TEACHER AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE
SCHOOL PERFORMANCE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS AT SUBURBIA
HIGH SCHOOL

A Thesis

Presented to the faculty of Graduate and Professional Studies in Education

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in

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(Educational Leadership)

by

Stacey M. Falconer-Medlin

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2014
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by

Stacey M. Falconer-Medlin

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Geni Cowan, Ph.D.

Date

Graduate and Professional Studies in Education
Abstract

of

TEACHER AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES OF FACTORS AFFECTING THE
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Brief Literature Review

A review of related literature identified several factors that affect the academic success of African American students in public high schools. These factors include socioeconomic status, parent support and involvement, attendance, participation in structured extracurricular activities, student engagement, teacher bias and expectations, systemic or institutionalized racism, and disproportionality in school exclusionary discipline practices. Of these identified factors affecting student achievement, socioeconomic status appears to have the greatest influence.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore reasons for the decreasing academic achievement of African American students in Suburbia High School in Northern California. Research will address staff and student perspectives for the decrease in achievement and seek to identify factors that can directly or indirectly be addressed by
school leadership to promote more positive educational outcomes for African American students.

Methodology

The researcher used a mixed-methods research design and collected both qualitative and quantitative data to answer research questions. Data were collected from staff members at Suburbia High School through an online survey and from student participants through individual interviews. The survey inquired about staff members’ personal opinions of the decline in African American student test scores on state achievement tests and the disproportionate number of African American students receiving disciplinary suspensions. The student interview protocol focused on the student’s opinions of the school, staff, curriculum, and policies, as well as their own personal habits during and after school hours.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Results of this study supported past research that socioeconomic status was a significant predictor of the academic achievement of students. Additionally, the researcher found evidence of low teacher expectations and bias within Suburbia High School that resulted in inequitable outcomes for its African American student population. Based on these findings, it is the recommendation of the researcher that teachers and school leaders at Suburbia High School adopt a school-wide behavioral intervention and supports program, provide more varied academic interventions and support programs for impoverished students, and implement professional development opportunities for staff to
address racial bias’ that are resulting in lower expectations for African American students at Suburbia High School.

_________________________________________, Committee Chair
Virginia L. Dixon, Ed.D.

_________________________________________
Date
DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Mike Medlin, without whom it would have never been completed. Thank you for pushing me to get to work, spending long weekends and evenings as a pseudo-bachelor, chauffeuring midnight drives to drop off and pick up chapters, and for listening to me babble about my research findings through breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I love you, baby. Thank you for your love and support!
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the ruling of the pivotal Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) in Topeka, educators, administrators, politicians, parents, and the larger public have been concerned with the quality of educational programs in public schools and their effectiveness in equally meeting the needs of diverse learners. Over the past five decades, student diversity in public schools in the United States has increased dramatically, and in California public schools, the ever-growing minority populations of student learners has challenged school leaders to adapt their instructional programs, teaching strategies, and school cultures to be inclusive, effective, and responsive to the broadening diversity of their learners. Now, in 2013, California public schools serve more Hispanic/Latino students than White students (California Department of Education [CDE], 2013b). Their Asian and Asian Pacific Islander student populations are also increasing, bringing onto California campuses student populations not only diverse of ethnicity, but also of language. In 2013, 21.6% of the students enrolled in California public schools were designated English-language learners representing over 50 different non-English languages and dialects spoken as the primary language at home (CDE, 2013b).
However, diverse languages and cultures migrating into California’s borders are not the only challenges which school leaders are endeavoring to overcome. One of the neediest subgroups of California’s student population, a group that has been in California demanding educational equality since before the Civil War, continues to be underserved and often ignored. California’s African American student population, while only 6% small, compared to the 25% of White students and 52% of Hispanic/Latino students (CDE, 2013b), continues to score the lowest API scores of all of the ethnic groups represented in California, even those significantly smaller in population (CDE, 2013b). This ranking of African American students at the bottom in measures of student achievement statewide has remained consistent for every year from 2005 to 2013 without exception (CDE, 2013a).

In Oakville Unified School District, a district located in the Sacramento River Valley in California, African American students are also struggling to keep pace with the other significant subgroups represented within the district. From 2003 to 2011, the African American subgroup in Oakville Unified’s public schools outscored the district’s Hispanic/Latino subgroup by an average of ten to twenty API points. However, in 2010, the Hispanic/Latino subgroup caught up to the achievement scores of the African American subgroup which had begun to stall out after climbing 67 API points in seven years (CDE, 2013a). In 2012, the Hispanic/Latino subgroup overtook the African American subgroup by 14 points and again by 26 points in 2013 (CDE, 2013a).
At Suburbia High School, one of the two major high schools in Oakville Unified, the African American subgroup had not only fallen behind the Hispanic/Latino subgroup to take last place in student achievement on California’s Academic Performance Index (API), but had also begun decreasing in API scores for the past five years. Though the overall trend for African American students in Oakville Unified School was one of slow, but positive, growth, at Suburbia High School, the African American student subgroup lost API points from 2008 to 2013 (CDE, 2013a). In those five years, the average API score for Suburbia High School’s African American student subgroup decreased from a score of 671 to 617, while every other significant subgroup continued to improve. This research focuses on the possible factors contributing to the decrease of African American API scores in Suburbia High School as compared to other significant subgroups.

**Statement of the Problem**

The purpose of this research is to explore the reasons for the decreased academic achievement of African American students in Suburbia High School. In general, what are the factors contributing to the decline in API scores? Which, if any, can be addressed by the school leaders and faculty of Suburbia High School to increase the academic outcomes of its African American student population? Specific questions to be addressed include the following:

- What are the opinions and perceptions of the staff and faculty regarding the school performance of Suburbia High’s African American students?
• What are the opinions and perspectives of the African American students at Suburbia High regarding their own motivations, academic progress, and contributors to their academic achievement?

• What factors exist that are affecting the academic achievement of Suburbia High’s African American students?

• Which of these factors can be directly or indirectly addressed by school leadership to promote more positive educational outcomes for African American students?

**Definition of Terms**

**Achievement Gap**

Often used to describe the pervasive differences between the achievement test scores of minority and low-income students to the achievement test scores of White and Asian students, the term can also be applied to differences in test scores within minority groups, and students of other significant backgrounds, such as gender and disability.

**African American**

For the purposes of this study, the term *African American* will be used to identify any person identifying with the *Black or African American* racial category as defined by the United States Census Bureau. The bureau acknowledges that this racial category is intended to “generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and [is] not an attempt to define race biologically,
anthropologically, or genetically” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014a, para. 2). The U.S. Census bureau defines the racial category *Black or African American* as “a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as ‘Black, African Am., or Negro’, or report entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian” (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b, para. 5).

**Annual Performance Index (API)**

In compliance with California’s Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999, the API measures the academic performance and progress of schools and local educational agencies on statewide assessments. The statewide target is an annual score of 800 or higher. Schools who do not reach this target are given annual growth targets to help them reach the overall goal of 800 in attainable increments over time.

**Brown v. Board of Education**

A U.S. Supreme Court case in 1954 that ended the legal basis for racial segregation in public facilities, including schools. This case overturned the legal precedent of “separate but equal” set in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) which had allowed racial segregation in public facilities, often resulting in poorer quality facilities for non-Whites.
Co-curricular Activities

A term used interchangeably with extracurricular activities but can sometimes be intended to describe extracurricular activities that are either academic in nature, but not compulsory for all students, or that occur within the instructional hours of the school day.

English-Language Learner (ELL)

A student whose primary language is not English.

Extracurricular Activities

Activities performed by students that fall outside of the realm of the required or normal school curriculum. These activities most typically include athletics and student clubs or organizations, and can be sponsored by a school or by private agencies.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

This is a federal law passed under the George W. Bush administration in 2001 that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act which ensures that all children have free, fair, and equal access to a high-quality public education. This act requires states to annually assess all students against state-adopted curriculum standards to receive federal school funding.

Poverty

An individual or family is considered impoverished if his/its annual income falls below the identified poverty threshold for the number of persons in the household.
Poverty only considers gross income and household occupancy. For example, for a family of four members, with two members as children under the age of 18, the poverty threshold as determined by the U.S. Census for 2013 was $23,624 (2014a).

Significant Subgroup

In the Annual Performance Index, student populations are divided into several subgroup categories. Some categories are racial/ethnic subgroups, such as Black/African American or Asian Pacific Islander. Other categories include special populations of student learners, such as English-language learners or students with disabilities. These categories become significant subgroups for a school’s API if the number of students that can be classified into that category is more than 10% of the school’s total student population or if the school has 100 or more students enrolled that fit within that category.

Socioeconomic Status (SES)

Socioeconomic status is the economic and sociological combined measurement of an individual’s or family’s position within a hierarchical social structure. This measurement includes annual income, educational level, and occupation in relation to others.

Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program

This program includes the three main assessment tests that California administers to its student population annually in compliance with the federally mandated No
Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the California Public Schools Accountability Act of 1999. It includes the California Achievement Test (CAT/6 Survey), the California Content Standards Test (CST), and the Spanish Assessment of Basic Education (SABE/2).

*Williams et al. v. State of California*

A class-action lawsuit filed in 2000 by Eliezer Williams et al. against the State of California in which almost 100 San Francisco County students filed suit against several state agencies, including the California Department of Education, alleging that the agencies had failed to provide public school students with equal access to instructional materials, safe and adequate school facilities, and qualified teachers. The case was settled in 2004 and resulted in increased state spending to implement standards-aligned instructional materials for schools in the first and second ranks of the API and improvement of school facilities. It also led to the establishment of the School Accountability Report Card, which annually reports the school’s overall condition of facilities, availability of textbooks, number of teacher vacancies and misassignments, and safety.

**Limitations**

This research was limited to one high school in Northern California. Therefore, the results of this study are only directly applicable to the staff and students of this particular high school. The conclusions made by the researcher may provide insights into
the factors affecting the academic achievement of African American students in other high schools in California, but they are not generalizable beyond the scope of the population studied.

Another limitation of this study is the selection method of the participants. Due to the small number of African American students enrolled Suburbia High School, complete randomization of student participants was not possible. Student participants selected into the high-achieving African American student group were included upon consent, while participants selected into the moderate- and low-achieving African American student groups were chosen randomly. Therefore, conclusions made from the high-achieving student participants should not be generalized to all high-achieving African American students within the school as the selected sample was not random nor was it substantial in size. The researcher also acknowledges that research attained from interviewing student participants once, during only one academic school year, may not be adequate to generalize findings beyond the scope of the academic year in which this research was conducted.

**Significance of the Study**

This research is intended to contribute to the field of educational leadership by informing school leaders and policymakers of significant factors affecting the academic achievement African American students in high school. This research may be useful in establishing and implementing instructional programs and supports to better meet the
needs of African American students, and consequentially, all students. Administrators and educators may also find this research useful in examining the equity and fairness of current policies and practices as they affect African American students.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Thesis**

The remainder of this thesis contains four additional chapters. Chapter 2 includes a review of related literature and research regarding the existence of an achievement gap and the controversy surrounding the label. It also includes relevant information about previously researched factors contributing to poor and high academic achievement and how those factors affect African American students and families specifically. The methodology, setting of the study, population and sample, data collection, instrumentation, and data analysis are contained in Chapter 3. In Chapter 4, the data analysis and findings of the study are presented. Finally, Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study and findings, conclusions drawn from the findings, and recommendations for areas of further study.
Chapter 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction
The passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001 amended and reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education act of 1965 with a focus on ensuring all students have fair and equal access to a high-quality education. Various stakeholders with a vested interest in the academic achievement of California’s student population have focused on the performance levels and growth of identified subgroups of the student population to ensure that all are sharing equal success. While no subgroup has yet attained the elusive 100% proficient rate on the current state standardized achievement tests (STAR) that President George Bush aspired to achieve with his educational reforming legislation, most subgroups have demonstrated positive growth toward that goal over the past twelve years. However, some subgroups, such as the African American and Native Alaskan subgroups, have struggled to achieve this positive trend, and the achievement gap between them and their White and Asian counterparts continues to be of concern (CDE, 2013a).

As reported by the U.S. Census in 2013, California’s population of approximately 38 million residents is comprised of 73.7% self-reported White-only citizens, which is only 4% less than the national percentage (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b). However, California’s population statistics for other racial and ethnic subgroups differs vastly from
national statistics. In 2012, California was home to almost 14% Asian residents, as compared to 5.1% in the nation. Additionally, California reported 38.2% Hispanic or Latino residents, over twice as many as compared to the 17% living in the U.S. In all census tabulated racial groups in 2012, California served as home to higher than the national percentage, except for Black/African American residents; California reported only 6.6% Black or African-American residents, barely half of the national percentage of 13.1% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b).

While over the past decade California’s population has become increasingly more diverse, so also are the achievement levels those various ethnic subgroups of students achieve in California’s public schools. In analyzing achievement trends statewide, California breaks its student population into eleven subgroups, eight of which are identified by race or ethnicity. These groups include Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, Asian, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Filipino, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and White students. While growth on the Annual Performance Index (API) across all subgroups on standardized tests has been achieved in California, as evidenced by a direct comparison of overall and subgroup API scores from 2009 to 2013, there remains a persistent achievement gap in two of California’s racial subgroups. The Black/African American subgroup has consistently lagged an average of 69 API points behind the state average API score in elementary grades 2 through 6, while the White and Asian subgroups have averaged a 66 and 109 point advantage, respectively (CDE, 2013a).
While California’s Asian subgroup consistently increases its lead each year to an average of 125 API points higher than state average by high school grades 9 through 11, and California’s White subgroup maintains a 68 point advantage, the Black/African American subgroup demonstrates a loss of approximately 21 API points by grades nine through eleven, resulting in a 90 point achievement deficit compared to overall state scores (CDE, 2013a). While the Asian and White subgroups, on average, improve their API scores compared to the overall average from elementary to high school, the African American subgroup performs an average of 21 API points lower (CDE, 2013a). This trend has been consistent every year from 2009 to 2013 for all three aforementioned subgroups.

Table 1

Achievement Gap by Grade Level and Racial Subgroup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Group</th>
<th>Academic School Year</th>
<th>2008-09</th>
<th>2009-10</th>
<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2011-12</th>
<th>2013-13</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>9-11</td>
<td>2-6</td>
<td>9-11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>-67</td>
<td>-89</td>
<td>-68</td>
<td>-91</td>
<td>-69</td>
<td>-92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>-52</td>
<td>-62</td>
<td>-48</td>
<td>-57</td>
<td>-45</td>
<td>-53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
<td>-3</td>
<td>-17</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>-23</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/</td>
<td>-39</td>
<td>-28</td>
<td>-48</td>
<td>-26</td>
<td>-45</td>
<td>-37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Alaskan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
It is important to note, however, that while California’s Asian and White subgroups consistently score higher than the state’s average API score in elementary school, Black/African American students are not the only students who begin testing, on average, at a deficit. For one, the broad label and API scores attributed to California’s Asian subgroup are misleading. Within the identified Asian subgroup exists over 60 different cultural and ethnic communities (Uy, 2009), but the achievement levels of this vast subgroup are typically reported aggregate. When disaggregate, significant differences are seen between the achievement levels of various Asian ethnic groups and cultures. For example, a study conducted in 2011 found that while California’s Asian students scored an overall 62% average on the mathematics portion of the California Achievement Test, sixth edition, (CAT/6), from 2003 to 2008 (Ooka Pang, Han, & Pang, 2011), Chinese students within the subgroup scored an even higher percentage of 71.3% compared to Samoan students, who only scored a 43.9%. Korean and Japanese students also scored significantly higher than the combined Asian subgroup score, with scores of 70.7% and 68.6%, respectively, while other Asian ethnic groups, such as the Cambodians and Loatians scored below 50%. This same trend occurred in the Asian students’ reading scores on the CAT/6 for the same years (Ooka Pang et al., 2011). In fact, in both mathematics and reading scores on the CAT/6, there was an average 30% difference between the highest performing Asian ethnic community and the lowest. However, given that over 50% of Asian-identified persons in the United States belong to one of the higher-achieving Asian ethnic groups—Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and
Asian-Indian (Barnes & Bennet, 2002)—it becomes apparent how the poorer academic achievement of certain Asian ethnic groups are masked by the higher performing groups when all achievements are combined into one total score. In this way, the myth that Asian students are outperforming all other racial groups due to their consistently high aggregate API score is misleading (Ooka Pang et al., 2011) and serves as a cautionary reminder to all researchers, educators, and policymakers that, though the use of racial subgroups can provide insight into how well California’s schools are meeting the needs of its diverse learners, available data packaged into large racial categories can hide the needs of smaller minority populations in need of support.

For the purposes of this study, the researcher uses the term high-performing Asian subgroup to identify the Asian ethnic communities included in California’s combined Asian subgroup who consistently demonstrate API scores higher than the White subgroup, from the lower-performing Asian subgroup, which contains Asian cultural groups who score API scores significantly lower than that of the White subgroup. The higher-performing Asian subgroup includes Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Asian-Indian students, while the lower-performing Asian subgroup includes the Cambodians, Laotians, and Burmese, among others.

While inequity is certainly found within California’s Asian subgroup, other identified racial subgroups are also struggling to achieve the same levels of success as that of the White and higher-performing Asian subgroups. California’s Hispanic/Latino subgroup averages 47 API points lower than the state average in elementary school, as do
American Indian/Native Alaskan students and Pacific Islander students, achieving average scores of 46 and 6 points lower than the state’s overall averages in elementary grades, respectively (CDE, 2013a). Curiously, these deficits against the state average only increase for two of the four subgroups from elementary to high school. While California’s American Indian/Native Alaskan subgroup lessens its gap against the state average by approximately 14 points by high school, the gap for Black/African American students widens by 21 points, and Native American/Pacific Islanders, 13 points, from elementary to high school grades. California’s Hispanic/Latino subgroup also sees a widening of the gap from elementary to high school of an average of 7 points each year. However, of the three subgroups, the Hispanic/Latino subgroup is the only one showing a marked decrease in this gap over the past five years. From 2009 to 2013, the Hispanic/Latino subgroup has reduced this elementary to high school achievement loss by 1 to 3 points each successive year, while the gaps in the Native American and Pacific Islander subgroups have remained relatively constant for all five years (CDE, 2013a).

By examining these data, it is clear that California’s public schools, while improving general academic achievement across all ethnic demographics, are still not bridging the achievement gap that exists between various minority groups and the White majority of Californian students. It is the purpose of this study to investigate causal factors that may be contributing to the achievement gap that has consistently existed between California’s Black/African American subgroup and the White and higher-
performing Asian subgroup by investigating results in one high school in a public school
district.

Table 2
Change in Difference of API Scores Compared to Average Score

<table>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>+19</td>
<td>+16</td>
<td>+15</td>
<td>+17</td>
<td>+9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+4</td>
<td>+3</td>
<td>+1</td>
<td>-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>-22</td>
<td>-23</td>
<td>-23</td>
<td>-21</td>
<td>-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>-10</td>
<td>-9</td>
<td>-8</td>
<td>-6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>American Indian/ Native Alaskan</td>
<td>+11</td>
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The context of this study was a public high school in northern California that
demonstrated negative growth in the achievement scores of its Black/African American
identified students on standardized tests from 2010 to 2013. The researcher, a public
high school math teacher, working in conjunction with the high school’s principal, sought
to identify factors contributing to this decline of academic achievement by the school’s
African American students, particularly in light of the positive growth every other
subgroup in the school had made during the same time frame. For this study, the
researcher decided to focus on oppositional culture theory, racial bias within the school
staff and institution, disproportionate discipline, student disengagement, family structure
and parental involvement, socioeconomic status and poverty, and school attendance and
truancy, and their effects on student achievement and the recognized achievement gap between African American students and students of the White majority. In this chapter, the researcher will review relevant literature regarding these topics, including discussion about the label, achievement gap, most often used to describe the discrepancy in achievement measures scored by students of the majority against students of the minority.

