their concerns, reflected on their past and spoke about how to move forward in the future to improve the educational achievement for African American students. The inequity for African Americans historically has gave many African American currently a relentless drive to improve the quality of education and access of opportunity for African American student success.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding, through the perceptions of school administrators, African American students, and Black Church leaders, concerning how Black Church and school partnerships work in supporting the educational achievement of African American students. The data collection process in this study explored the participants' perceptions with respect to their position in the partnership with Joyful Noise Baptist Church and Successful Preparation High School, observations by the research document analysis from the participants. This chapter discusses the four themes that emerged from the data: relationships, equity, community, and commitment. This chapter will answer the research questions based upon this study's findings while providing an alignment with the theoretical perspectives of Social Learning Theory and Critical Race Theory. Limitations to this study and implications for future research are also surfaced in this chapter. Implications include areas for future research; and relevant information for educational leaders at the district and building level, teachers, educational researchers, faith-based and service organizations.

This study had three research questions. Research question #1 asked: *What motivates African American students to become involved in the partnerships between Black Churches and their public school?*

The students, in this study were motivated to become involved with the partnership efforts between the Black church and their school for a plethora of reasons. It was clear that relationships formed from this partnership, both through fictive kinship and mentor/mentee, have helped African American students at Successful Preparation High School to transform their thinking about their academics. The student participants in this study who felt that the relationships formed in this partnership motivates them to continue to be apart of the partnership and even have their friends who are African American become apart of the partnership.

Student participants were extremely motivated to participate in the partnership because of the relationships formed by members at Joyful Noise Baptist Church felt like biological relationships because of their authenticity and genuine concern for their well-being as experienced by the students. Student participants reflected that they wish they had relationships with their teacher like they do with their mentors as stated in the literature (Keisch & Scott, 2015). From the review of literature, mentors are important in the Black Church for African Americans both young and old because many African American students come from broken homes (Douglas & Peck, 2013). The benefits from these relationships are wholesome for the student's development as well as the fulfillment of older African Americans desire to guide and lead the younger generation so that they are successful adults in society. Relationships with others brings about strength, especially for those students who are struggling to achieve and those coming from limitedly supportive homes (Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013). African Americans coming together for a common purpose exudes strength which is hoped to liberate those that are weak and oppressed. This idea has ethos in early cultures of the

enslaved African in the 1600's and is still relevant (Stuckey, 2013; Taylor, Chatters, Woodward, & Brown, 2013). The review of Literature also referenced the Black Church developing relationships to build and increase trust among young people as they are matriculating through their K-12 education as a way of providing preparing students for success (Drewry, Doermann & Anderson, 2001; Rubin, Billingsley, & Caldwell, 1994).

I learned that relationships, both fictive and mentor/mentee, are fundamental to the partnership efforts between Joyful Noise Baptist Church and Successful Preparation High School and integrally assists African American students to achieve and perform well academically. Black Church leaders told and I saw how their establishment of relationship helps the student build their confidence and increase academic motivation to grasp challenging concepts embedded in the grade level proficiencies needed to graduate from high school college ready. Many African American students represented in public school districts across the nation are reared in single-parent homes. Sometimes, the home life for some African American students is immensely disrupted because there is a lack of parental support. Inconsistent support from some African American students parents and families due to work and multiple siblings limits the motivation for students to achieve. The ability of the Black Church leaders to relate and build and maintain relationships with students who look like them means so much to students. This work will also help building leaders build and support a climate of nurturing in the educational journey for students.

Students in this study were clearly motivated to participate in the partnership because of the access to opportunities and educational supplies offered in the partnership that help them succeed in the classroom. Students were able to have resources that would

not normally be found in at-risk schools. Many public schools serving students that are affluent can afford to provide additional resources like technology and college visits to support achievement efforts. Having the abundance of community efforts and continued financial support through the various ways surfaced in the findings ultimately made students feel more likely to participate and continue participating each year of their high school education.