The Achievement Gap Versus an Opportunity Gap

While most researchers acknowledge that there is a significant difference in the performance level of African American students on statewide standardized tests, there is much debate surrounding the use of the term achievement gap in discussing this differential. Many researchers disagree with the implied premise that White students’ achievement on these standardized tests should be the determined standard against which to measure African American students’ performance (Carpenter, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006; Chambers, 2009; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). Part of their argument is that while it is true that the Black/African American subgroup has consistently scored below California’s White subgroup, California’s White subgroup has consistently fallen far short of those of California’s higher-performing Asian subgroup. Therefore, analyzing an achievement gap between White and African American students fails to acknowledge that there is just as much an achievement gap between White and higher-performing Asian students. In fact, in analyzing California’s standardized tests scores from 2009 to 2013, there are many achievement gaps worth
mentioning, in addition to the previously discussed differences among higher- and lower-performing Asian cultural groups. While African American students habitually take rank with the lowest state testing averages in racial subgroup comparisons, Hispanic/Latino students also come up short of the internalized standard of White test scores. Therefore, use of the term *achievement gap* may be inherently prejudicial, intimating that only African American students struggle to hit identified achievement benchmarks, and that White students, who score far below high-performing Asian students, are testing and progressing satisfactorily in public education.

This unconscious adoption of the White-student standard is especially misleading if the comparison is taken globally. Despite being touted as an economic and political powerhouse of a nation, the United States has consistently underperformed in comparative international studies of academic achievement against other developed countries in the world (Perry et al., 2003). Consistently, the United States ranks near last place regarding the academic rigor of its public education curriculum and measurable student achievement. In *A Nation at Risk*, a report written by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE) in 1983, several findings of the commission make clear that the achievement of White students in the nation is not a suitable yardstick of excellence against which to measure the inferiority or underachievement of minority groups. The report found that scores on the College Board’s Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) had been steadily declining from 1963 to 1980, dropping an average of 50 and 40 points in verbal and math scores, respectively. The average achievement on standardized
tests by high school students in the 1980s was lower than the achievement scores of high school students in the late 1950s. Between 1975 and 1980, the number of remedial math courses offered at four-year colleges had increased by 72%. The report also identified that American students placed last on 7 of 19 international comparisons of student achievement in the 1970s, and did not place first or second in any of them (NCEE, 1983). These statistics make clear why the achievement gap, as most often used to identify the inferiority of African American students to White students, unfairly and inaccurately sets the White students’ achievement as the accepted norm and approved target of excellence, when clearly, it is not.

An additional concern surrounding the use of the term achievement gap is that it only takes into account how various subgroups have performed on one measure of academic success, standardized achievement tests, and does not accurately convey the inequity that may exist across subgroups in other areas that affect student success and achievement. Researchers such as Chambers (2009) would instead use the term reception gap to be inclusive of the wide array of social and economic disadvantages many members of minority subgroups face when they arrive at educational institutions. Chambers argued that African American and Hispanic/Latino students may perform more poorly on standardized tests as a result of inappropriate tracking throughout their educational careers, due in large part to social inequities that force them into a lower tier of educational quality. These students, born into higher poverty households, may not have been afforded access to academic language and literacy programs, high-quality pre-
kindergarten programs, and supplemental educational services outside of school that more affluent children may have had. This inequitable beginning, Chambers argued, sets minority students up to consistently be behind the pack, enrolled in remedial classes that do not motivate towards academic success, and instead, doom these students to perpetual failure. The level of under-preparedness in which these students arrive to public school, or the academic level in which schools receive these students, sets them on a predetermined pathway of underachievement, lower academic rigor, and lower expectations of success. These missed opportunities, then, may have significantly more to do with discrepancies in statewide test scores than a mere lack of desire or care that the use of achievement gap may imply.

Another term that has found favor with researchers in expressing the deficit of minority students’ test scores compared to the White and Higher-performing Asian subgroups’ is opportunity gap, which may make more clear what Chambers (2009) meant to achieve with her proffered alternative. While achievement gap succinctly identifies what exists between subgroups across various areas of academic attainment—standardized test scores, grade point averages, and graduation rates—the term opportunity gap seeks to more comprehensively identify why this differential exists. Researchers argue that minority students are provided with fewer opportunities that lead to higher academic achievement, and it is this difference in opportunities that explains a gap in test scores and graduation rates, not simply intelligence, effort, or desire.
However, regardless of how impassioned the debate regarding the use of *achievement gap* may have become, it is an indisputable fact that while several subgroups in California’s testing repertoire consistently test below the state average on standardized testing, its African American subgroup remains the lowest by a significant margin, scoring 82 points below the state average in 2009 and a barely improved 81 points below the state average five years later in 2013. The more critical question, then, is not what to call the gap, but what is causing it?

**Oppositional Culture Theory**

One theory that strives to explain the differences in achievement across majority and minority groups in America is *oppositional culture theory*, based on the research conducted by Fordham and Ogbu (1986). This claims that some minorities adopt counter-productive behaviors and habits in institutionalized settings, such as public schools and the corporate world, as a result of their knowledge or belief that such institutions are rooted in racial discrimination and oppression (Harris & Robinson, 2007). Ogbu and Simons (as cited in Harris & Robinson, 2007) identified several minority classifications that serve as the underpinning explanation of why some minorities differ in their behaviors, and therefore achieve different levels of success. These classifications include *autonomous, voluntary or immigrant, and involuntary* (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Ogbu and Simons (1998) asserted that some of the more successful minority student subgroups in public schools not dominated or oppressed by the White American
dominant majority group, were able to achieve educational results similar to the dominant group. These populations, autonomous minorities, such as the Amish, Jews, and Mormons, differed from the majority group in race or ethnicity, language, or religion, but were still able to achieve average to above average levels of academic achievement, similar, if not equal to or above, the dominant group. Voluntary minorities included groups that immigrated to the United States seeking better opportunities: religious freedom, better employment, economic success, or political freedom (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). These groups, who willingly moved to the United States, tend to view education as the primary means in achieving the purposes that brought them to the United States in the first place. Ogbu and Simons (1998) identified the Asian subgroup as a voluntary minority, citing how they adopt behaviors and habits that increase academic achievement. Different than the previous two classifications, involuntary minority groups, are groups who have been historically enslaved, conquered, colonized, and oppressed by the dominant group. In the United States, such involuntary minorities include Native Americans, Alaskan Natives, and Mexican Americans, who were conquered, Native Hawaiians who were colonized, Puerto Ricans who currently consider themselves colonized, and African Americans, who were brought the United States enslaved (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Involuntary minority groups often experience a higher degree of discrimination that leads them to perceive barriers to success in school and the workplace. Due to this perception of discrimination, involuntary minorities adopt behaviors and attitudes that are oppositional to the dominant culture as a form of protest
and resistance to conforming to and assimilating with the culture that oppresses them (Harris & Robinson, 2007; Ogbu, 2004). In their works together, researchers Fordham and Ogbu (1986) sought to explain the differences in school performance across minority groups by examining two factors across the various classifications of minority groups—collective identity and cultural frame of reference.

In Ogbu’s (2004) theory, collective identity referred to a “people’s sense of who they are” (p. 3), while cultural frame of reference referred to what a minority perceived to be the appropriate behavior and dialect for their collective identity. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) determined that in response to their enslavement and oppression since entering the United States, African Americans developed an oppositional collective identity to that of their captors, the White majority. Evidence of this aversion towards acting White (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986) was found in interviews with several members of the African American communities in Shaker Heights, California and Oakland, California, where African American citizens reported that using proper English and adopting White mannerisms for behavior in White institutions, such as schools and the corporate world, were frowned upon in the African American community and met with distrust, resentment, and a social pressure to return true to one’s African American roots. Fordham and Ogbu (1986) reported that African American students they interviewed demonstrated a desire to achieve good grades, and that, in fact, earning good grades was not considered acting White or socially shunned by their African American friends. However, they also found that certain behaviors that students attributed to being White,
and that could have a positive impact on academic success, were discouraged. These behaviors included spending too much time in the library, doing one’s homework every night, studying too much, and using proper English. Students who wanted to excel academically had to carefully weigh the risk of social stigmatism against the reward of higher academic achievement.

Ogbu later clarified, in an article written in 2004, that many critics of his research had misinterpreted his writing and blended two very different factors that contribute towards the performance of African Americans in schools into one single-factor theory called oppositional culture theory. This theory oversimplified and misinterpreted Ogbu and Fordham’s (1986) research in stating that African American students choose not to achieve good grades purposefully, because to earn good grades and achieve high educational standards is acting White. However Ogbu (2004) clarified his position and reiterated that the students he interviewed in Shaker Heights and Oakland were not opposed to getting good grades, and often received complimentary feedback from their African American peers when they did so. Acting White therefore did not include academic achievement, but rather specific behaviors that led to academic achievement, such as studying too much, taking Advanced Placement or Honor’s courses, acting nerdy, enrolling in too many math or science classes, or speaking proper English.

Ogbu (2004) was careful to conclude, however, that African American students adopted a variety of responses to the “burden of acting White” (p. 9) while maintaining loyalty to their collective identity which frowned upon adopting the mannerisms or
language of the White majority that were not always purely oppositional. Camouflaging, for example, is one method of shielding oneself from the social sanctions that come with acting White. This requires participation in a large number of Black activities that fight against Black oppression. This was the most common method of coping that Ogbu found in schools in Oakland. Students participated in a large number of activities that were considered Black activities as opposed to White activities. They also tried to hide their desire to behave in ways that would advance their educational success by masking those behaviors with others that were oppositional to the institutional culture, such as acting like class clowns, allowing other students to copy their homework, or studying in secret so that their academic success would be attributed to being naturally smart instead of trying too hard.

Ogbu (2004) identified that another method of coping with the “burden of acting White” (p. 9) by is having a support group or mentorship. Students in Shaker Heights found a way to provide this support by the creation of an organization called the MAC scholars, a special student organization that rewarded academically promising African American students with membership in a group that celebrated their academic successes and provided support meetings to discuss strategies for dealing with peer pressure and furthering their academic achievement. This organization not only provided support and encouragement to these students, but also established an academic identity for achieving African American students.
Oppositional culture theory, in its oversimplified form, basically asserts the theory that African American students do not want to do well in school as a way to distinguish themselves as separate from the popular society that had enslaved and continues to oppress them. This no longer appears to be the explanation for the underachievement of African American students in American schools by academics, yet some of its tenets live on in the perceptions and opinions of many of America’s public school teachers (Harris, 2012). In a study completed by Bol and Berry (2005), teachers were surveyed regarding their perceptions of what caused the achievement gap between African American and Latino students and White students. Middle and high school teachers overwhelmingly indicated a belief that lack of achievement by African American students was caused predominantly by student characteristics, such as low motivation or care, lack of proper family support, and a poor work ethic, while supervisors and university faculty tended toward citing deficiencies in curriculum and instruction, including minority students having satisfactory access to quality curricula, and teacher beliefs about the abilities of students of certain racial and ethnic groups as being the leading causes of poor school performance by African American students (Bol & Berry, 2005). Studies such as this one indicate that the underperformance of African American students in school today could very well be more of a result of institutionalized racial bias leading to lower expectations of certain minority groups by their teachers than due to laziness or defiance of the students themselves.
Teacher Bias and Systemic Racism

For decades, much of the research into the causes of poor academic achievement by African American students has centered on deficiencies in the students’ themselves. This perspective, often referred to as the Deficit Thinking Model, seeks to attribute poor academic achievement to internal deficits or deficiencies in the student himself (Valencia, 2010). These deficits can manifest in several ways, such as limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, inappropriate behavior, insufficient family support, low motivation, or a lack of resources to attain academic excellence. This perspective is not new, and in fact, has surfaced in one form or another to influence public policy and perceptions from as far back as the early 1600s (Valencia, 2010). While many academics no longer find this theory viable or appropriate, vestiges of deficit thinking continue to influence teachers’ perceptions of their students’ performance and administrators’ adoption and implementation of school policies.

There is no dispute that students of all cultural backgrounds arrive at public schools with immense cultural differences such as differences in socioeconomic status and poverty levels, family structure, language abilities, levels of motivation, personal interests, talents and aptitudes. Much research has been devoted to investigating the effects of these cultural differences on student achievement. However, there is one area of research that seems woefully insufficient: the existence and effect of teacher bias in regard to establishing expectations of success of students from all cultural backgrounds.
In 2006, 72% of California’s teachers identified themselves as Caucasian. Of the remaining 28%, 16% identified themselves as Hispanic, 7% Asian, and 5% African American (Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2008). The same percentages describe the ethnic breakdown of public school principals in California’s schools in 2007. The overrepresentation of White teachers and administrators in the educational profession has long been a presumed significant factor affecting the school performance of minority students. This includes the perception that African American and Hispanic students have few school personnel to identify with, to form culturally-enhanced relationships with, and to serve as mentors and role models. Yet, currently researchers are beginning to investigate teacher biases towards students of particular racial and economic backgrounds, and to examine how those biases affect the academic progress of minority students.

Bol and Berry (2005) scratched the surface of this area of research when they determined a predilection of high school math teachers to blame the White-Black achievement gap on student characteristics, such as significant differences in student motivation, family structure and support, and work ethic. Sherry Marx, a professor in the Department of Secondary Education at Utah State University, found, during one study in which she observed and interviewed White, pre-service teachers enrolled in her teacher education classes, that deficit thinking was quite prevalent, especially toward children of color and English-language learners (Marx, 2006; Valencia, 2010). Marx concluded that “students in teacher education courses learn via stereotypes, that children of color and
ELLs have low educability and are difficult to teach” (Valencia, 2010, p. 127). Many
teachers are eager to deliver quality instruction to diverse classrooms of multicultural
learners, but simply willing change does not make it happen. “Deeply entrenched beliefs
surrounding the ability of different groups of students, often on the basis of ethnicity,
language, economic means, gender, disability, and simply average and below average

There is some research indicating that many teachers view their African American
students as less skilled than they may actually be. In a study conducted by McKown and
Weinstein (2002), elementary teachers underestimated the achievement levels of their
African American students, rating their skills much lower than their achievement scores
would predict (Riegle-Crumb & Humphries, 2012). Another study determined that
African American and Hispanic males were more likely to be thought to be in a math
class too difficult for them by their high school math teachers. Thus, with the odds that
an African American male student would be perceived as being enrolled in too difficult a
class is three times more than that of a White male student (Riegle-Crumb & Humphries,
2012).

Understanding the extent that teacher biases and expectations can have on the
school performance of various ethnic groups is extremely important when trying to
explain the persistent failure of African American students to perform highly on
standardized tests and enroll in advanced placement courses in high school. Much
research has been published regarding the phenomenon of stereotype threat and its
impact on the academic performance of African American students (McGee & Martin, 2011). Stereotype threat is defined as a type of confirmation bias, in which the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype suppresses the academic achievement of African American students across all grade and performance levels. These students, for fear of confirming what is already negatively assumed about them, perform more poorly as a result of the attributive stress and anxiety.

Conversely, *stereotype lift*, identifies how those same racial stereotypes affect non-historically marginalized groups, such as White males. Whereas the presence of negative stereotypes about African American students has a negative effect on the school performance of African American students, the inherent existence of those same stereotypes results in an increase in student performance by White males, the non-disparaged group (McGee & Martin, 2011). Following this research, the effects of teacher bias, particularly when teachers believe that African American students are naturally lower-skilled when compared to White students on average, could be significantly contributing to the achievement gaps demonstrated in African American student versus White student test scores.

However, research also shows that just because these stereotypes may exist, and that they can result in suppressed academic ability, it does not determine how African American students will respond to them, or guarantee a decrease in academic performance. Some may succumb to the pressure that negative stereotypes cause, while other African American students find the presence of racial stereotypes motivating to
achieve higher academic achievement (Harpalani, 2007). Researchers indicate that the resiliency that African American students demonstrate in overcoming the negative effects of stereotype threat are rooted in their “developing understandings of racism and their developing senses of, negotiations of, and assertions of what it means to be Black” (McGee & Martin, 2011, p. 4). In this way, one can see that negative stereotypes are harmful to these students, but not always to the point of being insurmountable.

While the effects of teacher bias and teacher expectations on the success of minority students is still a relatively new and limited field of research, there are several approaches that researchers have taken to better understand the roles that racism and race play in the academic experiences and achievement of African American students within the system at large. *Systemic racism* is the systematically structuring of society in such a way that advantages are given to some and disadvantages to others (Keleher & Johnson, 2001; Roithmayr, 2014). This larger umbrella of covert racism includes institutional racism, everyday racism, structural racism, and colorblind racism, all of which may directly influence the performance of African American students in schools without students, teachers, or parents ever being aware that it is happening (Keleher & Johnson, 2001; Marx, 2006; Roithmayr, 2014).

Colorblind racism, sometimes called *race blindness*, is purported to be the new racism of the era (Bonilla-Silva, 2001). Colorblindness is a sociological term referring to the disregard of racial characteristics when determining which individuals will receive services or participate in certain activities. An example would be private schools or
colleges making admission determinations without considering the applicant’s race or color. At its face value, this concept seems innocuous enough. Supporters of the colorblind ideology believe that it eliminates racism and provides equal opportunity to all individuals (Bonilla-Silva & Dietrich, 2011), as their selection for employment opportunities, admission, and other services is dependent solely upon need or merit. However, this ideology is predicated on the belief that racism no longer exists, or that if it does exist, it is no longer the main factor in determining life prospects of minority citizens. Many supporters of colorblind racism believe that social class is more of a determinant in the educational and employment attainment of African American citizens, and therefore, government legislature and programs should no longer use race as the primary factor for determining inequity among people-groups, but socioeconomic status.

In the field of education, negative effects of colorblind racism are seen in zero tolerance discipline policies and classroom-level discipline decisions that apply consequences for rule infractions equally to all students, without accounting for racial inequities that exist between racial groups. For example, a teacher may have a classroom rule that if you are more than five minutes tardy to class, you do not earn participation points for the day, and your overall course grade is lowered. A teacher may apply this rule equally among all of her students, regardless of race; however, it is misapplied, failing to account for other differences that may cause minority students to be at a disadvantage when it comes to compliance with this classroom rule. A second example could be the adherence to achievement test scores as an entry to higher-level math and
English courses in high school. Requiring that all Algebra 2 students receive a grade of B or higher for both semesters in high school to be permitted to advance to Advanced Placement Pre-Calculus is a colorblind policy for determining which students are permitted to enroll in an elite course. Such a policy does not permit flexibility that takes into account how other forms of racism or bias have influenced or contributed to an African American’s math grade of C when compared to a White student’s math grade of B.

In addition to color blind racism, institutional racism has had a serious effect on the academic outcomes of African American students. Institutional racism is the differential access of goods, services, and opportunities within a system due to racial inequality. Institutionalized racism can occur in educational institutions, commercial institutions, and public government bodies. It is described as the failure of an organization to provide appropriate and professional services to people due to their color, culture, or ethnic origin. The existence of institutional racism in California’s public schools is quite apparent when one examines the proportional underrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in Advanced Placement classes, their overrepresentation in suspension and expulsion rates (Keleher & Johnson, 2001), and the history of deplorable school conditions in schools serving a majority of African American and Hispanic students (Williams et al. v. State of California, 2000). In fact, upon examination of all key indicators of academic success—graduation rates, drop-out rates,
grade-point-average, discipline rates, etc.—the differences between racial groups are significant (Keleher & Johnson, 2001).

Understanding the roles that institutional and colorblind racism have in affecting the performance of students of color in schools is vital, as the racial undertones magnify the effects that more traditionally-thought factors, such as student engagement, truancy, and socioeconomic status, play in student achievement. All of the critical factors of student success that to be addressed in the sections which follow affect students of every color and ethnicity. However, it is important to remember that being a victim of institutionalized racism multiplies the negative impact of these factors unequally across different ethnic groups and may result in very different outcomes of success.