The student participants in this study appreciate the community support and the amount of time taken with them from Black Church members to increase their educational achievement. Student participants perceived this assistance to be motivating to them in setting and reaching high educational goals for themselves. The students made it clear that their teachers only can help them so much because of the overcrowded classes. Students in this study also felt teachers are unable to give one on one instructional support time as their tutors and mentors have by giving of their time both during and outside of the regular instructional school days. This continues the student's motivation to be a part of the partnership from year to year. I have seen how Black Church leaders are consistently present and staying engaged with the students at every tutoring session and this has been noted to improve the student's motivation toward school and increasing their likelihood to graduate on time and pursue higher education.

African American students, through partnership efforts, have able to receive positive attention and have voices heard from their mentors. The participating students are able to see a structure that is appealing to them; someone truly cares for them and responds to their needs can express it in ways that many teachers and administrator cannot due to limited ethnic representation and life experiences. Students are also getting

the feeling that, while the message they are getting from outside influence is that they are “less than,” these relationships show that they matter. The students can clearly see that they matter and are priceless to society. Society, both past and present, communicates negative portrayals of the African American race and sense of hopelessness for upcoming generations by the media and other outlets. The negative racial portrayal and sense of hopelessness for the youth has been significantly reversed by the partnership efforts. Even the students in the study expressed that they felt reaffirmed as a person and proud of their cultural heritage by participating in this partnership. This work further increases student motivation to participate. Students are able to see that there are positive characteristics within their own ethnicity which works for their greater good and educational achievement.

The positive conversations that many students encounter as they participate in the partnership efforts helps them better understand the past historical perspectives related to African Americans and their struggle to achieve, educationally speaking. As surfaced in the findings of this study, when younger African American students gain an understanding of the past it helps to shape the students current understanding of the need to achieve as a minority in society and therefore increase their motivation to do so. These motivating factors contribute to the students desire to participate in the partnership. African American students even work to increase student participation in these types of partnerships by speaking about the benefits to their friends and other classmates in a school. As understood by the student participants in this study, they participate and encourage their classmates and friends to participate because of the love, encouragement and historical knowledge about their culture gained in the partnership.

While the student perceptions about their desires to participate in the partnership efforts with their school, this study also looked at the perception of the school leaders. Research question #2 stated: *What are church member and administrator perceptions concerning the influence Black Church partnerships have had on African American students' educational achievement?*

The commitment of the Joyful Noise Baptist Church has made a great impact to supporting African American student achievement. The school leaders at Successful Preparation High School communicated through observation and in interviews how this partnership shows the commitment of the community in partnering to support the education for children in a reduced budgeted school district leaders. The Black Church Leaders made it clear through their interviews that they are committed to supporting the African American students in this community because they are obligated to make educational achievement a reality for African American students out of historical, societal inequity (Harris, 2005; Gorham, 2005; Drewry, Doermann & Anderson, 2001). The minimal support by school districts decisions and the lack of African American teachers in the schools to build strong culturally centered relationships drive this partnership to continue each year (Altschul, Oyserman & Bybee, 2006, p. 1158; Lipman, 2004).

The school leaders at Successful Preparation High School know that they are operating with limited community support primarily because of the disconnect and limited cultural representation among the staff to engage the community with the happenings in the school (DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Fullan, 2007; Roehlkepartain, 2009; Lipman, 2004). This partnership has served the school well from the school leader's perspective in making the community aware of the improvement in African American

students' education at Successful Preparation. Community support is key in working with low performing, urban public schools as a means to strengthen the knowledge and awareness of seeking a strong education for life and career success (McGowan, Palmer, Wood & Hibbler, 2016; Epstein, 2001). The considerable amount of time Black Church leaders devote to this partnership to support students is done in part to communicate to students that ample time must be devoted to studying in order to be successful in academic subject matters as they graduate from high school and prepare for college (Barnes, 2005, pp. 68-69). This was communicated through the several interactions with Black Church leaders who are committed to provide positive role models for students to follow as a way to support their achievement.

Successful Preparation School Leaders recognize that their ethnic and cultural difference poses a challenge to their ability to effectively support achievement for students who do not have the same life experience as they have. This means that the public school leaders will often have to strategically develop ways in which to support achievement for the groups of students needing additional support to reach and exceed grade level standards and benchmarks instituted by their state and district. While bringing their ideas to the Black Church leaders from Joyful Noise, I was able to see that each organization understand one another and are committed to making sure that they work cooperatively to support student achievement. Working together to reach a shared goal, further aligns with the theme of community that was found in this study. This work of collaboration between those with different life experiences works to dissolve past racial tension. This idea aligns with the critique of liberalism tenet of Critical Race Theory in

the fact that the society goes against the grain to eradicate historical norms of the past to further improve society moving forward.

Additionally, Black Church leaders know that the African American students across the community are not always seeing great role models of the behavior needed to enhance their achievement. In order to keep them on the right path, the black church has and continues to reach younger African American students by not giving up on them and taking as much time and dedication needed to make sure that all of their coursework is being understood and all chances to graduate and go on to attend and graduate from college. The commitment of the partnership with the Black church and the school in this study provides students with role model who are showing how they give of their time and their service through this multi-faceted method to help them transform their education. This idea is clearly articulated in Bandura's Social Learning Theory which discusses, the presence of modeling and how it works to communicate a system of positive or negative consequences in order to increase the likelihood that the learner will reproduce the behaviors being modeled for them (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Barnes & Wimberly, 2016; Ravitch, 2016; Kelland, 2015; Filerman, 2011). The hopes of the Successful Preparation High School and Joyful Noise Baptist Church leaders is that the students will understand the reasoning behind why this partnership is in place and reproduce the behaviors being taught in the partnership. These efforts work to increase their educational achievement and preparation for higher education. The Black Church leaders are relentless in providing students with positive consequences of having a solid education and achieving in school to increase the likelihood the same positive attitudes towards learning will be adopted by each student involved in the partnership.

The Black Church leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church also expressed a deep concern for societal empowerment and improvement in their mission to educate African American students. Black Church leaders perceive that currently public education operates in ways less than acceptable, which leaves students of color with limited progress and opportunity for upward mobility. Joyful Noise Baptist Church partners with the school knowing that the African American students need adequate resources to succeed. The need for opportunities for African American student to succeed further align with the review of literature which emphasized the need of reform from community support to increase African American student achievement (Baquedano-López, Alexander & Hernández, 2013; McCray, Grant & Beachem, 2010).

In addition to the classroom success, the Black church leaders in this study felt that there are far too few African American leaders that are employed by school district which even further the divide in the achievement for African American students in this study, as communicated by Black Church Leaders (Ladson-Billings, 2007; Ravitch, 2016; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Goldring & Smrekar, 2002). The decision making of current public school leaders at the district and building level do not always exercise moral and ethical integrity when deciding how to allocate funding and instructional practices for student in the community attending Successful Preparation High school (Jackson, Johnson & Persico, 2016; Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2016). This idea was found thoroughly saturated from the Black Church leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church and the student participants who mentioned inequity with their schooling. Even decision making strategies concerning school choice for the all of the participants in this study was troubling and filled with inequity, as noted in the review of literature (Ravitch, 2016;

Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott & Garrison-Wade, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2007; Rubin, Billingsley & Caldwell, 1994).

Responsibility and Christian duty also influenced Black Church leaders in their efforts to partner with the school to improve the achievement for African American students. The Black Church is founded upon principles which suggests a shared responsibility for the church community to collectively collaborate with one another in efforts to support the education of younger African Americans to achieve in their classes and prepare them for college (Duncan, 2016; Hale, 2004). The dedication of members in the Black Church cannot be broken and with this idea Black Church and its members are dedicated to support the community. The schools are definitely a part of the community which churches and service organizations seek to work with, as indicated through the findings in this study. The leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church hope to reform their community and transform society. The leaders at Joyful Noise Baptist Church and other educators identified in the literature review in the appear to agree that they must be committed to supporting African American students by any means necessary and it is their responsibility (Karaxha, Agosto, Black & Effiom, 2013; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The Black Church, in this study, has taken matters in its own hands to combat the inequity by providing this community support to its youth which is not uncommon according to literature (McCray, Grant & Beachum, 2010).