**Student Disengagement**

Another factor that contributes to lower levels of academic success of students in general is student disengagement, defined as a lack of interest or motivation in classroom learning, school activities, and interpersonal relationships with school staff which eventually leads to poor academic outcomes such as retention or dropping out (Sefa Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, & Zine, 1997). Student disengagement can be caused by many factors, both in and out of school. Some in-school factors include how interesting and relevant the school curriculum is (Perry et al., 2003; Slavin & Madden, 2006); the skill-competency of the student (Matthews, Kizzie, Rowley, & Cortina, 2010); teacher quality, school discipline procedures, and policies (Kinsler, 2011; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin,
the presence of racial bias or racism (Riegle-Crumb & Humphries, 2012; Roithmayr, 2014); and the type of activities and social programs the school offers to motivate students to attend, participate, and engage in their learning community (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Fletcher, Nickerson, & Wright, 2003; Hynes & Sanders, 2011; Sefa Dei et al., 1997). Out-of-school factors affecting student disengagement include parental support (Lareau, 2001; McCartin & Meyer, 1988; Middleton & Loughead, 1993), family stress and crisis (Sefa Dei et al., 1997), and socioeconomic factors (Rafferty, 1995; Sefa Dei et al., 1997; Tomul & Savasci, 2012). The latter factors are addressed later in this chapter when the effects of poverty and family structure on student achievement are examined. Research indicates that student disengagement is a multifaceted process that extends well into and beyond the classroom. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on three areas of student disengagement that occur within the purview of the school: curriculum, teacher quality, and student participation in co- and extracurricular activities.

One factor contributing to student disengagement is the relevancy of the curriculum students are required to study in school to their current or future goals and needs (Sefa Dei et al., 1997). As high school is a time of emotional and social transition, many students struggle with the question, *when will I ever use this in life?* If teachers and counselors cannot provide adequate motivation for students to find meaning in what they are being asked to learn, student disengagement may increase. This disengagement in the curriculum is exacerbated if students of minorities also receive overt or covert messages
that they do not have a place in particular subjects or classes. The underrepresentation of Hispanic and African American students in advanced placement (AP) classes, for example, may be caused by institutionalized racism or other factors limiting the academic success of Hispanic or African American students (Perry et al., 2003; Sefa Dei et al., 1997; Weinstein, 1996; Wiggan, 2008). However, the absence of racial diversity in AP classes sends a more immediate message to students considering the pay-off in attempting to achieve such high levels of academic rigor. An unintended and unspoken message may be received by African American and Hispanic students that these elite courses are reserved for a certain type of student, whereas the overrepresentation of African American and Hispanic students in remedial math and English classes may send a very different message that this where a student of those particular minorities belongs (Thompson, 2007). A student, surveyed in a high school in California as part of a study by Gail Thompson investigating student perceptions and opinions of their learning environment, stated, “I think that it’s obvious: when you’re in honors and AP, they’re challenging, but when you’re in regular classes, sometimes it feels like you’re in Special Ed” (Thompson, 2007, p. 43). In the same study, 40% of the student respondents indicated they wished for more challenging curriculum, and 40% of the teachers surveyed reported they sometimes had to lower their academic standards. Additionally, 80% of the teachers surveyed reported they believed some of their colleagues had low expectations for their students’ achievement (Thompson, 2007).
Another facet of school curriculum that can contribute to student disengagement is its cultural relevance to the students’ ethnography. For many years, debates surrounding inclusive, multicultural education versus classic, Western curriculum in public schools have been ongoing (Thompson, 2007). In Thompson’s (2007) study, students of all ethnicities were asked their opinions of the school’s curriculum. Thompson (2007) found that while 70% of the students surveyed reported that they learned “a lot of useful information in most of their classes” (p. 42), Latino students were more likely than African Americans or Whites to say this. Whereas, African American males and females were least likely to communicate that they had learned a lot of useful information in their classes. For a majority of the students that Thompson surveyed, boredom, low teacher expectations, and irrelevant curriculum were significant problems, especially cultural irrelevance. Sixty percent of the students surveyed reported they wished to learn more about their culture in their classes; however, more telling of the thirst for culturally relevant curriculum among minority students was evident when Thompson broke it down by race. Seventy-five percent of African American students indicated a desire to learn more about their culture in their classes, and 60% of Latinos reported the same; however, only 36% of White students indicated this same desire.

In the focus group portion of her study, Thompson (2007) recorded comments from African American students addressing this need. The theme from African American students was that exposure to African American culture and history was miniscule, and what little was taught, was often negative (Thompson, 2007). As one
student stated, “You learn about slavery. You don’t learn about positive Black people” (Thompson, 2007, p. 44). Another commented, “They make it seem like Black people haven’t done anything but be slaves” (Thompson, 2007, p. 44). Meanwhile, the theme among the Latino students was that they did not learn anything at all about their cultures in class. One African American student summed up the effect that this cultural void in daily curriculum has on students of minority groups by stating, “I have AP History, and I find myself doing better on tests when I’m reading and writing about stuff that pertains to my culture. If they incorporated more of that, then maybe I could do better in that class” (Thompson, 2007, p. 48).

Students are wishing for more culturally-relevant curriculum. While most of the teachers from Thompson’s (2007) study felt that their curricula and instructional strategies would improve the quality of their students’ lives, almost half of the participating students felt that what they were being taught would not teach them what they needed to know to survive in their communities. A higher percentage of students of color agreed with this statement than White students. Furthermore, almost 60% of the students responded that the curriculum would not prepare them for the real world. Half of the White students agreed with this assertion. Almost twice as many White females in were agreement over White males, and a slightly higher percentage of African American and Latino students were in agreement at 60% and 61% respectively (Thompson, 2007). The implication from the feedback of these students is clear: prerequisite to student
engagement is challenging curricula that are culturally responsive and real-world relevant.

If what is included in school curriculum is important from a student perspective, then how that curriculum is delivered must be equally as important in preventing student disengagement. Thompson (2007) found that most of the teachers that she surveyed rated themselves near excellent in terms of teaching practices and effectiveness at delivering curriculum, but the qualities that teachers looked for in excellent teaching were not aligned to what students wanted. The factors that the students deemed most important in determining the quality and effectiveness of a teacher included how well the teacher made the course work comprehensible, if the teacher provided extra help to students, the way a teacher responded to students’ questions during class time, and how patient the teacher was (Thompson, 2007). In response to these teacher qualities, almost half of the African American students Thompson surveyed expressed confusion over how to complete assigned coursework. One third of the students reported that their teachers seemed unwilling to provide additional help during class time, and African American students were three times more likely than White students to not ask for additional help from their teachers because of embarrassment.

While nearly all of the participating teachers in study indicated that they encouraged students to ask questions during the lesson, 20% of the student participants reported feeling discouraged from asking questions. African American students were eight times more likely, and Latino students were seven times more likely, to feel this
way than White students. Thirty percent of the students felt that teachers lacked the necessary patience to clarify and reteach concepts, and again, there was a noticeable difference in the percentage of African American and Latino students who felt this way versus White students, with students of color having a higher tendency to find their teachers impatient and annoyed when asked for help (Thompson, 2007).

**Extracurricular Activities**

Prior research has indicated that race is a significant predictor of participation in extracurricular activities (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). Dumais (2006) found that Hispanic and African American children participated in extracurricular activities as a much lower rate than White children in kindergarten and first grade. However, Lareau (2001) found no racial differences in the participants of her study after controlling for class differences. Lareau found socioeconomic status was a stronger predictor of participation in extracurricular activities than race. She also found significant differences in how students of different socioeconomic classes spent their leisure time. Students from middle- and upper-class families had less unstructured time outside of school and spent more time participating in structured extracurricular activities, compared to lower- and working-class students. The latter mostly participated in unstructured activities (Lareau, 2001). One suggested cause for the lower rate of participation in extracurricular activities among students from low socioeconomic families could be the financial costs of participation. Athletic teams and club activities often require specific materials, such as
uniforms, equipment, instruments, and fees, which impoverished families may be unable or unwilling to purchase. Additionally, in low socioeconomic families, older children may be required to assume more responsibilities within the home, such as preparing meals, supervising younger siblings, or seeking employment to provide financial assistance to the family. These responsibilities may require the students’ immediate return to home or work at the conclusion of the school day, preventing him from participating in most extracurricular activities. Other students of low-SES families may feel emotionally unable to commit to additional activities outside of the school day, especially if instability or stressors at home are taxing or burdensome. While the reasons behind why students of lower socioeconomic classes participate less in structured extracurricular activities are varied, if participation in them enhances academic achievement, then the unequal participation of students in these types of activities may be contributing to the achievement gap (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Fletcher et al., 2003).

Numerous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between extracurricular activities and academic achievement, in particular, sports (Broh, 2002; Fletcher et al., 2003), but little empirical research exists that explains why. Current theories cite stronger social relationships with adults and increased noncognitive skills as possible factors. Noncognitive skills include self-control, self-advocacy, resilience, determination, and social-interaction skills. The argument for the linkage of extracurricular activities to increased student academic achievement is based on their role in assisting students with acquiring these noncognitive skills and the resemblance that
extracurricular activities have to classroom settings and values. Both promote and instill values of independence and achievement.

Extracurricular activities often require participants to face success and failure regularly, such as winning and losing in sports, making mistakes in music performances, or not being selected for desired roles in theater. Practicing and working hard are stressed in many extracurricular activities, and this value of task persistence is equally useful and important in the classroom. Also, in extracurricular activities such as sports teams, music, or theater groups, students participate as a member of a larger unit, thereby promoting the values of universalism and teamwork, while simultaneously having an individual role to fill, promoting specificity (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). These experiences teach and refine important social skills, such as competition, cooperation, and conflict resolution, while also building individual self-esteem and self-worth. All of these skills can be translated to the school classroom and used to work more effectively with peers and adults, to self-advocate, and self-regulate in moments of challenge and failure.

Despite their connection to increased academic achievement, in the past ten years, California has seen a dramatic decline in the number of extracurricular programs available to students as a result of high-stakes testing and budget cuts. Principals have been forced to creatively allocate more funding for remedial and intervention courses, and increase student instructional minutes in the areas of Language Arts and math for students who fail to test proficiently on state achievement tests. Students from
disadvantaged backgrounds, who often attend schools in less-affluent neighborhoods, often fail to garner the needed parent and community support to maintain art, music, and athletics programs in times of financial crisis. This only exacerbates the racial and class inequality that Lareau’s (2001) research uncovered. To prepare students adequately to meet state university requirements, many high schools maintain at least an adequate selection of art, music, and athletic programs. However, some students underperforming in the areas of math and language arts lose the opportunity to take elective classes, such as art, theater, and music because they are required to enroll in concurrent math or English support classes. As most of the students represented in remedial high school classes are African American or Hispanic, more institutionalized racism prevents students of high need from accessing these enriching programs and meeting college entrance requirements (Broh, 2002; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). Those marginalized students who are free to enroll in elective courses may still find themselves at a disadvantage. The difficulty of learning a musical instrument for the first time as a high school freshman may lower the motivation for students to enroll in music courses, especially given that many members in their band classes may have had multiple years of experience thanks to the ability to pay for private lessons. This is, again, an example of where one factor for underachievement becomes magnified by another. Loss of music and athletic programs harm all students in a school community, but those with the ability to pay for private lessons or leagues still gain an advantage over those who cannot (Broh, 2002).
School Attendance and Truancy

One of the greatest predictors of academic underachievement is chronic absenteeism or truancy (Clark, 1983; Hughes & Ng, 2003; Mare, 1980; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Rafferty, 1995; Ready, 2010; Sefa Dei et al., 1997; Vaughn, Maynard, Salas-Wright, Perron, & Abdon, 2013). Several studies have concluded that students who are chronically absent from school are at higher risk of engaging in other negative activities, such as drug or alcohol use, delinquency and crime, school suspension and expulsion, and failure to complete compulsory education entirely. In addition, students with high rates of school absenteeism also show a marked decrease in earning potential after high school. With such dire consequences, it is paramount that public schools determine the underpinning factors surrounding the causes of truancy and seek to find effective solutions for ending it.

While many studies have been conducted to evaluate the effects and costs that absenteeism and truancy have on academic achievement, student success, and state and local finances, less conclusive research has been done on what causes students to purposefully miss school in the first place. While all would agree that truancy is a multidimensional problem, some researchers would argue that the overlying cause of truancy is low school engagement, or student disengagement. Student engagement has been described as a student’s personal investment in learning (Maehr & Midgely, 1996). Therefore, disengagement would be a lack of personal investment in one’s learning. This personal investment could manifest as active participation in school activities (Finn,
1989) as well as a developed loyalty or sense of belonging with one’s school. To achieve this, classroom activities need to be structured in such a way that student participation is encouraged, safe, and engaging. However, in addition to well-crafted and delivered lessons, social bonding is also necessary to capture and motivate students to attend school regularly and to graduate (Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). The question for educators, then, is how to effectively cultivate a collective school identity that all students of diverse backgrounds can belong to, particularly in communities that have high percentages of at-risk youth who bring with them to school many of the other factors that contribute to truancy.

While much research supports the argument that truancy is a result of student disengagement, it is not the only cause. Truancy is also recognized as an externalizing behavior that closely corresponds to delinquency (Vaughn et al., 2013). Students who demonstrate truancy often exhibit other negative or at-risk behaviors and factors such as substance abuse, in-school and out-of-school violence, crime, as well as lower school engagement (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People [NAACP] Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., 2005; Vaughn et al., 2013). It is unclear if these factors have a causal effect on truancy or if truancy has a causal effect on one’s involvement in crime or substance abuse, but most researchers would agree that at the very least, all aforementioned behaviors are linked and prominent among at-risk youth.

Additionally, truancy has been linked to one’s socioeconomic status and family structure. Students from impoverished families are 25% more likely to miss three or
more days of school each month as compared to children from more affluent families (National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). Disadvantaged students are more likely to change schools during the school year and have more irregular attendance, due in large part, to unstable housing conditions or parent employment, and frequent and more serious illness (Hughes & Ng, 2003; Rafferty, 1995). Students from lower-income households may also shoulder more responsibility for themselves and younger siblings, particularly where the parent’s employment makes it difficult to supervise and facilitate transportation to and from school, and they may also have less access to consistent methods of transportation. In addition, research has demonstrated that students from large families, or from single-parent households, are more likely to have higher numbers of absences and to drop out of high school (Mare, 1980). This is most likely due to the increase in poverty that is linked to larger family and single-parent households more than the structure of the households themselves. In fact, while once thought to be a significantly contributing factor to student academic achievement, recent research has shown than most of the harmful outcomes associated with single-parent households are more directly caused by related issues of poverty, than by the structure of single-family homes themselves (Dowd, 1997; Jenkins, 1989; Sefa Dei et al., 1997).

**Socioeconomic Status and Poverty**

In almost all of the previously discussed factors affecting student achievement, one common theme continues to surface as a compounding force: socioeconomic status
and one’s poverty level seem to be the ultimate super-factor in predicting one’s academic success (Bendel, Halfon, & Ever-Hadani, 1976; Chambers, 2009; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Hynes & Sanders, 2011; Jenkins, 1989; NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., 2005; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Rafferty, 1995; Ready, 2010; Roithmayr, 2014). Correlations have been shown between socioeconomic status and school attendance (Sefa Dei et al., 1997; Vaughn et al., 2013; Wehlage et al., 1989), student behavior and discipline (Gregory et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2011; NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., 2005; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Robbins, 2005; Skiba et al., 2011), participation in extracurricular activities (Dumais, 2006; Fletcher et al., 2003; Hynes & Sanders, 2011), low teacher expectations (McGee & Martin, 2011; Perry et al., 2003; Touliatos & Lindholm, 1980), and student disengagement (Matthews et al., 2010; Sefa Dei et al., 1997; Slavin & Madden, 2006). Socioeconomic status has even been identified as a more comprehensive predictor of positive school outcomes than race and intellect. It would appear that where one comes from has an enormous effect on the opportunities and successes one will enjoy in childhood and later as an adult.

Socioeconomic status and impoverished, while often used interchangeably, are not one in the same. Impoverished refers to a person or family that earns an annual income below an identified threshold. In 2013, the U.S. Census Bureau (2014a) identified the poverty threshold for a family of four at $23,836 per annum. For a family of six, the threshold increased to $31,932. Poverty, therefore, only identifies the annual earnings of
a person or family and does not address other areas of wealth and status that socioeconomic status does include. *Socioeconomic status* is a measure of sociological and economic worth that includes an individual’s or family’s economic and social position as compared to others. This measure includes annual income, highest levels of attained education, and occupation. This section will investigate the extent to which each of these factors—income level, parents’ education, and parents’ occupation—affect student achievement.

According to research, the level of education attained by a child’s parents has both a direct and indirect effect on the child’s academic achievement, and is one of the most important variables to explain the academic achievement and education level that a student will achieve (Tomul & Savasci, 2012). Parents who have higher education levels often have greater opportunities to provide better and more economic and social resources to further the academic success of their children. As such, the educational level of a student’s parents can be a strong predictor in the educational outcomes for the student himself. Indirectly, parents who have attained higher levels of education also have a tendency to communicate higher expectations and beliefs in their children’s academic abilities and achievement (McCarten & Meyer; 1988; Middleton & Loughead, 1993). Parents with higher levels of education also tended to raise children who participated in more extracurricular activities, which can also enhance academic achievement (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). Finally, parents who have achieved higher levels of academic success themselves often provide more academic and social support to
their children. In an international study, the international mathematics and science academic achievements of children whose parents had a low education level showed a correlation in student achievement scores that were lower than those of other children (Hanushek & Luque, 2003).

Another factor of socioeconomic status, income, may prove a more influential factor on student achievement. Parents with higher education levels, on average, earn higher incomes, and are therefore able to finance more extracurricular resources and services to support their children’s academic success (Schiller, 1973). However, while more education typically equates to higher incomes, it is important to note that there is still inequity across income levels, despite matching education levels, when comparing different ethnicities and genders. For example, in 1969, a White male with 12 years of education earned an average of $9,000, while an African American male with the same educational level earned only $6,000 (U.S. Census, 2014a). In 2012, the median income of a White male in the United States was $44,201. The median income for a White female the same year was $30,353. The median incomes for an African American male and female, however, were $25,551 and $20,376, respectively.

Understanding that truancy and student disengagement can be influenced or worsened by socioeconomic status and poverty, a more pressing question surfaces: Do these factors affect the academic achievement of certain racial and ethnic populations more than others? In regard to poverty, the answer is yes. According the U.S. Census Bureau (2014a), two groups had poverty rates more than 10 percentage points higher than
the U.S. rate for the total population in the 2007-2011 Census. Twenty-seven percent of American Indian/Alaska Native citizens reported household incomes at or below the poverty rate, and 25.8% of Black/African American citizens reported the same. In California, the percentage of both subgroups in poverty was only marginally lower than the nation’s average, both falling in a percentile range of 20-24.9%.

Poverty can affect the academic progress and success of a student in many ways, often doing significant damage before the student is even old enough to enroll in public school. In a child’s formative years, access to age-appropriate learning materials and activities can set the stage for school readiness. Shared reading, for example, is one of the most influential activities parents can do with their children that has been linked to positive academic achievement and outcomes (Whitehurst & Lonnigan, 1998). However, in an impoverished household, the number of books, educational toys, and experiences is vastly different than that of a more affluent household (Arnold & Doctoroff, 2003).

Parents in poverty may be unable to provide these resources consistently to their children (Schiller, 1973). For example, only half of the pre-school aged children receiving public assistance have alphabet books in the homes, compared to the 97% of children born to professionally working parents (McCormick & Mason, 1986). Children from low socioeconomic families may only receive a total of 25 hours of one-on-one picture book reading by the time they enter school compared to middle-class children who may receive upwards of 1,500 hours (Adams, 1990). In these ways, low socioeconomic status can negatively affect and predict the academic performance and outcomes of children much
earlier than the first day of school, as emergent literacy is a critical stepping-stone to high academic achievement.

Children growing up in low socioeconomic families also have less access to high-quality childcare, pre-K instructional programs, and public schools (McCormick & Mason, 1986). One study found that impoverished minority parents, in particular, were found to be unusually suspicious of less expensive childcare programs and opted more often than not, to have relatives care for their children during the day, rather than pay for a questionable day care program (Schiller, 1973). This was particularly prevalent in single-parent households where the mother was the primary caregiver. The next section will take a closer look at the effects of family structure, particularly single-parent households, on student achievement.