The Community influence aligns with the Critical Race Theory's tenet of interest convergence. Black Church leaders feel that the support is limited for students of color in and outside of their school. The community of African Americans must come together along with other community groups like the Boys and Girls Club of America and the

YMCA to provide these opportunities for African American student to succeed in their academic and prepare themselves for college. Their passion to do so comes from the reality of the decision making strategies employed by the district leaders who minimally represent the best interest African American students attending lower performing schools. The Black Church leaders at Joyful Noise boldly alluded to this idea in their interviews. Part of their dedication to this partnership is due to the limited ethnic representation in the school and the district as it relates to African American leaders employed by the school district to which Successful Preparation High School belongs which corresponds with the interest convergence tenet in Critical Race Theory (Sleeter, 2012; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

It is necessary to note that when schools opt to structure and develop partnerships similar to tone in this study, there must be an alignment pertaining to each partnering organization's outcomes. There must be specific roles and boundaries which each partner must follow to ensure that student outcomes are the central focus and are articulated through every operational decision made regarding the partnership. This study expressed how clear and consistent work towards a shared goal form both the school and Black Church leaders positively supported the educational achievement and college preparation for African American students.

With respect to the perceptions of students participating in the partnership and why they felt motivated to do so and why school leaders sought to establish and maintain a partnership with a Black church to improve African American student achievement, the overarching can be clearly answered: *How has this partnership between the Black*

*Church in this community and this public school promoted student success for involved African American students?*

African American students who have participated in the partnership have been able to achieve academically in ways that public education has not always been able to successfully. The commitment of the partnership with the Black church and the school in this study provides students with role model who are showing how they give of their time and their service through this multi-faceted method to help them transform their education. This idea is clearly articulated in Bandura's Social Learning Theory which discusses, the presence of modeling and how it works to communicate a system of positive or negative consequences in order to increase the likelihood that the learner will reproduce the behaviors being modeled for them (Bandura & Walters, 1977; Barnes & Wimberly, 2016; Ravitch, 2016; Kelland, 2015; Filerman, 2011). The hopes of the Successful Preparation High School and Joyful Noise Baptist Church leaders is that the students will understand the reasoning behind why this partnership is in place and reproduce the behaviors being taught in the partnership. These efforts work to increase their educational achievement and preparation for higher education. The Black Church leaders are relentless in providing students with positive consequences of having a solid education and achieving in school to increase the likelihood the same positive attitudes towards learning will be adopted by each student involved in the partnership.

The partnership between the Church and the school in this study has and continues to bridge the gap of achievement as expressed by Church and school leader participants because it suffices the provisional need of equitable resources, instructional support and relationships for African American students at Successful Preparation High

School to succeed. Education reform strategies set in place by the United States Government and funding to support educational achievement for all students have only minimally worked to exclusively support African American students attending schools with a reputation for low academic achievement (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ward et al., 2015). With the ever-changing student demographic represented in public schools across the country, building principals may find that this research is useful in reforming instructional practices for student success.

This inequality that was communicated by the Black Church leader participants and my observations clearly gives way to the Black Church's drive to be different by assisting African American students with their students and modeling citizenship, benevolence and academic responsibility. Modeling these social behaviors aligns with the modeling proponent of the Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1977). Equity, for my participants, refers to the term that has been used in the African American communities across this community to describe how public education should operate, but does not. Money, resource allocation and limited African American decision-makers/leaders in school districts were noted by the participants for continuing the inequity in the education of African American students. Minimal African American district leadership gives limited representation when school district decisions are made involving all students esteems the interest convergence proponent of critical race theory (Sleeter, 2012, pp. 491-493; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Joyful Noise Baptist Church leaders in this study consistently communicated their belief that all students should be able to attend a school without admission criteria that is often flawed and not adhered to by administration. This inequity in decision-making clearly addresses

the interest convergence with Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). It is time for society to ensure accountability for their reasoning and policy implementation.