**Family Structure and Parental Support**

Researchers have documented the value of family involvement in the academic lives of students (Arnold & Doctoroff, 2003; Clark, 1983; Jenkins, 1989; McAdoo, 2007; McCartin & Meyer, 1988; Middleton & Loughead, 1993; Sampson, 2002). Various studies suggest that family relationships and involvement have a significant effect on student learning from elementary school to college. For example, researchers Middleton and Loughead (1993) identified three levels at which parents could be involved in the academic lives of their students: positive involvement, noninvolvement, and negative involvement.
Positive involvement describes parents who are actively involved and engaged in their student’s development (Herndon & Moore, 2002). These parents ask questions about the goals and interests of their students, and work to actively support their student’s progress towards attaining those goals. Negatively involved parents, on the other hand, are also actively engaged in their student’s academic life, but do so to further their own aspirations and desires, and not those of their student. For example, a negatively involved parent might communicate a willingness to pay for his student’s college tuition, but only if the student enrolls in a major program or school that the parent approves. Noninvolvement is described as indifference or a hands-off approach to the academic goals and aspirations of the student. Noninvolved parents may not realize that their students want or need their support, and may appear to have no concern for the future of their children (Middleton & Loughead, 1993).

For some time, researchers have investigated the impact of single-parenthood on the academic outcomes of children (McAdoo, 2007; Dowd, 1997; Jenkins, 1989; Routé Chatmon et al., 2006) seeking to prove or dispel theories that students from a married, dual-parent household perform better academically than students from single-parent households. The research regarding this assumption is mixed. While there is no denying that students from single-parent households, particularly single-mother households, are at a substantially higher risk of poor academic outcomes, the reasons may have more to do with socioeconomic status than supervision, lack of a male role model, or an exhausted mother incapable of disciplining or assisting her child (Jenkins, 1989). Dowd (1997)
commented that single-parent families are often mistakenly assumed to be problem-families, and that the public view of single-parents is remarkably consistent. Single-parents are stigmatized as uneducated, irresponsible, less observant of their children’s behaviors and habits, and poor (Dowd, 1997; Jenkins, 1989). While research does support conventional wisdom that single-parents monitor their children’s social and school activities less (Zick & Allen, 2010), it may be less due to a disregard or lack of caring about her child’s academic and social progress, and more attributed to the socioeconomic needs of the child to help out around the house with chores or acquire a job to help stabilize family finances. In this way, many researchers argue that single-parenthood alone is not the deciding factor for negative school outcomes, but rather single-parenthood coupled with low socioeconomic status (Jenkins, 1989; Lino, 2010; Zick & Allen, 2010). In fact, in one study conducted by Weitzman (1981), the incomes of 228 divorced men and women in Los Angeles County were compared after one year of their divorce. Women, who had been married for less than 10 years, demonstrated incomes that ranged from 29% to 71% of their pre-divorce household income. The men, however, demonstrated incomes representing 74% to 78% of their pre-divorce household incomes.

The premise that single-parenthood has a negative correlation with academic achievement manifests in many ways. For one, single-parent households typically operate on lower income levels, due to the absence of the dual-incomes that married or cohabitated partners share (Lino, 2010). Another theory is that children of single-parent
households are exposed to lower levels of social control—supervision and effective socialization—which are associated with juvenile delinquency (Anderson, 2010; Steinberg, 1987). However research conflicts on this association. Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986) found a statistically strong and significant association between broken homes or parental absence with child delinquency and aggression in 33 of 40 analyses; however, Lipsey and Derzon (1998) conducted a study that demonstrated that broken homes were the weakest predictor of violent or serious delinquency in youth ages 6 to 14. Instead, according to their research, the two strongest predictors for violence or serious delinquency in high school aged youth were a lack of social ties and involvement with antisocial peers (Lipsey & Derzon, 1998).

**Disciplinary Disproportionality and Zero Tolerance**

It is worth noting that the achievement gap which exists between African American and Hispanic/Latino students and their White and Asian counterparts is mirrored conversely in the number of in-school and out-of-school suspensions and expulsions accrued by all subgroups in public schools nationwide. Some researchers refer to this racial discrepancy as *the discipline gap*. Others call it *disciplinary disproportionality*. Disproportionality refers to the overrepresentation of a particular group in particular category as compared to the representation of others in that same category (Skiba et al, 2008). Disciplinary disproportionality, then, describes the disproportionately high rates that students belonging to certain racial or ethnic groups
receive discipline referrals, suspensions, school arrests, and expulsion (Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2012). Regardless of the label used, several decades of research demonstrate that students from certain racial and ethnic groups, particularly Black/African American students, are subjected to higher rates of exclusionary disciplinary practices, than students belonging to the Caucasian majority (National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2013).

Government reports and research literature have documented disciplinary disproportionately among African American students in schools across the nation. When referred for a behavioral infraction, African American students receive harsher discipline than peers of different ethnic backgrounds. Additionally, they are less likely to receive milder disciplinary alternatives when available (NASP, 2013). In fact, schools which have higher populations of African American students often have more zero tolerance policies, more intrusive and expansive security measures, fewer mild disciplinary practices, and higher rates of suspensions and expulsions, regardless of the school’s levels of misbehavior or deviance (Welch & Payne, 2012).

Data shows that at the middle and high school level, African American students are overrepresented in student discipline referrals in comparison to their enrollment, while White and Asian students are underrepresented (Gregory & Mosely, 2004). This statistic is particularly true in regard to African American male students, who, “along with Latinos and Native American students, are suspended or expelled in numbers vastly disproportionate to those of their White peers” (Gordon, Piana, & Keleher, 2000, p. 2).
This disproportionate discipline has only been further exacerbated by the establishment of zero-tolerance policies, which limit the flexibility and freedom that teachers and administrators have had in the past to explore alternative methods of discipline and intervention for certain offenses that may prove to be less destructive to the student’s academic success.

Zero Tolerance, a one-strike-you’re-out educational discipline policy, found its beginnings with the passing of the Gun Free Schools Zone Act of 1990, which prohibited guns within 1,000 feet of school campuses (Robbins, 2005). Zero Tolerance was later solidified by President George Bush’s America 2000 address, in which President Bush called for a complete elimination of drugs and violence in schools. In an attempt to meet this directive, Congress drafted the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) of 1994, which directed schools to implement programs to address and prevent violence in and around schools, and prevent the illegal use of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs. This law was later passed as Title VIII of Goals 2000: Educate America Act by President Clinton as part of the renewal of the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (Robbins, 2005). In addition to the directive to provide violence and drug-use prevention and training, this law also required that any student found in possession of a firearm within 1,000 feet of a school to be expelled for no less than one year. This was the beginning of other zero-tolerance policies, since states receiving federal funds were required to expel, for no less than one year, any student who brought a firearm to a school or school-sanctioned event. Each state maintained the right to enhance this law as it saw
fit. Some states kept the language of the law as written by the Federal government. Other states, however, added to it, gathering additional offenses that would be lumped together within the zero tolerance umbrella, such as additional types of weapons, illegal drugs, alcohol and tobacco, and harassment (Robbins, 2005).

Advocates of zero tolerance policies claim that it prevents disruption of the school’s learning environment and strengthens campus safety by removing dangerous students from school grounds immediately following an infraction, while simultaneously sending a strong message to other students to not commit the same infraction (Gregory & Cornell, 2009). However there is little empirical research to support such claims. Contrarily, available research would suggest that zero tolerance expulsion policies have a negative effect of students and demonstrate no effectiveness in preventing the very behaviors these policies seek to eliminate (American Psychological Association [APA] Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006). Furthermore, researchers suggest that zero tolerance policies may cause more harm than good, by lessening the flexibility that teachers and administrators have in effectively teaching and rehabilitating student offenders, particularly those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds and need this guidance the most (Gregory & Cornell, 2009; Robbins, 2005). Zero tolerance policies create a one-size fits all consequence for student misbehavior that does not take into account the intent, circumstances, or history of its offender. It may contribute to the nation’s high levels of suspension and expulsion in schools (Gregory & Cornell, 2009), and the
disproportionate number of those suspensions and expulsions affecting African American students (APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2006).

Zero tolerance policies are based partly upon a philosophy that recognizes exclusion as an effective method of discipline and rehabilitation (Robbins, 2005). This places the primary focus of the infraction on the consequence or punishment, rather than the violation itself. This philosophy is rooted in the belief that a student’s motivation to behave appropriately is not because it is inherently right or moral to do so, but rather fear of the punishment if he behaves inappropriately and is caught (Durkheim, 1961). Some behaviorists would consider this philosophy to be authoritarian in nature, because of its strong emphasis on structure and control with a noticeable lack of support and understanding (Baumrind, 1968). In parenting, authoritarian parents are described as directive and demanding, but not responsive. These parents expect their directives to be obeyed without question or explanation as opposed to authoritative parents who more effectively balance their children’s need for structure and accountability with a caring responsiveness to their individuality (Baumrind, 1991). Authoritative parents set clear standards for their children’s behavior with assertiveness, but are not intrusive or restrictive. It is a discipline style that is supportive rather than punitive, where responsible conformity with group standards can be achieved without individuals losing their autonomy or self-assertiveness (Baumrind, 1968). This parenting style demonstrated positive results across many student groups, and predicted favorable
outcomes in the areas of academic achievement, behavior, and self-esteem for low-income Hispanic and African American students.

This research concerning parenting styles and the indelible line separating authoritative rule, which sets appropriate boundaries within a supportive and responsive structure, and authoritarian rule, which places greater emphasis on obedience without question to the ruling authority, can further explain how zero tolerance policies, which are much more authoritarian than authoritative, discriminate against students of minority backgrounds. These students often arrive at school already feeling powerless, victimized, and misunderstood (Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Robbins, 2005). Proponents of zero tolerance policies believe that these policies set an equal yardstick against which all students, regardless of class or color, are measured. Any student who violates a zero tolerance rule receives the same punishment; therefore, the policy is fair. However, students who are marginalized by color or class may suffer distinctive differences as a result of exclusion from school. A student from a middle-class or affluent background, for example, if suspended or expelled, most likely will have the financial means to supplement his education with tutoring, private instruction, and other extracurricular services that a student from a low-income background will not be able to afford (Gregory et al., 2010). In this instance, the zero tolerance consequence of suspension from school is not equal for both types of students, and since there are more African American and Hispanic students living in poverty than White students by
national average (Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, 2014), it becomes more apparent how unfair and discriminatory zero tolerance practices actually can be.

Researchers recognize that disciplinary disproportionality and exclusionary discipline create inequitable opportunities for student learning (Gregory & Mosely, 2004; Gregory et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2011; Noltemeyer & McLoughlin, 2010; Welch & Payne, 2012). In addition to a loss of classroom instructional minutes, which often results in poor grades, test scores, and self-esteem, other effects include the disconnection of the student from his school community (Kinsler, 2011) which increases the likelihood of grade retention, truancy, and juvenile delinquency. Due to the more frequent discipline referrals that African Americans receive, coupled with the harsher consequences that are assigned, the expulsion of African American students from schools – particularly males – often results in placement in juvenile detention centers and other alternative education settings. These institutions typically offer a lower-quality educational program and more modeling of negative behavior, which does not support the correction of an excluded student’s behavior nor successful reentry into a mainstream educational setting (NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, Inc., 2005). This data demonstrates that the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of African American students contributes significantly to a higher rate of African American students leaving the educational system and entering the juvenile justice system. This pathway is more popularly known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Gregory, Nygreen, & Moran, 2006). It is one of the more devastating long-term effects of disciplinary disproportionality. In addition to the
disproportionate number of African American students entering the school-to-prison pipeline, other long-term consequences affecting victims of disciplinary disproportionality include failure to graduate high school, lower rates of enrollment and graduation from post-secondary educational institutions, lower rates of employment and income, and higher rates of adult poverty and criminal arrests compared to White peers (NASP, 2013).

Research is clear that disciplinary disproportionality affects African American students more severely than any other racial or ethnic group, with devastating long-term consequences (Gregory et al., 2006; Kinsler, 2011; NASP, 2013; Welch & Payne, 2012). Less easy to identify, however, is the underlying cause of this inequity. There is no single factor that causes disproportionality (Skiba et al., 2008); it is a complex phenomenon that is influenced by multiple factors varying from one context to another. This makes it a difficult and complex problem to solve, but several schools are attempting to find a way by implementing alternative disciplinary programs that address the underlying reasons for student misbehavior and work to prevent them before they occur.

One such program, School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS), strives to improve student academic and behavior outcomes by guaranteeing students access to the most effective instructional and behavioral practices and interventions possible (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports [PBIS], 2014). This is accomplished by providing school leaders an operational framework for achieving
these outcomes that is aligned to the four integrated Positive Behavioral Support elements: supporting social competence and academic achievement, supporting decision making, supporting staff behavior, and supporting student behavior (PBIS, 2014). This is one example of a multi-tiered system of support which focuses on preventing misbehavior before it occurs through explicit teaching of behavior to all students in the school. There is no research currently to explain how SWPBIS directly affects disciplinary disproportionality yet, but when implemented as directed, SWPBIS schools report positive outcomes such as a reduction in discipline referrals, more instructional time, and increased academic engagement of students (Horner, Fireman, & Wang, 2010).

Another program that has garnered much interest in public schools seeking disciplinary alternatives is restorative justice, which includes a collection of principles and practices that center around promoting respect, taking responsibility, and strengthening relationships within school communities as a way of managing and preventing offending behavior (Hopkins, 2002). Restorative justice, or restorative practices, is based on the premise that people will make positive changes when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to or for them. Characteristics of restorative justice include focusing on the harm done by the discipline infraction, rather than the rule that was broken, giving a voice to the person who was harmed, engaging all affected parties in collaborative problem solving, building and strengthening relationships within the school community, and empowering student growth and responsibility (Hopkins, 2002; Payne & Welch, 2013). Restorative justice seeks to foster an
authoritative style of school discipline that alters the traditional student-teacher-administration hierarchy, and instead emphasizes that every school member has a responsibility to the school community (Payne & Welch, 2013). Research shows that this approach, which attempts to influence individual behavior by enhancing and strengthening positive norms of a positive school culture, has been successful in many middle and high schools, especially those serving large populations of minority students, such as African Americans and Hispanic/Latinos (Hale, 1982; Maehr & Midgely, 1996), though a disparate number of schools with high percentages of racial minorities currently utilize restorative justice (Payne & Welch, 2013).

Rationale for the Study

The researcher has chosen to investigate factors affecting the academic achievement of African American students because of the current priority in the field of education to establish higher rates of proficiency for all minority students and to ensure equality across California’s diverse student population. For 50 years, African American students have struggled to attain the levels of academic success enjoyed by members of the Asian and White subgroups, and today, are being outscored by California’s Hispanic/Latino subgroup. It is imperative that research is done to identify why African American students are not achieving at the same rates as other racial subgroups so that policies and programs can be implemented to help support this population of students to achieve the greater levels of success to which they are entitled.
Summary

The educational needs of African American students in California are not being met. While schools have implemented programs to better serve their non-English speaking students, primarily Hispanic/Latino students, African American students continue to rank dead last in API scores statewide every year. Theories surrounding the reasons for this achievement gap are plentiful. Some believe it is due to a lack of motivation or caring on behalf of the students, as demonstrated by the higher rates of suspensions for African American students in high school than that of other racial groups. Others believe the disproportionality of discipline and lack of academic achievement is indicative of institutionalized racism that prevents African American students from having access to the quality and rigor of a challenging curriculum necessary to inspire motivation and engagement. Finally, some would blame external factors lying outside of the purview of the school district, citing family structure, support, and socioeconomic status as the critical factors affecting the educational outcomes of African American students. However, despite the numerous possible causes contributing to the low academic achievement of California’s African American students, the challenge to determine a positive course for change rests in the hands of school administrators and educators, upon whom these students depend.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the reasons for the decreased academic achievement of African American students of a Sacramento River Valley high school. Administrators at the school where the study was conducted had already identified the need to examine and address the negative growth on state achievement tests of its African American student population during its six-year accreditation review by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges in 2011. However, the administrative team lacked sufficient research regarding the possible causes of the low achievement of the African American students on campus to effectively create an action plan for change. It was this researcher’s intent to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the opinions and perspectives of the staff within this high school as related to the academic achievement of these African American students?

2. Does racial bias or stereotyping occur within the school, and if so, to what extent does it affect the academic achievement of African American students on campus?

3. What opinions and insights can high-, moderate-, and low-performing African American students provide about school staff, policies, curriculum, and programs as they relate to their academic successes and failures?
4. What changes can be made within the school to better address the academic needs of the African American students on campus?

Setting of the Study

Research was conducted at Suburbia High School, a public high school serving students grades 9 through 12. It is located in the Sacramento River Valley in California. The school district encompasses 19 public elementary, middle, and high schools. Its surrounding neighborhood is considered suburban, and the city it is located in has become a bedroom community for both the bay area and Sacramento region. The school is surrounded primarily by single-family homes, and also several mobile-home parks in the area which feed the school’s population, as well as apartment complexes. Suburbia High is one of the two main high schools that the majority of students in the school district attend, and was the second high school built in the city. It opened in 1969 as a satellite campus for the first high school in the city before becoming a junior high school for grades 7 through 9 in 1973. In 1983, Suburbia High began its transition into a comprehensive high school, graduating its first, fully-matriculated class in 1992.

In 2012-2013, Suburbia High reported a school population of 1,666 students, approximately 300 students less than the other major high school in the city. According to the CDE (2013b), approximately half of the students enrolled at Suburbia High School are white (47.8%) and the second-largest ethnic group is Hispanic/Latino (29.2%). The third largest ethnic group is black or African American students, who comprise only
11.3% of student enrollment. This population group has varied in size from between 175 students to 215 students over the last 15 years. Other ethnicities represented at Suburbia High School include Asian, Filipino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and American Indian/Alaska Native. However, the percentages of students enrolled of these ethnic groups are significantly less than 10%, making the white, Hispanic/Latino, and Black/African American student populations the only subgroups identified as significant subgroups for state testing and accountability purposes. Other significant subgroups of students at Suburbia High include its population of English-language learners, socioeconomically disadvantaged, and students with disabilities representing 10.7%, 35.2%, and 10.9% of the student enrollment respectively. It is worth noting that Suburbia High has approximately 4% more African American students enrolled than the competing high school across town, and has slightly higher percentages of socioeconomically disadvantaged students (6.5% higher) and students with disabilities (2.5% higher) than the other district high school (CDE, 2013b).

Over the past three years, Suburbia High has been making progress raising student achievement as measured by its Academic Performance Index (API) scores, which includes student performance and growth on several of California’s standardized tests as well as graduation and drop-out rates. Though the school has not met the federal requirements of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) for its English-Language Arts and Mathematics standardized test scores, from 2010 to 2013, Suburbia High School did demonstrate a gain of 28 API points school-wide. Suburbia’s population of white
students made a 30-point gain over the three years, and its Hispanic/Latino population gained a noteworthy 53 API points. This positive trend was also seen in gains made by the socioeconomically disadvantaged, English-language Learners, and Students with Disabilities groups, all of which made gains between 23 and 50 points. In fact, in almost every significant subgroup represented at Suburbia High School, positive growth has been achieved over the past three years. That is, in every subgroup except the African American subgroup.

While the vast majority of students at Suburbia are demonstrating higher levels of academic achievement, Suburbia’s African American subgroup is not. Over the past three years, this subgroup has not only not seen significant growth in API scores, it is in fact the only subgroup that has suffered a significant loss. From 2010 to 2013, the African American student subgroup at Suburbia High School has seen a 43-point decrease in its API score. Additional concern is evidenced by examining graduation rates among the three major ethnic subgroups at Suburbia High. In 2012, Suburbia High School graduated 89.6% of its White students, 82.6% of its Latino/Hispanic students, and 81.8% of its African American students (CDE, 2013b). However there were distinct differences in the levels of education attained by these graduates from each racial subgroup. For example, of the 89% of Suburbia’s white students to graduate in 2012, 33.9% graduated having met California State University/University of California admission requirements (CDE, 2013b). Conversely, 19.1% of Suburbia High’s Latino/Hispanic graduates and 13.5% of its African American graduates met CSU/UC
requirements. While these percentages are much higher than they were in 2006, the same gap in college-readiness was evident then as it is in 2013. In 2006, 28% of Suburbia’s white graduating students met the basic college-entrance requirements, while only 6% of graduating African American students did.