The Black Church Leaders and the schools administrators agreed that their work is never done. They were responsible and passionate about continuously planning to improve the partnership each and every year to increase the influence and educational impact to African American students. The persistence in working with the members of the community to bring in resources so that student are able to attend their classes prepared with the proper supplies and even knowledge needed to reach grade level proficiency by the end of each semester. School leaders perceived that this partnership has reshaped the neighborhood and community by preparing students to be leaders and made their jobs less frustrating. The reputation for the school and its ability to work with the community is consistently strengthened.

When the Black church partners treat students like their own biological kin they are further able to relate to students in ways that teachers and administrators simply cannot. This study showed how the cultural disconnect among school staff and administration can be positively influenced through partnership efforts with Black Churches.

A climate of trust, which is needed in the society to which we live, in order for families and guardians of students feel secure with the education of their children. This work also enabled the school to fully meet and exceed the mission, vision and strategic planning efforts, which are sometimes ambiguously structured.

Overall, this study surfaced and located supportive measures that have incredibly increased the educational achievement and college preparation for the participating African Americans students at Successful Preparation.

### **Moving Forward: A call to action as a result of these findings**

As a result of the findings in this study, a call to action should take place for schools that are experiencing this same limited achievement for African American student populations at the high school level. If ever a time, it is now. We cannot no longer sit back and allow students to minimally achieve and fail to prepare them for the road that lies ahead. Every student should be able to graduate on time and be prepared and ready for college after graduation. If not college, then a career and technical education, so that the student is able to earn and make an honest living for themselves.

Everyone has a role in these efforts. I see Black Church leaders continuously working with the communities connected with the church directly and indirectly to grow the support and awareness of the needs of students who reside in underserved neighborhoods and who attend at-risk schools. Additionally, continual planning efforts by Black Churches to establish like partnerships with these schools and consistently improve each year to make stronger impact will work to provide increase in the achievement for schools that have a partnership with a Black Church committed to supporting African American student achievement.

For Public Schools Leaders, it is imperative to begin to take a look within yourself to determine whether you are fully committed to ensuring the vision and mission statements for your district and the building in which you serve. If you truly intend to raise the achievement for African American students, then you will likely need to

incorporate some of the strategies found within data in this research to support your efforts by establishing a partnership similar to the one found in this study. The specifics of the partnership should be representative of your target goal and mirror the desire to increase student achievement. It is necessary to acknowledge that many times administration is hesitant to work with religious organizations or groups to which they are not familiar for the separation of church and state, also not to offend students/families and lack of cultural competence. There are boundaries, of course, that must be followed, but a willingness to work with organizations to which you are not unfamiliar to support achievement will work to increase the capacity of the school while also increasing student achievement when the population of students being served are similar to the students that were enrolled at Successful Preparation.

This research, aligning with the critique of liberalism tenet of Critical Race Theory, would call for societal restructuring. Society must work relentlessly by dismantling prejudices and discriminatory measures which have historically presided in public education for African American students and therefore limiting their educational achievement. This research by in no way sees to cast blame or judgment for the oppression in the nation's past times, but in fact seeks to liberate upcoming generations of African American students in their educational advancements from community support. Even with limited African American leadership representation in the schools, at the building and district level, African American students still have the opportunity to succeed in and outside of the classroom. This idea alludes to the interest convergence tenet of Critical Race theory in the fact that the operational decision-making strategies are not and have not always been favorable for African American student and one reason for

this is the limited ethnic representation of school leaders making decisions on a daily basis.

The findings in this study should only encourage and recruit participation of all leaders, teachers and community members to work together to support student success for all students that are represented in a school districts, especially African American students, whose achievement is dire need to improve. When society comes together in this way to support achievement, African American students are able to then understand that society cares for them, through the modeled support, motivation and continued encouragement which positively influences the African American students educational achievement. This work by far also aligns with the Social Learning Theory, in the fact that African American students are shown through the dedication and commitment of society working together to communicate to how to be successful in the classroom and that they are significantly valuable as a student and a person.

### **Limitations**

The sample size of this study was small, seven participants total. Thus, the results should not be generalized to a broader population.

Another limitation was that participants in this study were from a specific geographical location in the southwestern United States. The findings for a study in a different location may elicit completely different support mechanism working to support educational achievement or the type of schools which students attend in other regions across the United States.

The participants, outside of the two school leaders, were from urban communities, and shared a similar lower- and middle-class socioeconomic status. Participants' common location and socioeconomic status also poses a limitation in this study.

This study looked at a partnership with one church and one high school, a single case. There may be additional support methods of and existing partnerships with high school involving more than one church or organization that works together in their efforts to support educational achievement for students attending high schools across the United States.

Another limitation in this study is the denomination of the church in this study limits the types of support found to support African American Students. There are over one hundred denominations of churches practicing Christianity, which are home to African Americans beside Baptist Churches. There may be other types of support offered by other churches differing from the Baptist Church, which this study is limited in finding.

The ages and grade levels involved in public education can ultimately affect the types of support offered by partnership. This study focused solely upon high school students and their educational achievement. Educational achievement improvement and support by community partnership efforts for an elementary or junior high school may require completely different types of support than those found within this research.

Despite these limitations, this study provided an in-depth view of the perceptions of African American students, Black Church leaders and school administrators about how Black Church partnerships support the educational achievement for African American students.

## **Implications**

**Implications for Educational Researchers.** This research focused solely on how one church and one school partner to support the educational achievement for African American students. Professors of Educational Leadership programs across the United States may find this research useful in their graduate programs to prepare current and aspiring district/ building leaders with an understanding of how to strengthen the community and support the students' academic matters in their future leadership positions.

**Implications for School District Leaders.** This research can assist district leaders in understanding how to work with communities within the geographical boundaries of the school district to support educational achievement for African American students specifically. District Leaders can also use the findings of this research in preparing building leaders through professional development seminars about strategies to employ to provide supplemental resources to increase student achievement in an inexpensive way.

**Implications for School Building Leaders.** School Principals and other building level administrators may find this research useful in understanding ways in which they can work to build community support to ensure achievement for African American students. Building administration may find this in similar student demographics represented.

**Implications for Classroom Teachers.** Classroom Teachers can use this research in their efforts to plan lessons that are challenging for their students and may ultimately enhance students learning. With the presence of partnerships with organizations like

churches, as shown in this study, students are able to work on one with their tutor or mentor in the partnership to complete their assignments. This may work for student with limited institutional support at their home, while increasing student learning and increase the shared responsibility for student's education.

**Implications for Black Church Leaders.** This research may assist Black Church leaders to prepare ministries and auxiliaries that are geared to addressing the lack of access to educational resources experienced by some of the African American student in their community. The use of this research can further work to support African American student success from the relationships and commitment of members in their church. Church leaders that currently have programs in place which currently provide similar assistance to students in their community, however, they may decide to amend current practices and adopt other practices surfaced in this study to continue in a quest to make a positive impact in the lives of African American students.

**Implications for Service Organizations.** The findings in this research can enable leaders of nonprofit service organizations understand how to address the needs for students in similar demographic communities and where there is also a strong need of academic support for minority students, not just African Americans and their K-12 education.