Other discrepancies among ethnicities exist at Suburbia High regarding overall grade point average (GPA) and discipline. In 2013, the average GPA at Suburbia High School was 1.88; however, white students averaged a GPA higher than that, with an average GPA of 2.04. Hispanic/Latino and African American students had average GPAs that were lower than the school average. Hispanic/Latino students averaged 1.73 GPA and African American students averaged 1.82. Sixty-one percent of white students at Suburbia High had GPAs that were a 2.0 or higher, while only 54% of African American students and 49% of Hispanic/Latino students had the same.

When examining student expulsion and suspension rates, the differences were much more obvious. In the 2012-13 academic year, Suburbia High reported 334 total suspensions, including both in-school and out-of-school suspensions (California Department of Education [CDE], 2013c). While African American students only comprised 11% of Suburbia High’s student enrollment, they accounted for 28% of the total number of suspensions (CDE, 2013c). Hispanic/Latino students, equaling 29% of the student population, also accounted for 28% of the incidents of suspension, while white students, who made up nearly 48% of the student enrollment, only accounted for 34% of the number of suspensions (CDE, 2013c). When examining only incidents of in-
school suspension resulting from defiance, white students comprised 39% of the 100 incidents, Hispanic/Latino students, 26%, and African American students, 28% (CDE, 2013c). Compared to enrollment percentages, there is a definite underrepresentation of white students in these incidents of suspension, and a definite overrepresentation of African American students. While the ethnic gap in these statistics has improved slightly from 2011-2012, evidence remains that African American students appear to be more heavily represented in discipline suspensions than do the other two major ethnic groups at Suburbia High School.

**Research Design**

In designing this study, the researcher applied a mixed-methods approach, collecting both quantitative and qualitative data to answer research questions. Participants in the study included staff and currently enrolled African American students from the high school. Data were collected from staff members through use of a survey, while data were collected from student participants through individual interviews. Staff members were surveyed about their opinions and beliefs regarding the achievement and behavior of the African American students.

Students were surveyed about their satisfaction with Suburbia High School in regard to the quality of the school’s instructional program, influence of peers, opinions of staff and students, and household demographical data and personal habits. Students were
also asked about their opinions regarding their own personal academic success as well as
that of the African American subgroup at Suburbia High School.

Population and Sample

According to the school’s office coordinator, Suburbia High School maintains a
total of 90 academic support staff for the 2013-2014 school year. These staff members
include administrators, teachers, counselors, paraprofessionals, resource specialists, a
school psychologist, and a college-and-career-readiness advisor. In 2012, the site
reported 100% of its administrators and 81% of its teachers as white. For classified
paraprofessionals and office or clerical staff, Suburbia High’s demographical make up
was also predominantly white, at 71% white and 23% Hispanic. The sample for this
study consisted of an array of staff members encompassing all of the aforementioned
positions. The sample included the school’s principal, two of three assistant principals,
47 teachers, five academic counselors, six paraprofessionals, the school psychologist, and
the college-and-career-readiness advisor, creating a total sample of 57 participants, as
some participants identified themselves as holding dual-positions within the school. All
members of the staff participant sample were self-selected into the study by volunteering
to complete the online questionnaire provided to all current staff members of Suburbia
High School.

In 2012-13, Suburbia High School enrolled approximately 10% of its student
enrollment was African American. Of that 10%, 52% percent were also identified as
being socioeconomically disadvantaged, compared to the 58% of Hispanic/Latino
students and 70% of white students at the school who also identified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. The sample of student participants for this study were 15 African American students across all four grade levels who were currently enrolled in math courses spanning Algebra 1 to Pre-calculus. At the time of the study, there were no African American students enrolled in either of the Calculus or AP Calculus courses to be interviewed.

**Design of the Study**

The researcher used a mixed-methods research design and collected qualitative and quantitative data through the use of an online survey and individual interviews. The staff survey was administered and collected online. It queried staff members at Suburbia High School about their perceptions and opinions of the academic achievement and behavior of African American students in general. Staff members were presented statistical data about the disparities in academic achievement and suspension rates of African American students and asked to explain these disparities.

Data from the student participants in the study were collected by conducting individual interviews. In these interviews students were asked about their positive and negative feelings about Suburbia High School, their opinions of their teachers, administrators, classmates, and course, and what factors had contributed to their own success or lack thereof. Students were also asked about how much time they spent weekly engaged in various academic and nonacademic activities, the number of extracurricular activities they participated in, and if they felt that their race had any
impact on their school performance. At the end of the interview, students were given statistics about Suburbia High School’s negative growth for its African American subgroup of students on the API and asked to provide their own insight as to what may be the cause.

**Data Collection Procedures**

Staff members participating in the study were self-selected by their participation of the online survey which was emailed to every staff member at the school. The researcher announced the purpose and process for the study at a monthly staff meeting with the permission of the school’s principal. Staff members were then sent an email containing the website link for the online survey (see Appendix A). Candidates participated based on their current employment, in any capacity, at Suburbia High School. Of the 90 staff members offered the opportunity to participate, 57 volunteered and completed the survey. Informed consent was obtained by including a disclaimer at the start of the online survey. Participants were not allowed to view the first survey question without first agreeing to give consent on the disclaimer page. By administering and collecting the surveys online, the privacy and confidentiality of the participants was maintained.

The link for the online survey was active for two weeks. During this time, the researcher sent out three email reminders to the staff at Suburbia High School, alerting them to the decreasing amount of time to elect to participate in the study and complete the survey. After two weeks, the researcher deactivated the link and collected the
responses. Electronic survey-data were deleted within 90 days after the link was
deactivated.

Student participants were also self-selected. Math teachers at Suburbia High
School were asked to deliver a consent form to any student identified by school records
as Black/African American who was currently enrolled in their classes (see Appendix B).
The consent form explained the purpose of the study and allowed students to volunteer to
participate by returning the consent form, signed, to their teacher. Students under the age
of 18 were also required to obtain parental consent on the reverse side of the student
consent form before returning it to their math teacher and before they could be considered
as potential participants.

Seventy consent forms were given out and 27 were returned with student and
parent consent. It was the researcher’s intent to equally select five participants from each
of five math courses—Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2, Pre-Calculus, and Calculus—to
ensure that a broad range of academic experience and ability were included in the study.
However, only one African American student was enrolled in Pre-Calculus, and none in
Calculus, at the time of the study. Furthermore, only one student of the three African
American students enrolled in Algebra 2 returned a consent form. Due to the extremely
limited numbers of African American students in these courses, those students who were
enrolled in Pre-Calculus and Algebra 2, and who returned signed consent forms, were
automatically included in the study. Student candidates who were enrolled in Algebra 1
and Geometry were given random numbers and then selected into the study by use of a random number generator. In all, 15 students were selected to participate.

Student participants were contacted by the researcher to set a date and time for the interview. Each interview lasted from 20 to 35 minutes and was conducted on school grounds. Student participants were informed at the beginning of the interview of their ability to stop participation at any time, and were given the opportunity to create a pseudonym to be used while the researcher recorded their responses electronically. This was done to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the students participating. Students were also interviewed individually to maintain privacy and confidentiality. Transcripts of the interviews with students were destroyed within 90 days of completion of the study.

**Instrumentation**

The staff survey was created to gather data about the perceptions and expectations of staff members at Suburbia High regarding the academic performance and behavior of African American students at the school (see Appendix C). The questionnaire consisted of seven questions, three of which pertained to demographics, asking each participant to identify his/her age, years of experience working with students in an academic capacity, and current position. The fourth question provided statistical data regarding the API growth of Suburbia High’s African American student subgroup for the past three years in comparison to the two other significant subgroups on campus. It also asked participants to express their own opinions of what factors may be contributing to the gap. Questions 5 and 6 identified information about the disproportionate number of suspensions assigned
to African American students on campus compared to the percentage of African American students enrolled at Suburbia High. It asked participants to give their opinion about reasons which might account for the disproportionality, as well as to provide their own definition of the word defiance, since a majority of the suspensions administered across all ethnicities were given for defiance. Finally, Question 7 asked participants whether they felt that in-school or out-of-school suspensions were an appropriate consequence for tardiness or truancy. The demographic questions were multiple-choice, while the last four questions soliciting staff opinions and perceptions were free-response. The researcher looked for commonalities in the free-response questions and compared them to other responses given by participants of similar age or experience and position.

The instrumentation used for the student interviews consisted of an interview protocol of 23 questions (see Appendix D). The first seven questions, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative queries, inquired about the student’s family structure, residence, family routines, and personal habits. The next 11 questions, all qualitative, asked the student for his/her opinions regarding the following: the school in general, the staff and students on campus, the classes the student was enrolled in or had taken previously, and factors within and outside of the school which contributed or detracted from school performance. Questions 18 through 22 asked participants about the influence of their peer-group and same-ethnicity peers on their school performance. The last question provided statistical data about the past three years of API achievement of the Black/African American subgroup at Suburbia High and invited participants to supply
their own conjectures to explain the results. In collecting the data from these interviews, the researcher, again, looked for common phrases and themes throughout all of the participant responses, then cross-referenced them against three achievement groups; participants were grouped into low-achieving, moderately-achieving, and high-achieving subgroups by GPA. The student participants in the high-achieving subgroup demonstrated cumulative GPAs of 3.0 or higher, the moderately-achieving subgroup demonstrated cumulative GPAs of 2.0 to 2.9, and the low-achieving subgroup had cumulative GPAs below 2.0.

During the interviews, student participants were invited to share as much or as little as they wished in response to each question. The researcher did, at times, ask clarifying questions during the interview to better ascertain the meaning of the participant’s response. Students were encouraged to offer an estimated answer if they were unsure, but were also allowed to respond with “I don’t know,” if they did not sufficiently feel capable of answering. They were also invited to say “Pass” if they felt uncomfortable answering. No participants opted out of any questions, though several responded with “I don’t know” for various questions. These responses will be discussed more fully in the Finding and Interpretations section in Chapter 4.

**Data Analysis Procedures**

For most of the research conducted in this study, the researcher looked for repeating phrases or themes in the free-response answers provided by participants. In analyzing the staff questionnaires, the researcher looked for repeated words, phrases, or
themes to identify common perceptions or thinking among the qualitative questions about academic performance, student suspensions, and definitions of defiance. The researcher then cross-referenced those themes against the age and experience levels of the respondents, as well as the job positions held at the school.

For the staff questionnaire, the researcher utilized the online survey program SurveyMonkey to create, administer, and collect the questionnaires. This program was chosen for its anonymity, user-friendliness, and cost-effectiveness. The program also offered data analysis tools that allowed the researcher to more efficiently search for common phrases and words among the large sample of responses.

The same mixed-method approach was used in analyzing data collected from the student interviews. Some of the questions asked were quantitative, such as how many minutes students spent engaged in social media or how many extracurricular activities they participated in. Other questions were qualitative, such as how students felt about their teachers and administrators. In analyzing the results of the quantitative questions, responses were tabulated. For the qualitative questions, the researcher examined student responses for themes or repeating phrases or words. The researcher then cross-referenced those themes against the various subgroups of student participants as identified by low-, moderately-, and high-achieving GPAs. The researcher also looked for trends between questions, for example, the number of extracurricular activities a participant was involved with against the student’s GPA or opinions of school staff.
Limitations

This research was limited to one high school in Northern California. Therefore, the results of this study are only directly applicable to the staff and students of this particular high school. The conclusions made by the researcher may provide insights into the factors affecting the academic achievement of African American students in other high schools in California, but they are not generalizable beyond the scope of the population studied.

Another limitation of this study is the selection method of the participants. Due to the small number of African American students enrolled Suburbia High School, complete randomization of student participants was not possible. Some student participants were selected automatically due to a limited number of African American students available in upper-level math courses. Other participants were selected into the study randomly. Therefore, conclusions made from the high-achieving student participant subgroup, which included the two students selected by the researcher for participation due to their enrollment in upper-level math courses, should not be generalized to all high-achieving African American students within the school, as the selected sample was not random.

Another limitation to the study was the small sample size of student participants. Due to the length of the interview, and the researcher’s desire to collect feedback from students that had breadth and depth, the researcher could only conduct a total of 15 interviews, which represented approximately 10% of the African American student population at the school. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the data collected
during these interviews should not be overgeneralized to the entire African American student population at Suburbia High School, nor any other high school. The researcher also acknowledges that research attained from interviewing student participants once, during only one academic school year, may not be adequate to generalize findings beyond the scope of the academic year in which this research was conducted.
Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore the reasons for the decreased academic achievement of African American students in Suburbia High School. Specific questions to be addressed include the following:

1. What are the opinions and perceptions of the staff and faculty regarding the school performance of Suburbia High School’s African American students?

2. What are the opinions and perspectives of the African American students at Suburbia High School in regard to their own motivations, academic progress, and contributors to their academic achievement?

3. What factors exist that are affecting the academic achievement of Suburbia High School’s African American students?

4. Which of these factors can be directly or indirectly addressed by school leadership to promote more positive educational outcomes for African American students?

The data of this research is presented and analyzed in this chapter. It is divided by staff participant responses and student participant responses. Each question from the staff survey and student interview protocol is presented with a brief analysis, most often with the inclusion of a table presenting data results. The summary to this chapter addresses how the data collected from staff and student participants compare and how
each provides insight to answering the aforementioned research questions guiding this study.

**Presentation of Data**

This section presents data collected from both questionnaires and the student interviews. Each question from both instruments is presented, followed by an analysis of the data. First, data collected from the staff surveys will be presented and analyzed, followed by an analysis of data collected from the student interviews. The impact of this data, as relates to the four research questions that led to this study, will be discussed in the summary to this chapter, as well as the researcher’s recommendations to follow in Chapter 5.

**Staff Survey**

**Question 1: What is your age?** All 57 participants answered this quantitative question, where various age ranges were provided for selection. The collected responses are displayed in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1  Ages of staff participants
The majority of participants in this study were between the ages of 36 and 65 (80.7%), with the highest number of staff reporting to be 36-45 years of age (31%). There were only 10 staff participants who reported ages under 36 (12.2%), and only three participants were under the age of 26 (5.2%). This indicates a moderately older staff, as the median age fell in the 46-55 age range.

Staff demographics at Suburbia High School shared by administration also indicate that only two staff members currently holding employment are African American. For this reason, the researcher chose not to inquire about the race of participants, in order to maintain participant privacy and confidentiality. However, given that over 78% of staff members at Suburbia High School last year were White, the researcher feels secure in assuming that the majority of respondents who participated in this research were also white.

**Question 2: How many years of teaching will you have completed by the end of the current academic school year in progress?** Participants were asked to select the appropriate range of years teaching that applied. An option was provided for participants who had no experience teaching because they worked in a different capacity at the school, for example, a paraprofessional or psychologist. The responses are identified in Figure 2.

The majority of participants were current teachers, or had had past teaching experience (85.9%). Eight respondents (14%) reported never having taught before. There were no participants currently completing their first year of teaching, however, one
respondent was completing his second year of teaching, while two others were completing year three. Of the 49 participants who indicated possessing years of teaching experience, the median number of years teaching was between 11 and 15 years. The two highest categories were 11-15 years of teaching experience and 16-20 years of teaching experience, both of which described 12 participants each. Therefore, almost half of the staff participants with teaching experience (48.9%) had taught for no less than 11 and no more than 20 years.

**Figure 2  Teaching experience**

Figure 2 represents the number of years of full-time teaching that participants have completed in their careers. A response of “0” indicates a participant who has never has been, and is currently not, a classroom teacher.

**Question 3: What is your current position? (Please select up to 2 positions that most accurately reflect the majority of your current assignment.)** Participants were given the ability to mark up to two positions from a select list to identify their current position at Suburbia High School. Participants were also allowed to select
“other” and then identify the name of their position. Three participants chose to do so.

The researcher has included those written-in responses in Table 3.

Table 3

Composition of Staff Participant Sample by Job Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition Statement</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Percentage of Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Administrator</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraprofessional</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Counselor</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychologist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-and-Career Readiness Advisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Support Staff</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Some participants are represented in two different categories due to split or shared job-assignments.

The majority of staff participants (82.4%) reported primarily as teachers, with two optionally reporting split-positions that included a part-time academic counselor and a College-and-Career Readiness advisor. With 10% of respondents identifying as paraprofessionals, 92.9% of the staff participants in the study identified as members of instructional staff, against 19% of staff participants who held non-teaching positions. However, this data is inclusive of two participants who reported split-positions that spanned the teaching and non-teaching categories. Of the school’s administrators, 75% participated in the study.

**Question 4: In your own opinion, to what would you attribute the negative growth of Suburbia High School’s Black/African American subgroups API scores from 2010-2013?** Participants were provided API data for the three major ethnic
subgroups at Suburbia High for the past three years and asked to identify possible causes for the loss of growth for the Black/African American subgroup. Fifty of 57 respondents answered this question, most responding complex answers that cited multiple causes for the lowered API scores of African American students. The researcher deconstructed each complex answer into one or more response statements, resulting in 98 response statements that were then assigned to one of three categories that described the nature of the statement. These categories include family-influenced factors, school-influenced factors, and student-influenced factors. Table 4 shows the most common themes that were found among the responses collected; along with the number of instances each theme was mentioned.
Table 4

Most Common Themes Regarding Factors Causing the Decrease in API Scores by the African American Subgroup at Suburbia High School from 2010-2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement or Theme</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family-Influenced Factors</strong></td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low socioeconomic status</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of parental support in the home</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental indifference to the value of education</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A sense of entitlement by parents that their children are owed positive outcomes without requiring hard work or preparation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of high expectations for academics set by parents for their students</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student-Influenced Factors</strong></td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of interest in school or low motivation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indifference to the value of education</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Succumbing to negative peer pressure</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor work habits and study skills</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher levels of misbehavior and a lack of school-appropriate social skills</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor attendance</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of entitlement that they should be able to pass a class without having to work hard for it</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School-Influenced Factors</strong></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff is not culturally representative of this subgroup and therefore does not effectively foster positive connections with these students</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School does a poor job of integrating these students into the school culture and activities</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School lacks assistive programs and interventions tailored to this subgroup’s needs</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum is not engaging, relevant, or culturally-inclusive</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Some respondents are represented across multiple themes.

Statements assigned to the family-influenced factors category included responses that referenced parental support, family structure, socioeconomic status, and family stressors, such as substance abuse in the home, incarcerated family members, or unstable
guardianship or place of residence. School-influenced factors included school policies and procedures, staff demographics, curriculum, staff outreach, and school programs and interventions. Student-influenced factors included student behavior, habits, and motivation, such as completion of homework, study skills, tardiness, comportment, and attitude and motivation.

Of the 98 response statements assigned to each category, the category of family-influenced factors received 44.8% of response statements. The category of student-influenced factors received 36.7% of the total response. Finally, the remaining 18.3% of response statements were assigned to school-influenced factors.

**Question 5: In your opinion, what might account for the almost equal number of suspensions of Black/African American students as compared to White and Hispanic/Latino students, given that the Black/African American student population at WCW is significantly lower than the other two subgroups?**  

Forty-four of 57 participants answered this question, resulting in 65 response statements that were grouped by common phrases or themes. Sixty-one of the 65 response statements were assigned to one of ten reoccurring themes. Those themes, and the number of response statements assigned to each of them, can be found in Table 5, below.

Of the 61 response statements assigned to the ten most reoccurring themes, more than half (55.7%) indicated family-influenced factors as the cause of the disproportionate number of suspensions assigned to African American students, while only 22.9%
indicated student-influenced factors. School-influenced factors were mentioned in 31 of the response statements, accounting for 50.8% of the 61 responses.

Table 5

Most Common Themes Regarding the Cause of Disproportionate Suspensions of African American Students by High School Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement or Theme</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>African American students’ cultural style of behavior and communication learned at home, is not effective or supported in the classroom.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These students lack parent support or high parent expectations.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They may have low academic skills, and a lack of school and parent support increases misbehavior.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American students may have a high level of distrust of their teachers and administrators due to historical, or currently perceived, racism.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff cannot, or do not, relate appropriately with African American students.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These students have few positive role models at home or school to teach them positive behavior.</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Those students see no value in school.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>These students act out more because they lack a cultural identity and do not find their culture represented in the curriculum or staff at school.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American students value the reputation that getting into trouble at school gives them.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The disproportionality is due to racial profiling and unconscious bias on the part of school staff.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Some respondents are represented across multiple themes.