### **Areas of Future Research**

**Future Research for Educational Researchers.** Future research could seek to understand how all students at the school with a partnership can support the educational achievement for all students enrolled. Another area for future inquiry would address, how might teachers and leaders effectively maximize the heuristics of the Black Church

support to their respective schools in ways that are respectful to students who do not practice a religion? Additional areas of research also include locating what types of support work to ensure the educational achievement for all minority students who specifically come from disadvantaged, single parent household backgrounds offered by faith-based organizations.

**Future Research for School District Leaders.** Future research could include understanding how other service-related organizations can partner with schools to provide a district wide rise in educational achievement and college preparation for students.

**Future Research for School Building Leaders.** Continued research could be conducted to address how to further develop and support achievement for students who are not just of the African American ethnic background. Other possible areas of research include; What other ways can building leaders build a school culture or trust, shared responsibility and community involvement in schools that serve large populations of African American students?

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to understand how Black Church and school partnerships work in supporting the educational achievement of African American students. Through the interview process, student participants reflected on their perceptions as it related to the support they received by the Black Church partnership with their school. At the same time, Black Church leaders and Schools leaders at the partnering high school reflected on their perception as to why the Church partners with the school and how the overall effect support African American student's educational achievement. All seven of the

participants in this study offered information that was consistent with the literature on the mission of the Black Church, Inequity with Achievement for African American Students, Legislation to Address Inequalities, and Partnerships for Student Success.

Although the sample size was small and therefore cannot be generalized to the population as a whole, much useful information can be extracted from this research study. First, consistent with the literature, all participants found that the relationships formed by the partnership with the Black Church provide the students with support needed to increase their motivation and ability to adopt better instructional practices to ensure their educational achievement. The Black Church partnership, in a relentless attempt, provided additional resources and worked with other service organizations in order to provide African American students with opportunities not otherwise offered in a large urban school district that operates on financially strict budgets. This research found that the four themes of, relationship, community, equity and commitment all work cooperatively to improve the educational achievement for African American students. This was communicated from the perceptions of the students, school and church leader in this study.

There were also important implications for school leaders and Black Church leaders to continue their efforts to impact educational leaders. Participants suggested that Black Church members played an essential role in their education and development plan for higher education as it was expected of them following high school completion.

One final conclusion was these students' belief that educational achievement and improvement was possible for them before they became involved with the Black Church partnership at their school, they could not imagine that they would be able to have the

support they needed to prepare for graduation and even make a plan for college and their career. anything else after high school. This expectation was not only one they had for themselves, but was reinforced by the Black Church leaders and school administrator's commitment to work together to achieve the common goal of educational achievement.

I have been enlightened from my participants that it is good for our African American students to see that we take education seriously because we give our time and money to ensure their success. It is our duty, as educators and community leaders, to use this research to improve the support measures which work to ensure educational achievement for not only African American students, but all students.

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APPENDIX A  
Interview Protocol

All Participants

1. Please describe this partnership between the church and the school.
2. How are you involved with the school/church partnership?
3. How does the partnership influence the educational achievement and college preparation African American students in this school?
4. Why do you feel the Black Church partners with this schools?
5. Why do you feel the school partners with the church?
6. How does the Black Church support African American student's education?

School Administrator/ Church Leader

7. What are the primary goals of this partnership?
8. What factors motivates you to participate in the partnership with the Black Church/School?
9. How might this partnership influence students other than academics?
10. What aspects of the partnership are most influential for student learning?

Student Specific

11. What did this partnership mean to you?
12. What difference did it make in your learning?
  - 12a. What other differences did it make?
13. What motivated you to participate in the partnership?

14. What advice would you offer to educational leaders who wish to create partnerships?

All Participants

15. Is there any other information you would like to provide me as it relates to Black Church and school partnerships? If yes, please share.

16. Is there any other information you would like to provide me as it relates to educational achievement and college preparation of African American students? If yes, please share.

## Appendix B

### Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Tuesday, May 23, 2017      Protocol Expires: 10/18/2019

IRB Application No: GU169

Proposal Title: From the Sanctuary to the Classroom: The Role of Black Church Partnerships in Supporting the Educational Achievement and College Preparation for African American Students

Reviewed and Exempt

Processed as: **Modification**

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) **Approved**

Principal

Investigator(s):

Reubin McIntosh

Katherine Curry

306 Willard

Stillwater, OK  
74078

Stillwater, OK 74078

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The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

The reviewer(s) had these comments:

Mod to 1) change title from "From the Sanctuary to the Classroom: The role of the Black Church in supporting African American students to ensure academic success both in school and pursuing higher education." to "From the Sanctuary to the Classroom: The Role of Black Church Partnerships in Supporting the Educational Achievement and College Preparation for African American Students", 2) change advisor from Dr. Blum to Dr. Curry, 3) update recruitment form and 4) update interview protocol

Signature :



Hugh Crethar, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, May 23, 2017

Date

## **ADULT CONSENT FORM OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY**

**PROJECT:** FROM THE SANCTUARY TO THE CLASSROOM: THE ROLE OF BLACK CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS IN SUPPORTING THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS.

### **INVESTIGATORS:**

Reubin McIntosh: Master's degree Human Relations University of Oklahoma, Bachelors Degree Communication and African and African American Studies, University of Oklahoma

### **PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this study is to gain understanding through the perceptions of African American students and Black Church leaders how Black Church and school partnerships support the educational achievement of African American students and preparation for college. This study can assist educational leaders in implementing community partnerships to increase student achievement for African American students.

### **PROCEDURES**

You will be asked a series of open-ended questions. This study will last 50 minutes to 1 hour. Participants are able to take rest breaks if needed and ask for clarity of interview questions. The interview will be audio-recorded.

### **RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:**

There are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

### **BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:**

If you are interested, we will send you a copy of the results of the study when it is finished.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY:**

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Audio recordings will be transcribed. All audio recordings and study materials will be retained for two years after completion of the study.

**COMPENSATION:**

You will receive a 10.00 USD Starbucks gift card for your full participation in this study. Partial participations cannot be accepted and therefore not compensated.

**CONTACTS :** You may contact any of the researchers at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: Reubin McIntosh, (918)-269-5944, [reubin.mcintosh@okstate.edu](mailto:reubin.mcintosh@okstate.edu), Katherine Curry, Ed.D., 306 Willard Hall, School of Educational Studies Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, (918) 520-9217 or [Katherine.curry@okstate.edu](mailto:Katherine.curry@okstate.edu). If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405- 744-3377 or [irb@okstate.edu](mailto:irb@okstate.edu)

**PARTICIPANT RIGHTS:**

I understand that my participation is voluntary; that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time, without penalty.

**CONSENT DOCUMENTATION:**

I have been fully informed about the procedures listed here. I am aware of what I will be asked to do and of the benefits of my participation. I also understand the following statements: I affirm that I am 18 years of age or older. I agree to be audio-recorded.

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant Date

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

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Signature of Researcher Date

VITA

Reubin L. McIntosh

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: FROM THE SANCTUARY TO THE CLASSROOM: THE ROLE OF BLACK CHURCH PARTNERSHIPS IN SUPPORTING THE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT FORAFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2018.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Human Relations at University of Oklahoma Tulsa, Oklahoma, December, 2013.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Communication and African and African American Studies at University of Oklahoma Norman, Oklahoma, December, 2011.

Experience:

The Boys and Girls Clubs of America  
*Executive Director of Student Achievement and College Readiness* 2015-Present  
Tulsa, Oklahoma

Tulsa Community College  
*Adjunct Instructor*  
Tulsa, Oklahoma  
2014- 2015

Tulsa Public Schools  
*Teacher/Senior Secondary Alternative Education Coordinator*  
Tulsa, Oklahoma  
2011- 2014

The University of Oklahoma  
*Student Affairs Lead (Presidential Community Scholars)*  
Norman, Oklahoma  
2008- 2011

Professional Memberships:

- National Alliance of Black School Educators
- Tulsa Young Professionals