**Question 6: How would you define “defiance” as it applies to school discipline?** Forty-four of 57 participants answered this question. This question yielded the most number of different responses (24) of all of the staff survey questions. The researcher identified key phrases and components from each response and looked for
agreement from other respondents. The common themes from the response statements are recorded in Table 6, along with the percentage of staff participants whose responses were included in each theme.

Over half of the response statements (55%) included “not following directions” as part of the respondent’s definition for defiance. Most indicated the key authority figure as “teacher,” but several others identified “staff” or “adult” as authority figures, as well. The next largest theme included response statements that defined “defiance” as “breaking school or classroom rules.” This definition was included in 31% of the total response statements. Additionally, 24% of response statements citing either “not following directions” or “breaking school or classroom rules” included a descriptor indicating the presence of student willfulness, deliberateness, or intent as part of the definition. Other common themes were “disrupting the learning environment,” acting with or showing “disrespect” to classmates or the authority figure, and acting for one’s own selfish wishes rather than doing what was beneficial for the learning community.

Where in the previous questions the researcher could find substantial commonalities, in this question, the responses were so varied that with the exception of “not following teacher directions” and “breaking school or classroom rules,” most other responses had either no other matching responses or the researcher was unable to ascertain the exact meaning of the response and was unwilling to group it with another response without clarification. Some such responses that are not included in Table 5 are “using inappropriate language,” “becoming combative,” “demonstrating a lack of trust,”
“not doing work,” “moving around the classroom,” “physical altercation,” “being passive aggressive,” and “conflicting cultural differences.”

Table 6

Most Common Definitions of the Word Defiance by High School Staff

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition Statement</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not following teacher’s directions</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breaking school or classroom rules</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not following directions or breaking school or classroom rules</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>willfully or intentionally</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causing disruption to the learning environment</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting out of selfish motivations rather than for the good of the community</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being disrespectful</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defying the authority figure</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Some respondents are represented across multiple themes.

**Question 7: Do you feel that suspension (in-school or out-of-school) is an effective and appropriate consequence for tardiness?** Fifty of 57 participants answered this question with responses of yes, no, or a mixed response which the researcher recorded in the list of supplied responses in Table 7 below, along with the number of staff participants who selected each response. Several respondents also provided suggestions of alternative discipline consequences for tardiness or truancy, such as Saturday School, lunch or after-school detentions, or manual labor, such as picking up garbage, helping with janitorial duties, or working in the cafeteria. Other respondents commented that they had no suggestions for alternatives to suspension, even though they did not feel that suspensions were effective or appropriate.
Table 7

Responses of High School Staff to the Question: Are In-school or Out-of-school Suspensions Effective and Appropriate Consequences for Student Truancy or Tardiness?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition Statement</th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes for in-school suspension, No for out-of-school suspension</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes for truancy, No for tardiness</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes for the benefit of other learners, No for the student being suspended</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes for appropriate, No for effective</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Student Interviews

**Question 1: Who do you live with?** All 15 student participants answered this question. Five students reported living with both biological parents, six reported living with their biological single-mothers, and one student reported living with his biological single-father. Two students indicated that they lived in blended families with one biological parent and a stepparent, and one student reported living with his single-Aunt.

Table 8 shows this distribution of family structures by student achievement-level combined with the average total number of household occupants, which was question two of the student interview protocol. Data collected shows that 80% of the high-achieving student participants spend the school week in a household of two married parents, biological or biological/step, while only 28.5% of moderately-achieving and 33.3% of low-achieving students do the same. Moderately-achieving students demonstrated the
highest percentage of single-guardian households (71.4%), compared to the 66.6% of low-achieving students and 20% of high-achieving students whose households were managed by only one guardian.

Table 8

Family Structure and Average Number of Persons in Primary Household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Achievement Level</th>
<th>High-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Moderately-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Low-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Family Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both biological parents, married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both biological parents, unmarried</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-biological parent, mother</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-biological parent, father</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blended family, married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative, single</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Persons in Household</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Primary family structure is representative of the parent or guardian the student resides with the most or, in the case of equal custodianship, the guardian the student resides with for the majority of the school week.

**Question 2: How many people live in your house?** All 15 participants answered this question. The households of high-achieving students averaged 3.2 people, and were most all comprised of parental guardians and their biological children. The average household occupancy of the moderately-achieving students was only slightly higher at 3.6 people, while the average household occupancy of the low-achieving students was 5 people. Table 8 shows this data in comparison to the type of parental guardianship by student level of achievement. Table 9 also contains this information, but
in comparison to the type of residence each student lives in during the school week as well as the number of bedrooms each residence provides.

Table 9

Type of Residence, Number of Household Occupants, and Number of Bedrooms by Student Achievement Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Achievement Level</th>
<th>High-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Moderately-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Low-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary Type of Residence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-family house, own</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-family house, renting</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apartment, renting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condominium, renting</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Household Occupants</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Bedrooms</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>3.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Primary family structure is representative of the parent or guardian the student resides with the most or, in the case of equal custodianship, the guardian the student resides with for the majority of the school week.

**Question 3: How many hours during the school week do you spend reading for fun?** Eight of the 15 participants responded that they did not enjoy reading and spent zero hours reading for pleasure during the entire week. One low-achieving student reported reading five hours during the school week because her mother required it of her, even though her English teacher did not. One high-performing student admitted that he loved to read, but did not find much spare time during the school week to read as much as he would like to. He reported that he reads one hour a night before bed. The other participants reported one to four hours of reading for fun during the week.
In the high-achieving students group, the average number of hours spent reading during the school week was 2.2 hours. This was the highest average, but only slightly. The low-achieving students group averaged 2.0 hours during the school week. The moderately-achieving group had the lowest average: 0.9 hours per school week. Collectively, all 15 students averaged 1.53 hours of voluntary reading during the school week. This data is included in Table 10 which compares the average number of hours students reported spending reading, doing homework, socializing with friends, and engaging in media during the school week by achievement-level.

Table 10

Average Number of Hours Spent on Specific Academic and Social Activities During the School Week and Outside the School by Student Achievement Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Student Achievement Level</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High-Achieving Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderate-Achieving Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low-Achieving Students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>8.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing with friends (hanging out, talking on</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>17.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the computer or phone, engaging in real-time social</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>media, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment/media (independently surfing the</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>16.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internet, video games, television, computer games,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>movies, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Primary family structure is representative of the parent or guardian the student resides with the most or, in the case of equal custodianship, the guardian the student resides with for the majority of the school week.
Question 4: How many hours during the school week do you spend doing homework? All 15 student participants answered this question. The number of hours spent on homework during the school week ranged from two hours to 15. More time was spent on homework by students of the low-achieving group. They averaged 11.7 hours a week on homework. The moderately-achieving students averaged 7.1 hours a week completing homework and the high-achieving students spent the least amount of time, 6 hours, completing homework. Combined, all 15 students spent an average of 8.13 hours on homework during the school week. Students did not indicate if the homework was inclusive only of each night’s assigned work or if it included make-up or missing assignments. This data is included in Table 10 where it is compared to the average number of hours students reported spending reading, socializing with friends, and engaging in media during the school week by achievement-level.

Question 5: How many hours during the school week do you spend socializing with friends outside of the school day? All 15 student participants answered this question. The researcher clarified for every participant that “socializing” included such activities as hanging out with friends, talking to them on the phone, texting, engaging in real-time social media, such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, but should not include activities done during school hours or structured activities, such as organized sports practice or clubs. All students struggled to provide an answer due to their tendencies to multitask. For example, some students responded “24-7” when the
inclusion of texting was mentioned. With guidance, each student supplied an estimate, and the range of hours spent socializing spanned from zero hours to 40.

Significantly more hours were spent socializing by students belonging to the low-achieving group. These students reported a range from 20 to 40 hours, and averaged 30 hours of socializing during the school week. The moderately-achieving students group reported answers ranging from zero to 40 hours, and averaged 19.1 hours of socializing during the school week. The high-achieving students group supplied answers ranging from zero to 13 hours, and averaged 15.8 hours each school week. Aggregate, all 15 students spent an average of 17.07 hours socializing per school week. These averages are available in Table 10, as compared to the hours students reported that they spent reading, doing homework, and engaging in media.

Two students reported zero hours spent socializing during the school week, but for very different answer. One high-achieving student indicated that he did not have time during the school week to socialize at all due to the high demands of his personal interest in designing video games. He reported spending all available free time during the school week working on his media projects. The other student to report zero hours spent socializing during the school week belonged to the moderately-achieving students group. He reported having no time or the ability to spend with friends due to being currently grounded by his parents for earning less than acceptable grades.

**Question 6: How many hours during the school week do you spend engaging in entertainment media?** All 15 student participants answered this question. However,
all students needed clarification if this question included cell phone use and the internet. The researcher clarified to all students that entertainment media was intended to include television, movies, video games, computer games, internet surfing for fun, and most any other technological activity that did not include socializing with friends. Student responses varied from three to 40 hours each school week.

Students in the high-achieving group averaged 17.2 hours engaged in entertainment media activities, mostly surfing the internet and watching television. Their answers ranged from three to 25 hours each school week. The moderately-achieving group reported an average of 18 hours per school week, with individual answers ranging from seven to 40 hours per school week spent mostly watching television and playing video games. The low-performing student group averaged 19.3 hours a school-week spent engaging in entertainment media, mostly the internet and video games, with individual responses that ranged from eight to 40 hours. Collectively, all 15 participants averaged 16.27 hours a week engaged in entertainment media. Table 10 contains this data and compares it to the average number of hours students spent reading, completing homework, and socializing with friends.

**Question 7: How many televisions, computers, and cell phones do you have in your house?** All 15 student participants answered this question. Zero students reported having zero televisions, cell phones, or computers in their households. The high-achieving students group averaged 3.6 televisions, 3.2 computers, and 3 cell phones per household. The moderately-achieving students group averaged 4.7 televisions, 2.0
computers, and 3.1 cell phones per household. The low-achieving students group averaged 4 televisions, 4.7 computers, and 4.7 cell phones per household. Collectively, the average numbers of televisions, computers, and cell phones per household for all students combined were 4.2, 2.93, and 3.53, respectively. This data is displayed in Table 11 compared to the number of household occupants.

Table 11

Average Number of Televisions, Computers, Cell Phones, and Occupants per Household by Student Achievement Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Achievement Level</th>
<th>High-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Moderately Achieving Students</th>
<th>Low-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Televisions</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computers</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>2.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell phones</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Household Occupants</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Primary family structure is representative of the parent or guardian the student resides with the most or, in the case of equal custodianship, the guardian the student resides with for the majority of the school week.

**Question 8: How many extracurricular activities do you participate in and what are they?** All 15 student participants answered this question after receiving clarification that extracurricular activities included sports, clubs, private organizations, and other such structured and supervised activities. Table 12 provides the number of extracurricular activities students participated in by achievement level, as well as the average participation for each subgroup of students.
Table 12

Participation in Extracurricular Activities by Student Achievement Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Extracurricular Activities Students Participated in Within the Past Year</th>
<th>Student Achievement Level</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High-Achieving Students</td>
<td>Moderately Achieving Students</td>
<td>Low-Achieving Students</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Extracurricular Activities</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The higher-achieving students participated in the highest average number of extracurricular activities, 1.8, within the last school year. The moderately-achieving students group average one extracurricular activity within the last school year, while the low-achieving students group averaged less than one extracurricular activity within the past school year. Forty percent of the high-achieving student participants reported participation in zero extracurricular activities, 71% of moderately-achieving student participants reported participation in zero extracurricular activities, and 66% of low-achieving student participants participated in zero extracurricular activities for the past year.

Of the extracurricular activities that students reported participating in, 76.4% were sports, inclusive of cheerleading. Of the sports activities reported, 84.6% were school-sponsored teams and 15.3% were participation in private leagues. Participation in school-sponsored clubs, including Associated Student Body, accounted for 17.6% of the
total number of extracurricular activities reported, and one high-achieving student reported daily participation in a digital-design program outside of school that accounted for the remaining 5% of the extracurricular activities.

**Question 9: How do you feel about school?** All 15 participants answered this question. Six of 15 participants indicated they liked school, four indicated school was “okay” or “fine,” but that they had mixed feelings about it, and five participants admitted to not liking school much or at all. None of the low-performing students liked school, 66% openly disliked school, and 33% indicated that it was okay by comparison to middle school. In the moderately-achieving group, 28.5% liked school, 42.8% felt that it was okay, and 42.8% did not like school. None of the high-achieving students disliked school, 20% felt it was okay, and 80% reported liking school.

Table 13 lists some of the common positive and negative comments made by students responding to Question 9. The positive comments included that their friends were present, they learned “interesting stuff,” there were more activities to participate in as compared to middle and elementary school, and four students recognized school as being a gateway to having a successful future. Of the negative comments that student participants had about school, four included that curriculum they were learning was “irrelevant” and a “waste,” because they either already knew what career they wanted and did not see a connection between what they were learning in school and that future, or, they felt that school did not prepare them for any part of the real world at all.
There were an equal number of positive and negative comments made about school when the data is viewed collectively, however disaggregate, high-achieving students provided slightly more positive comments than negative, moderately-achieving students supplied equal positive and negative comments, and low-achieving students provided slightly more negative feedback than positive.

Table 13

Student Likes and Dislikes About School by Student Achievement Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I like school because…</th>
<th>Student Achievement Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High-Achieving Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderately-Achieving Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low-Achieving Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends are there.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy learning interesting stuff.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will help me get a good job and have a better future.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are sports and activities to participate in.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I dislike school because…</th>
<th>Student Achievement Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High-Achieving Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moderately-Achieving Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low-Achieving Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is difficult at times.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a waste of time because it includes a lot of work that is irrelevant and uninteresting to my personal goals.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hate having to get up to be there so early.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes the teachers lose my assignments or don’t grade things on time and my parents take it out on me.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students here are disrespectful and rude to the teachers and it ruins my experience.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Question 10: How do you feel about your teachers at Suburbia High School?

All 15 student participants answered this question. The majority of student responses were extremely positive. Thirteen of the students (86.6%) responded with comments like “I love all my teachers,” “they’re really good,” or “they’re really cool.” None of these students had any negative feedback about any of their current teachers. The remaining two students (13%) said that their teachers were “okay” or “alright” and mentioned having had difficulties with one or two. One of these students was in the high-achieving students group and the other in the moderately-achieving students group. None of the student participants had anything seriously negative to report about any of their teachers other than a few not being as fast at inputting late work as they would like.

Question 11: How do you feel about the administrators at Suburbia High School? All 15 student participants answered this question. Eleven of the 15 student participants reported having no real opinion because they did not really “interact with” or “know them like that.” Of these students, 33.3% were from the high-achieving students group and 66.6% were from the moderately-performing group. Two students, one from the low-achieving group and one from the high-achieving group responded favorably to administrators and said that they thought they were “cool.” Two students in the low-performing group reported not liking two of the four administrators, indicating that they felt the two administrators were “rude” and played favorites.

Question 12: How do you feel about your classmates at Suburbia High School? All 15 student participants answered this question. Eight of 15 participants
responded favorable and reported liking their classmates. Positive responses included “I like them,” “they’re very nice,” “they’re cool,” and “I get along with them.” Five of 15 responses were uncertain or mixed. These responses included comments about students not acting themselves or “trying to be someone they’re not,” that some students “ignore you when you say hi,” and that appreciation for one’s classmates depended on the class, as AP classes tended to have students with better behavior and who were more respectful than non-AP classes where students “would show up late,” “had attitudes” and “didn’t care.” Two students also mentioned having difficulty finding friends who would share common interests with them. Only two responses to the question were negative, where participants reported that their classmates were “racist kinda” and “rude.”

**Question 13: How do you feel about the classes that you’re taking at Suburbia High School?** All 15 student participants answered this question. Five students reported liking or loving all of their classes without complaint. Two students indicated that they enjoyed all of their classes but one: Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). These two students were in the high-achieving student group, and one was enrolled in an early-college academy program. Five students mentioned not liking biology or science because of difficulty with the vocabulary or not having had science classes at such a high caliber in the past. Two students mentioned having too much work, two others mentioned having too much “busy work,” and two students indicated that they enjoyed their classes but struggled with passing tests. Two students mentioned particularly enjoying English class because “all of your friends are in there.”
Question 14: Do you think school is important? All 15 student participants answered this question. One-hundred percent of student respondents answered “yes.” Seven of 15 respondents, across all three achievement levels, further commented that school was “important to go somewhere in life.” Ten participants, also from across all three achievement levels, commented that school was necessary “to get a good job.” Three students stated “yes” and did not further comment.

Question 15: What helps you to be successful in school? All 15 student participants answered this question. Table 14 shows the frequency of various themes or phrases from students’ responses for this question and for Question 16. All students indicated that they felt moderately to highly successful in school. Specific feedback provided regarding factors leading to this success included “sports and everything I’m involved in,” positive parental influences, and “Academic Success”—a lunchtime intervention program that catches students with class grades of D or F, or any missing assignments, and requires them to stay for 15 extra minutes of work time or classroom intervention to get caught up. The most often cited factor affecting student academic achievement was parental influence. Fifty-three percent of student respondents mentioned parents as factors contributing to their success. Of these students, only one was from the low-achieving students group. The other seven were from the moderately-achieving and high-achieving students group. Also, zero students from the low-achieving students group mentioned participation in extracurricular activities as a contributing factor to success.
Question 16: Has anything prevented you from being as successful as you would like to be in school? All 15 participants answered this question. Seven of 15 participants responded “no” or “not really” and did not comment further. All seven of these participants were assigned to the high-achieving or moderately-achieving student groups. All three students in the low-achieving group indicated factors limiting their academic success, and all responses indicated *socializing* as the leading detriment. One student mentioned her cell phone being a distraction and her desire to “hang out” with her friends instead of completing her school work. The other two low-achieving students indicated agreement that friends and socializing distracted them from completing work in and out of the classroom.
Table 14
Student Responses Regarding Factors Promoting and Preventing Academic Success

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Promoting Success</th>
<th>High-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Moderately Achieving Students</th>
<th>Low-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation in extracurricular activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myself; high personal drive or motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental/guardian support or influence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Academic Success” Intervention class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private tutoring</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family members who are not primary guardians</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher encouragement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-provided tutoring</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors Limiting or Preventing Success</th>
<th>High-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Moderately Achieving Students</th>
<th>Low-Achieving Students</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment in AVID class</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor selection of interesting/relevant elective courses</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myself; low personal drive or motivation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family routines after school limits time to complete school assignments</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not studying</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socializing/cell phone use</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nothing is hindering my success</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Three of five high-achieving students indicated that they were satisfied with their achievement and could not identify any factor hindering their success. However, the two respondents from the high-achieving group who did provide factors limiting their academic success cited classes at Suburbia High School as problematic. One student
expressed a desire to drop out of the AVID class and program in which she was currently enrolled to allow her more freedom to choose a more interesting elective. The second student criticized the limited selection of elective courses offered at Suburbia High School, wishing that there were more courses that met his interests and future goals of designing video games.

Six of seven students assigned to the moderately-achieving students group responded with “no” or “not really” to this question, yet one student provided additional information after his no response citing himself as the sole factor affecting his success. One student in the moderately-achieving students group cited family routines as the cause of his lack of achievement, responding, “My mom picks me up from my aunt’s house after school and I don’t get to my homework until after four, but then I have to do chores and go to the gym with my older brother. There isn’t enough time to get work done.”

**Question 17:** Do you feel that the staff at Suburbia High School treats all students, fairly and equally, regardless of race? All 15 student participants answered this quantitative question. All students responded “yes.”

**Question 18:** Do you think that the school’s rules and consequences are fair and assigned to students equally, regardless of race? All 15 student participants answered this question. All participants but one responded “yes.” However, one student commented that the school’s dress code policy was not applied consistently to all students, yet she did not feel that it was applied inconsistently on the basis of race.
Questions 19 and 20: Have you ever heard the phrase “acting white” or the phrase “acting black”? If so, what does each of those phrases mean to you? All 15 student participants answered this question. More information was provided by students regarding what behaviors were inclusive of acting black, and of those participants who described what it meant to act white, most did so by comparing behaviors attributed to acting black to the lack of that behavior in acting white. Table 15 includes the most frequent phrases or descriptors of “acting white” and “acting black” by all 15 students.

The researcher found similarity between the descriptors provided by students of each of the three different groups. For example, students from the high-achieving group were as likely to report acting ghetto as a descriptor for acting Black as students from the low-achieving group. Additionally, the variety of descriptors provided by all students was substantial. For this reason, the researcher chose not to disaggregate the students’ responses by achievement level in Table 15. Instead, the researcher included the frequency of each descriptor among all 15 student responses collectively.

The descriptors of acting white and acting black provided by students were grouped into three categories: differences in speech, differences in comportment, and differences in behavior or interests. The first category, differences in speech, included descriptors describing the type of vocabulary, tone of voice, and style of speech that students attributed to acting white or acting black. Students provided more descriptors for acting white than for acting black in this category, offering seven different descriptors of the speech patterns of acting white and only four different descriptors for acting black.
Most descriptors, for both phrases, repeated the word *proper* as an adjective describing
the style of speech for each phrase. Acting white included speaking proper, sounding
more intelligent or professional, not cursing as much (as compared to acting black), and
using a different type of slang. Acting black included fewer descriptors that more
students identified with in greater frequency. Differences in speech by those acting black
included not speaking proper, using a lot of slang words, and cursing all the time.
Table 15

Student Descriptors of Acting White and Acting Black

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Acting White</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Acting Black</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Differences in speech</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a different tone of voice</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding more intelligent</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sounding more “professional”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>“Cussing” all the time</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different type of slang</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Using a deep voice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not “cussing” as much</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking proper</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saying “dude” a lot</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in comportment</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not acting “ghetto”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acting “ghetto” or “ratchet”</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting more “proper”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Being loud</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting more “preppy”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to be funny</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting more “calm”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acting “ignorant”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being so loud</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acting “defiant”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting “modern”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Acting “rude” or “disrespectful”</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting higher in social status</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Not caring as much or acting lazy</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Complaining about doing things you don’t want to do</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Acting more “casual”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Having their own “swag”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differences in behaviors or interests</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earning really high grades</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Dressing more “casual” (sagging pants)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wearing dressier clothes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>Listening to a certain kind of music (rap)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to a certain kind of music</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Hanging out with a lot of Black people</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(country)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciating your culture and where you come from</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying taxes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making a lot more money</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>Appreciating sacrifices that others have made to make you who you are</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The category of *differences in comportment* included descriptors describing the demeanor students acting white or acting black. Participants offered seven different descriptors for comportment for acting white and 10 different descriptors for acting black. Descriptors of comportment for acting black had a greater frequency than either of the other two categories with eight participants citing “acting ghetto” or “ratchet” as a descriptor of acting black. This descriptor had the highest frequency of all descriptors in any category. In addition, four students used the phrase “being loud” in their descriptions of acting black. This had the second highest frequency of all descriptors in all three categories, though it was equal to “not speaking proper” in the *differences in speech* category for acting black.

Other descriptors for acting black in *differences in comportment* included trying to be funny, acting “ignorant,” “defiant,” “rude,” or “disrespectful,” and “not caring as much” (as compared to acting white). Conversely, in the category of *differences in comportment*, acting white included not acting “ghetto,” acting more “proper,” “preppy,” “calm,” and “modern,” and not being so loud. Students provided 14 more descriptors for acting black in this category than for acting white. Additionally, there was greater frequency of those descriptors provided for acting Black in this category than that of the descriptors offered for acting White.

The third category, *differences in behaviors or interests*, included personal habits, hobbies, and interests that students identified that did not fit in the previous two categories. In this category, students identified an equal number of descriptors which
were provided with equal frequency. Both phrases elicited descriptors describing music preference and styles of dress. Acting white included country as an example style of musical preference and wearing clothing that was “more dressy.” Acting black included rap music as the example style of musical preference and dressing more “casual,” which one student described as “sagging” one’s pants. Two descriptors for acting white included references to money: paying taxes and “making a lot more money” (as compared to acting black). However, the additional descriptors for acting black were more socially and culturally oriented: appreciating one’s cultural background, being appreciative of the sacrifices others had made “to make you who you are today,” and “hanging out with a lot of Black people.”

Only one descriptor was mentioned that directly addressed academic performance: one low-performing student said that acting white could include earning grades that “are really high.” However, at the summation of six different students’ responses, stratified across achievement levels, all six students indicated that acting black or acting white had “nothing to do with grades or school at all.” The remaining eight student participants did not mention grades, school, or other elements of school performance in their responses to Questions 17 or 18.

**Question 21: Have you ever been influenced or pressured by peers of the same race to behave or act a certain way?** All 15 participants answered this question. Thirteen responded with answers of “no,” one answered “it’s a mixture,” and one said, “I’ve been pressured, but I didn’t give in.” Of the 13 students who responded “no,” five
provided additional explanation that followed a similar theme. These students indicated that they were their “own person” and did what they felt like doing regardless of “what other people are doing.” Two students mentioned having gained confidence in themselves from family members, and that this provided strength to follow their own “wishes” and “goals.”

The two students who did not provide “no” answers both made reference to peers pressuring them to use drugs or alcohol. One student responded, “I don’t want to not do it and be the person not doing it.” He then shared that he uses alcohol or marijuana approximately once a month with his friends. The other student indicated that she’d been pressured into using drugs, and that she felt it was “typical of the black community.”

**Question 22: What do you think may be causing the difference in the overall API scores of Suburbia High School’s African American students compared to the state average and other racial subgroups?** All 15 student participants answered this question. Students were provided with the average API scores achieved by the African American/Black, Hispanic/Latino, and White subgroups at Suburbia High for years 2010 to 2013. They were also provided information regarding the statewide average API scores for 2012-2013 by racial subgroup. Students were then asked to provide their own insights and opinion regarding the reason for the lower African American/Black subgroup scores as compared to the other three major racial groups.

The data collected from student responses to this question is recorded in Table 16. It shows every answer provided by students who elected to suppose one. Five students
answered “I don’t know.” The data in Table 16 is representative of 13 students across all three achievement levels, yet only one response was provided by a low-achieving student participant.

Table 16

African American Students’ Opinions of the Causes of Decreasing Achievement in API Scores by the African American/Black Student Subgroup at Suburbia High School

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causal Statement</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent-Influenced Factors</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It has to do with the home environment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you grow up in a chaotic household, then you’re really not trying to focus on school. You’re focused on surviving.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is common sense to rich people isn’t common sense to poor people growing up in the hood.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I think it has to do with parents not pushing their child to stay in school and actually do their homework.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There’s a lot more on their minds to worry about than school (shooting people, drugs, having children young).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student-Influenced Factors</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot of them think that school isn’t going to do anything for them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe the Black kids that go to Suburbia are more “ghetto” and don’t care about anything except trying to get into trouble.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black kids think that if they get good grades they’re going to get made fun of.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know a lot of Black people that don’t do what they’re supposed to do, like homework.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School-Influenced Factors</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers and the principal need to try harder to make connections with these kids and not assume that they don’t care; they may need help and not know how to ask for it.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybe it has to do with the teachers; there is a perception that Black students shouldn’t achieve.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is already assumed that White people will be successful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black people get put down more, so they don’t think they should try.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Some respondents are represented in multiple categories.
Responses varied greatly to this question, and most students appeared surprised by differences in API scores among the racial subgroups. Two students who responded “I don’t know,” also said, “That’s surprising.” Responses that were provided were grouped into three categories as were the responses from staff participants to a similar question from the staff survey. Complex responses were broken into smaller response statements that were assigned to three categories: parent-influenced factors, student-influenced factors, and school-influenced factors.

The number of response statements assigned to each category was almost equal; the student-influenced factors category and school-influenced factors category were each assigned four response statements, but the parent-response factors category received five response statements. Themes that appeared in the largest category, parent-influenced factors, included references to parental support, socioeconomic status, and environmental stressors within the home, such as drug abuse, violence, and teenage pregnancy. The response statements assigned to the student-influenced factors category included statements about lower-motivation of African American students to try hard in school, concerns about losing the respect of one’s peer group by overachieving, and a belief that African American students do not feel that school will help them to achieve life-long success.

Finally, the response statements assigned to the category of school-influenced factors included a lack of connection or relationship between staff and their African American students, a student belief that teachers expect that African American students
will not achieve while conversely expecting that White students will, and the belief that African American students may be put down more often and, consequently, give up trying to do well in school.

**Question 23: Do you believe education is important?** All 15 student participants answered this question. Every student responded affirmatively. Five students responded, “Yes, definitely,” and provided justifications describing education as the only way “to get anywhere in life.” Another student explained, “It’s the only way I’m going to get my dreams. It’s my ticket out of here.” The responses were varied across the achievement levels and the research found no significant trends between each groups’ responses.

**Findings and Interpretation of the Data**

In this section, significant findings of the data collected from staff and student participants will be interpreted and discussed. The researcher found five overarching themes that appear to be the most significant in contributing to the low achievement of African American students at Suburbia High School. These include low socioeconomic status, lack of parental or family support, misinterpretation of student behaviors by school staff, lack of student engagement and involvement in the school’s culture and community, and a lack assistive programs and support within the school to meet the social and educational needs of Suburbia High’s African American population. In the
section that follows, data collected from staff and student participants will be discussed as related to each of these themes.

**Low Socioeconomic Status**

In analyzing the data collected from the staff participants at Suburbia High School, it is clear that a large number feel that the lack of achievement of African American students at Suburbia High School is primarily caused by family or student factors (see Table 3). The greatest frequency among staff members’ responses to factors contributing to the decrease in API scores for Suburbia High’s African American students occurred in the *family-influenced factors* category, which had more than twice the number of response statements than the *school-influenced factors* category. Within this category, staff members reported socioeconomic status as the greatest contributory factor in determining student achievement, followed by “parental indifference to the value of an education.”

This same trend was demonstrated in staff responses to Question 6, which asked staff to explain the reasons for the disproportionate number of African American students receiving in-school and out-of-school suspensions (see Table 4). The three explanations provided by the most number of staff participants all referenced family-influenced factors and accounted for almost half the total number of responses provided to this question.

One of these responses explained the high number of suspensions as a result of “African American students’ cultural style of behavior and communication, *learned at home*,” which staff members judged as ineffective and unsupported in the classroom.
This explanation was shared by 29.5% of the staff participants who answered this question. The second most-frequent response explained the disproportion by a lack of parent support or high expectations. Twenty percent of staff members agreed with this explanation. Finally, the third explanation offered by staff members to explain the disproportionate suspension of African American students from school was that these students might have much lower academic schools and be provided less support, both by parents and the school.

This belief that family-influenced factors play the largest role in student achievement may be true; research does support a connection between lower socioeconomic levels and low parental involvement with student achievement of all races (Arnold & Doctoroff, 2003; McCartin & Meyer, 1988; Ready, 2010; Routé Chatmon et al., 2006). Furthermore, findings from the student interviews may also support a correlation. Due to the legal and moral responsibility to keep the socioeconomic status of students confidential, the researcher was unwilling to ask student participants to provide household income levels. However, in analyzing the demographical data provided by students, one may be able to infer that the students assigned to the low-achieving subgroup, by nature of their lower GPAs, may live in families of lower socioeconomic status.

Students in the low-achieving group averaged 2.6 bedrooms in households with an average occupancy of five people. One student in this group identified the sleeping arrangements for her family, reporting that she and her younger nephew slept in the
living room, while her mother and older sister shared one bedroom, and her second-oldest sister and her son slept in the other. A second student from the low-achieving group reported similar arrangements. He and his two younger brothers slept in the living room, while his parents occupied one bedroom and his uncle and cousin slept in the other. All members of the low-achieving group lived in residences that were rented, and none were single-family homes. Members of the higher-achieving student group, however, reported an average number of bedrooms that was equal to the average number of household occupants and 60% lived in homes that their parents owned. While this data in no way proves that one student group is the victim of lower socioeconomic status than the other, it does suggest it.

Other demographic information provided by student participants may also suggest that students in the lower-achievement group live in families of lower-socioeconomic levels. The low-achieving students in this study reported fewer televisions, cell phones, and computers than the average household occupancy (see Table 10). The higher-achieving students reported having an equal number of computers to household occupants, and a greater number of televisions and cell phones than household occupants, on average. These data may suggest that the families of students assigned to the low-achieving student group have less household income to spend on entertainment and personal electronic devices as a result of higher household occupancies. It may also suggest that the families of students from the low-achieving group have higher averages
of household occupancy as a result of less personal income, which also would limit spending on personal electronic devices and entertainment.

More research into this field of socioeconomic status as it relates to household demographics is needed, yet, within the limitations of this study, there appears to be a lower level of affluence among students assigned to the low-achieving student group when compared to that of the higher-achieving student group. It is important to note, however, that these data in no way imply that students of the higher-achieving group are not in poverty; only that by comparison, members of the higher-achieving student group appear to enjoy benefits of a slightly higher level of affluence, namely a private bedroom, more access to entertainment media, and more personal electronic devices.

Student feedback regarding the cause of poor achievement by the African American subgroup at Suburbia High School also included discussion of low socioeconomic status as a contributing factor. Students reasoned that the lack of achievement may have “to do with the home environment” and that students in poorer households have “a lot more on their minds to worry about than school.” One student explained, “If you grow up in a chaotic household, then you’re really not trying to focus on school, you’re focused on surviving.” These sentiments were echoed by several staff participants who cited low socioeconomic levels as a determinant of student success. One staff member commented, “I would guess it was economic hardship contributing to possible frail family structures.” Another questioned whether the socioeconomic levels
of Suburbia High School’s African American families had dropped in the past three years.

Within the current limitations of available data, it is impossible to ascertain the socioeconomic levels of the school’s African American students apart from the overall student population. However, the perception of staff and students that African American students on campus come from lower socioeconomic families is insightful. This may indicate an unconscious expectation of teachers on campus that African American students will arrive to school underprepared and with less home support than students of other racial backgrounds. This stereotype could be impacting the expectations that teachers and administrators have of their African American students, resulting in lower expectations of achievement for this student subgroup than that of the Hispanic/Latino and White subgroups on campus. Therefore, even if African American students are not suffering lower socioeconomic levels than their peers, the perception of staff that they are could be negatively impacting their school outcomes just the same.

Lack of Parental or Family Support

The second-most reported explanation for low student achievement by staff members in the study was a lack of parental support and/or indifference to the value of an education. These beliefs, shared by 32% of the staff participants, may also be supported by data provided by the student participants in the study. When asked to provide contributors to their academic success (see Table 13), over half of the students referenced parents as having played a significant role. Of these students, only one was assigned to
the low-achieving subgroup, compared to three in the high-achieving subgroup. One high-achieving student commented, “My parents [contribute to my success], because they only want us to concentrate on school. We know that it’s kind of our job and whenever we do something right, they’re always there, cheering us on.”

Another high-achieving student referenced his father’s difficulty in school because he “wasn’t the sharpest tool in the shed” for having had a child when he was 18 years old. This student explained, “But he’s always found a way to do…He’s a hard worker, and that 90k a year isn’t for nothing. He’s always motivated me. He’s only ever missed two of my games since high school.” By comparison, the student from the low-achieving group who referenced his parents as an influence on his academic success stated, “My mom and dad [help] by getting on my case and taking stuff away from me….I’m not allowed to go places when my grades are bad, so that makes me want to do better.” While all three of these students cite their parents as influences on their academic success, the student from the low-performing group referenced his parents’ punitive efforts to correct his lack of achievement, whereas both students from the high-achieving group referenced a positive parental influence of motivation and support, not just accountability.

Parental support was referenced among the moderately-achieving students, as well. Over half of the students in the moderately-achieving group (57%) also reported parental support as a significant factor contributing to their success. Their responses indicated that their parents encouraged them to succeed by making an example out of
themselves and by encouraging their children to achieve better. One student reported, “I feel pressured to succeed because I think [my dad] is kind of living his dream through me. He tells me all the time that you can’t go anywhere without an education.” Another student explained about her mother, “When she was younger, she had my older sister and didn’t get the opportunity to go to college, but now she’s very successful…she taught me that I can do anything, as long as I put my mind to it.” A third student from this group indicated that his parents helped him by paying for a tutor to work with him three days a week.

These data indicate that participants from both groups believe strongly that parental support and involvement is a significant contributing factor to the school outcomes of children. Students whose parents provided positive emotional support, encouragement, and actively supported their children’s participation in activities of interest appear to achieve at higher levels than those whose parents provided anecdotal warnings of potential failures from their own past experiences, or who simply punished students for not meeting parental expectations.

**Misinterpretation of Student Behaviors by School Staff**

While staff and students both share a belief those positive educational outcomes are promoted by parental influence, they disagree about the value students and parents place on education. In the staff survey, staff participants reported parent and student indifference to the value of an education as the fourth highest reason for declining African American API scores (see Table 3). Yet, when students were asked if they felt
education was important, 100% responded in the affirmative, several following-up with comments that education was the only way “to get anywhere in life” or that it was their “ticket out of here.” Additionally, there was no difference among the responses to this question across achievement levels. Low-achieving students were just as likely to indicate education as a means to positive and successful life-outcome as the high-achieving students. In fact, one student, in her response to Question 22, which asked for her opinion for the decrease in API scores for the African American student subgroup at Suburbia High, addressed teachers and said, “If you have a kid acting rowdy or loud, you need to make a relationship or connection, get to know them. We assume that they don’t care, but they may need help and don’t know how to ask for it, or don’t want to lose their street cred for asking for help.”

That some staff members at Suburbia High school perceive students as not valuing education or not caring enough about their future to try, was evident on the staff surveys. Thirty-six references were made by staff participants relating to student-influenced factors affecting African American students’ achievement. Staff members reported a belief that African American students had “low motivation” and a “lack of interest in school.” Some criticized the students’ habits, citing poor attendance, lack of appropriate social skills, higher levels of misbehavior, and poor work habits or study skills as the culprits behind the decrease in student achievement. One participant commented, “This subgroup seems to care less about their future or perceives their future as hopeless. Many of them act as though they are victims and therefore expect to fail or
expect help.” Another participant responded, “African American students don’t appear to care about their performance on the CST. I’ve had African American students actively encourage others to…make patterns out of the answer bubbles.” However, this perception of African American students was directly contradicted by the responses of the student participants, themselves. This leads the researcher to conclude that staff at Suburbia High may be interpreting the student behavior of African American students incorrectly; students may appear to not value education or school, but in actuality, they do.

What, then, is creating this miscommunication between staff and African American students? Given that 13 staff participants referenced a different cultural style of communication and behavior among the African American students enrolled at Suburbia High School, it may be that staff are misinterpreting the culturally-specific behaviors which African American students exhibit as being “defiance” or a “lack of caring.” While there was less description and agreement among student participants about the behaviors associated with acting white, there was significant agreement about which behaviors were considered acting black. Eight students referenced “acting ghetto” as a descriptor for acting black. When asked to describe what that meant, students identified “acting ghetto” as being loud, acting rude, disrespectful, or lazy, complaining about things one does not want to do, and trying to be funny. Students also explained that acting black included a different style of speech, namely, not speaking “proper,” using a lot of slang, and the overuse of profanity. Given that these behaviors, which
appeared to be valued and accepted as part of one’s African American cultural identity, it becomes clear how communication between school staff and this particular student population may be disconnected. As staff members expect students to speak in proper English, refrain from profanity, complete assigned tasks or follow directions without complaint, and act respectfully toward other students and staff, the expectations of the staff members at Suburbia High School may contradict what African American students may expect of themselves and each other. More importantly, while student participants identified these behaviors as typical of African American students, every participant clarified that these behaviors did not include a desire to earn poor grades or not achieve in school. Therefore, the researcher concludes that these students may understand what behaviors are expected and appropriate within their own culture, but they may lack awareness of how such behaviors are interpreted by staff members, or the impact they may have on their own academic achievement. Additionally, staff members at Suburbia High School may lack an accurate understanding of the intent of the students who exhibit these behaviors.

This behavior style, which is unwanted by staff members at Suburbia High School, may be a significant contributor to the disproportionate suspension of African American students at the school. Several behaviors that student participants identified as comprehensive of acting black were identified by staff participants as being “defiant.” The most common definitions of defiance by staff participants included not following the directions of an authority figure and breaking school or classroom rules (see Table 5).
Student participants identified acting black as complaining about doing tasks one did not want to do and “acting defiant.” Staff members also included causing disruption to the learning environment as a form of defiance, where student participants indicated that acting loud or “cussing all the time” was inclusive of acting black. These contradictory expectations and behaviors, combined with the wide interpretation by staff of what it means to be defiant, could indicate why African American students are suspended more frequently, and often for defiance, than the percentage of African American enrollment at Suburbia High School would indicate is appropriate.

It is worth noting, however, that while some staff participants cited unconscious racism or bias as a contributor to the overrepresentation of African American students in school discipline suspensions, the student participants did not feel that the school’s policies or practices were biased. One-hundred percent of the students interviewed answered affirmatively that school discipline procedures and policies were fair and unbiased in regard to race. One-hundred percent of the students interviewed also responded affirmatively that staff members were fair to, and respectful of, all students, regardless of race. Therefore, the researcher concludes, that staff expectations for student behavior are applied consistently and equally to all students of all races. However, staff and students may be unaware of how equal application of the rules and consequences may actually be inequitable to minority students. This might be particularly true for African American students, if such students are not explicitly taught how to behave...
according to the assumed social customs and expectations of the school, rather than simply punished for failure to comply.

**Lack of Student Engagement and Involvement in School Culture and Community**

Disproportionate discipline and poor student achievement by African American students at Suburbia High School could be due to the school’s ineffectiveness at integrating its African American students into school culture and activities. Data collected from student participants in the study indicate a low level of participation in extracurricular activities by student participants in the low-achieving student category. These students, with GPAs less than 2.0, reported only participating in an average of 0.33 extracurricular activities in the past year, while students in the high-achieving group participated in 1.8 (see Table 11). This could be the result of lower socioeconomic status among students’ families from the low-achieving student group. Less financial resources may inhibit these students from participating in clubs or activities that require special equipment, clothing, or travel. However, this hypothesis cannot be substantiated with currently available data.

A second explanation for this difference in participation in extracurricular activities could be that students who have GPAs lower than a 2.0 are ineligible to participate in athletics. Therefore, students in the lower-achieving student group may desire to participate in certain extracurricular activities, but not be allowed to by school regulations. However, GPA has no bearing on one’s participation in on-campus clubs or off-campus athletic activities, which the researcher included within the category of
extracurricular activities for the purpose of this study. It may be, then, that African American students perceive only certain activities open to them for participation: football, basketball, and baseball were the most frequently cited extracurricular activities in which the students in this study reported participating. Students who do not meet the prerequisite GPA for participation in these activities may struggle to find meaningful social connections to Suburbia High School which increases student disengagement and perpetuates poor achievement. Furthermore, as research has demonstrated, participation in structured extracurricular activities supports the acquisition of noncognitive behaviors which enhance a students’ ability to be successful within the structured classroom setting (Broh, 2002). A lack of participation in such activities may be exacerbating the poor achievement of this student group by limiting exposure to opportunities to learn socially-accepted norms of behavior.

Participation in extracurricular activities and clubs increases student engagement in school (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010), thereby increasing academic performance. Yet, research shows that additional factors which support student engagement include relationships between students and staff members, quality and rigor of the curriculum, and instructional practices of the educators (Slavin & Madden, 2006; Thompson, 2007). In regard to these factors, the majority of staff participants were silent. Out of 98 response statements regarding factors contributing to the decrease in African American API scores, only eight mentioned staff-student relationship or classroom curriculum (see Table 3). Staff participants addressing these areas of concern stated that “students are
taught very little about their own heritage on campus or in the history, government, or economics classes” and that “the black history month that is allowed on campus is only recognized or taken seriously by very few teachers.” Three staff members commented that the curriculum offered to students was not engaging, relevant, or culturally-inclusive. They also reported that staff at Suburbia High are “unable to relate to the needs or experiences that Black students have,” “don’t do a good job of including African American students in the Suburbia High family,” and are mostly white, and therefore unable to “connect with the culture” of the school’s African American students.

However, data collected from the student participants in the study did not include negative criticisms of teachers or classes, in general. General consensus of the student participants was that the teachers at Suburbia High School were well-liked and effective. Zero students in the low-achieving group or moderately-achieving groups had criticisms of their current teachers, and only one student in the high achieving group had complaints. This student criticized some teachers for not giving timely feedback on assignments, not having grades updated frequently enough, and for not being able to adequately control classroom behavior, yet even he stated that he liked “most” of his teachers.

Students were more likely to criticize the relevance of school curriculum than its teachers. While 100% of student participants expressed a belief that school is important for achieving positive life-outcomes, 26% reported that the classes and curriculum taught in school were irrelevant and uninteresting to their personal goals (see Table 12). This
was particularly true among students of the low-achieving student group who referenced in various interview questions a belief that education was important, but that school was a “waste of time” because much of the curriculum taught would never be useful in one’s “real life.”

Student participants also expressed agreement with staff participants in regard to the lack of meaningful staff-student relationship between staff members and African American students on campus. Five staff participants referenced the distinctive lack of African American teachers and administrators on campus as having a negative effect on African American student achievement because these students “do not find their culture represented in the staff or curriculum at school” (see Table 3). Five other staff participants identified the need for positive African American role models to be more present in school and at home to help teach African American students “positive behavior” (see Table 4). Student feedback did not mention a need for positive African American role models or more culturally-inclusive curriculum, but students did report that “teachers and the principal need to try harder to make connections with [African American] kids.” The lack of connection between these students and their administrators was evident in Question 11; 73% of student participants reported not knowing who school administrators were or not being familiar enough with them to provide feedback about their effectiveness or likeability. Similarly, the researcher noted that when asked what factors contributed to their academic success, zero student participants reported any teachers or staff members as having had a positive impact on their educational outcomes.
While students reported general like and appreciation for the effectiveness and helpfulness of their teachers in Question 10, none included them in their responses for factors contributing to their academic success.

These data indicate that African American students at Suburbia High School feel disconnected and disengaged from their school community. Low participation in extracurricular activities and a communicated lack of relationship with school personnel seem to be two areas that may be significantly contributing to the achievement gap of African American students as compared to the achievement of Hispanic/Latino and White students on campus. More research into the habits and perceptions of Hispanic/Latino and White students at Suburbia High School would be helpful in determining any differences in extracurricular participation and meaningful staff-to-student relationships that may exist across racial groups. Yet, based on these data collected from African American students and staff at Suburbia High School, lack of relationship and school involvement appear to be a significant factor contributing to the poor achievement of African American students.

**Student Habits**

Staff participants identified low student motivation as the highest student-influenced factor contributing to the low academic achievement of African American students at Suburbia High School. Some staff members explained that low motivation was interpreted from particular student habits such as not completing homework assignments, poor attendance, poor work habits and study skills, and higher levels of
misbehavior. One staff participant commented, “Parents recognize that the student is having difficulty and should come in for extra help, but the student does not follow through with the commitment.” Another staff participant responded, “The African American population seems to have poor attendance, and when they miss school, they do not often ask for the make-up work.” Several other staff members concluded that lower achievement was the result of “lack of attendance, study skills, and turning in work in a timely manner.” Overall, these student-influenced factors comprised 36.7% of the responses staff provided regarding the low achievement of African American students in school.

Student responses supported some of the predictions of staff participants. For example, there was a significant difference in the amount of hours students from the high-achieving group spent in unstructured, social activities as compared to the students in the low-achieving student group. Students with GPAs between 3.0 and 4.0 reported an average of 15.8 hours spent socializing with friends outside of school hours and during the school week, compared to students with GPAs below a 2.0 who reported an average of 30 hours (see Table 9). Students from the low-achieving group also identified socializing and cell phone use as the primary cause of not reaching their academic potential (see Table 13). During their interviews, low achieving students shared that succumbing to the desire to hang out with their friends or socialize during class instead of choosing to complete school assignments limited their success, as well as not studying as much as they knew they should.
**Lack of Assistive Programs and Support**

Data collected from staff participants indicated that staff at Suburbia High School felt African American students lacked appropriate social skills and educational competencies needed for higher levels of academic achievement in high school. Furthermore, staff conjectured that these low skills, combined with a lack of parent and school support, may be responsible for low student achievement and higher rates of school suspension. Consistent in Questions 4, 5, and 6 of the staff participant survey was the perception that African American students lack prerequisite academic and social skills necessary to be successful in higher-rigor courses and school in general.

Student participants did not indicate inadequacies in their own academic competencies directly, yet did identify that several classes were difficult for them, particularly science. Fifty percent of students in the low-achieving and moderately-achieving student subgroups mentioned difficulty with their science courses. One student commented, “Biology is hard, but maybe that’s because science is new to me. I mean, like, we had some science before, but this is like a whole new level of science!” Another student, in the moderately-achieving subgroup commented, “I don’t like biology because it’s too difficult. The vocabulary doesn’t make sense.” Finally, a third student responded, “I don’t like science at all. It’s not my thing.” This trend did not appear in the high-achieving sub group who did not communicate any difficulties with any classes, other than AVID, for which two students expressed dislike because it prevented them from enrolling in more interesting elective courses and required a lot of “busy work.”
Other trends that surfaced from student responses about their opinions of their classes and school was that their study habits were not effective and that the higher amount of required reading was an obstacle to success. One student in the moderately-achieving subgroup mentioned a dislike for history because his teacher required him to read the history textbook by himself. The student commented, “It’s hard for me. I’m used to power points and notes being done with us.” Another student responded that the increased amount of reading and writing essays made English and history classes challenging, and three students in the low- and moderately-achieving subgroups mentioned not studying enough and struggling to remember concepts on tests.

Difficulty in reading and studying may be indicative of a lack of competency in these skills, or a lack of desire, as indicated by the overall averages in voluntary reading provided in Table 9. On average, student participants in this study only reported reading 1.8 hours a week voluntarily, several commenting that they had “never been into reading.” However, contrary to the communicated beliefs of many staff participants, who reported feelings that African American students did not care about their academic progress and did not try hard enough to earn high grades and test scores, students in the low-achieving subgroup reported spending more time on homework than students of the high-achieving subgroup by over four hours a week (see Table 9). This difference could be the result of students in the low-achieving group having shorter attention spans, more distractions at home, and less motivation to complete homework assignments efficiently. However it could also be a side-effect of poorer literacy skills, which would increase the
amount of time needed to complete assignments independently. More research into the literacy skills of African American students at Suburbia High School would be assistive in determining what impact this skill is having on the overall academic achievement of this population of students across courses high in academic vocabulary, independent reading, and writing.

In regard to school-implemented intervention programs and support, students reported only two as having had an impact on their academic achievement. When asked what helped them to be more successful in school, four students across all three achievement levels responded “Academic Success” (see Table 13), a lunchtime intervention program implemented at Suburbia High School to provide 15 minutes of intervention for students with missing assignments or course grades below a C. Students reported that while they did not like having to attend Academic Success, they found it useful in informing them of their progress and helping them to “catch up” on missing work. The only other school-implemented intervention support that students reported as having had a positive impact on their academic achievement was teacher-provided tutoring, which was only identified by one moderately-achieving student. Other than these two programs, no students identified any other academic or behavioral supports offered by the school. Students participants did, however, offer feedback in regard to programs or supports they wished Suburbia High School would offer. Two students suggested making class sizes smaller, so students could receive more individual help from teachers during instructional time. One student requested the establishment of a
“homeroom” period to allow time to work on assignments with the support of a classroom teacher, and three students expressed the desire that school would start later, allowing students more time in the mornings to wake up, eat breakfast, and complete more homework.

These data would indicate that Suburbia High School lacks assistive programs needed to sufficiently address the behavioral and academic needs of its African American student population. Zero students provided feedback indicating any existence of behavioral or emotional support programs at Suburbia High School, and only two academic supports were identified by student participants—Academic Success and teacher-offered tutoring. This lack of intervention support may be preventing the academic success of this student subgroup and increasing student misbehavior and suspension rates.

**Summary**

In this chapter, staff and student data collected in this study was interpreted and discussed as related to the five themes contributing to the poor educational outcomes of African American students at Suburbia High School. These themes included low socioeconomic status, lack of parental or family support, misinterpretation of student behaviors by school staff, lack of student engagement and involvement in school culture and community, student habits, and lack of assistive programs and support within the school.
In regard to low socioeconomic status, the researcher found that staff and students at Suburbia High School both believe that the socioeconomic level of a student’s family is influential in the academic success of the student, and that staff perceives its African American student demographic to be exposed to higher rates of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage. Data gathered from this study partially supports this assumption, given that students in the study earning below a 2.0 GPA indicated less frequency of home ownership, higher household occupancy, and less access to entertainment and technology devices within the home as compared to students in the higher-achieving subgroup.

Additionally, the presence of two married biological parents, or a married parent-stepparent combination, in the students’ primary residence was more prevalent among the high-achieving African American students in this study as compared to those in the low-achieving subgroup. Eighty percent of the high achieving students in this study resided primarily in married, dual-parent households, whereas 28% of moderately-achieving and 0% of low-achieving students in the study did the same. Past research shows a correlation between dual-parent households and higher income level (Anderson, 2010; Jenkins, 1989; Lareau, 2001). Therefore, the prevalence of single-parent households among the student participants in the moderately- and low-achieving student groups may also be indicative of higher levels of poverty and less financial resources.

In regard to the lack of parental support as a contributing factor to lower academic achievement, the findings of this study show a relationship between higher-levels of
positive parental support and involvement with higher academic achievement of African American students at Suburbia High School. Sixty percent of students earning above a 3.0 GPA reported parental involvement as a significant contributor to their success. These students identified parental support as encouraging and celebrating student success, attending and supporting students’ participation in activities of student interest, and reassuring students of their ability to achieve anything they desire to achieve. Fifty-seven percent of students earning a GPA between 2.0 and 2.9 reported parent involvement and support as a contributing factor. These students identified parental support as cautionary advisement to not repeat the regretted mistakes that they had as youth and to instead become more successful than they had become, along with providing academic support, such as private tutoring. Only one student from the low-achieving subgroup identified parent support as having had a positive impact on his academic achievement. This student identified parent support as holding him accountable to an identified level of achievement by restricting access to privileges when his grades fell below expectation.

In regard to the misinterpretation of African American student behaviors by school staff, the researcher’s findings demonstrate that African American students can easily identify and describe behaviors associated with acting black, and that these behaviors are often directly juxtaposed to the behavioral and social norms expected of students by school staff at Suburbia High School. Behaviors such as “acting loud,” “ghetto,” and overuse of profanity are in conflict with staff’s desire to create and
maintain an appropriate environment for learning. Additionally, “acting defiant,” “rude,” and complaining about things one does not want to do are accepted behaviors by students within the African American culture, but are in conflict with student behavioral expectations of school staff. This indicates that there is a behavioral disconnect, and likely a cultural-disconnect, between African American students and the predominantly White staff at Suburbia High School. African American students may be influenced or taught to behave in a manner that is accepted and approved by their African American peers and community yet is not understood, supported, or approved by the White-majority of teachers and administrators at school. Further findings show that this disconnect inaccurately contributes to staff members’ perceptions that African American students, on average, do not appreciate the value of education, are low-motivated, and defiant of school regulations and expectations, which directly results in lower teacher expectations and higher rates of suspension of African American students.

In regard to the lack of student engagement and involvement in school culture and community, the researcher found that low-achieving African American students participated in fewer extracurricular activities than those students from the moderately- and high-achieving student groups. Additionally, data demonstrated that students across all achievement levels lacked meaningful relationships with members of the Suburbia High School staff, as zero students reported any staff personnel as having had a significant impact on their academic achievement. The majority of student participants also reported having little to no familiarity with the school’s administrators. These
findings support the small number of staff participants who reported that the staff at Suburbia High School failed to be representative of the enrolled African American student population and did not foster positive connections with this student population to the detriment of African American student achievement.

In regard to student habits, the researcher found agreement between the determination of staff members that African American students demonstrated poorer work and study habits and the feedback provided by student participants in the low-achieving student group. These students admitted their preference to socialize and interact with peers to the detriment of their academic achievement during interviews and had the highest average number of hours spent socializing during the school week of all three achievement-level groups by almost half (see Table 9).

Finally, findings from this study showed that Suburbia High School lacks substantial assistive programs and intervention supports to meet the needs of its African American student population. Student participants only identified two intervention supports provided by the school that assisted them in achieving higher levels of academic success, and zero student participants identified programs or interventions that supported them emotionally or behaviorally. In regard to the two academic interventions that students identified, only 26% of students reported the lunchtime Academic Success program as helpful, and only 6% of students mentioned teacher-provided tutoring as supportive. These data collected from the student participants were corroborated by a small number of staff participants who directly identified Suburbia High School’s lack of
targeted intervention supports for these students as the cause of decreased API scores for Suburbia High’s African American subgroup.
Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this research was to explore the reasons for the decreased academic achievement of African American students at Suburbia High School. It was this researcher’s intent to investigate the following research questions:

1. What are the opinions and perspectives of the staff within the high school as related to the academic achievement of their African American students?
2. Does racial bias or stereotyping occur within the school, and if so, to what extent does it affect the academic achievement of African American students on campus?
3. What opinions and insights can high-, moderate-, and low-performing African American students provide about school staff, policies, curriculum, and programs as they relate to their academic successes and failures?
4. What changes can be made within the school to better address the academic needs of the African American students on campus?

In reviewing the literature, it was important to research and address several key areas affecting student academic achievement: the impact of family structure and socioeconomic status, parental involvement, systemic and teacher bias, disproportionate discipline, student disengagement, and participation in extracurricular activities.
Focusing on these key areas was crucial in evaluating the perceptions and beliefs of staff and students at Suburbia High School regarding the academic achievement of African American students.

The researcher conducted a mixed-methods study, using both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry. Data were collected from staff participants by use of an online survey which contained a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions. After students and their parents gave consent, student participants were interviewed individually according to a 23 open-ended question protocol. This research method provided substantial data regarding the perspectives and opinions of staff and African American students at Suburbia High School.

**Conclusions**

The findings of this study conclude that the decrease in academic achievement by Suburbia High School’s African American student subgroup is most likely caused by a combination of the following factors: a) real or perceived low socioeconomic levels within these students’ families, and b) inadequate academic and behavioral interventions and supports within the school. These two factors contribute to poor educational outcomes by increasing student disengagement, misbehavior, and suspension, and by lowering the expectations that teachers place on the academic efforts of their African American students.
As discussed in Chapter 2, research shows that low socioeconomic levels affect student learning in many ways. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are at risk of higher levels of student disengagement (Matthews et al., 2010; Sefa Dei et al., 1997), participate in fewer extracurricular activities (Fletcher et al., 2003), and may demonstrate poorer student behavior and self-discipline (Gregory et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2011). Some of these effects were determined to be present in the low-achieving student participants in this study. Those student participants with GPAs below a 2.0 participated in fewer extracurricular activities that those students with GPAs of 3.0 or higher. Additionally, the lower-achieving students appeared to have more difficulty with self-discipline as they reported spending significantly more hours during the school week socializing with friends, even to the detriment of their academic achievement.

Furthermore, staff perception of the African American student culture in general included descriptions of poorer student behavior, apathy, lack of engagement, and a seeming indifference to the value of education.

Additional research is needed to more accurately determine the socioeconomic levels of lower-performing African American students at Suburbia High School to determine if the staff’s perception of higher levels of poverty is accurate. However, the perception of staff that African American students are more naturally inclined to lower levels of affluence is still problematic. Research has linked the low socioeconomic status of students to lowered achievement expectations of their teachers. This effect was also evident in the students’ responses in this study. Student opinions of the achievement gap
revealed a student-held belief that the success of White students is automatically assumed, while African American students are automatically assumed to struggle or fail.

Low socioeconomic status also inhibits student success as parents may lack the financial resources to be positively involved in their students’ academic and social lives. Research shows that children raised in impoverished families often are not provided meaningful learning experiences in early childhood. This iniquitous beginning can set the stage for these students to be perpetually behind their same age peers in linguistic, academic, and social development (Arnold & Doctoroff, 2003; Tomul & Savasci, 2012). That a significant percentage of staff members (40.9%) felt their African American students were lower-skilled academically or behaviorally as compared to their peers was also evident in this study in staff responses concerning the disproportionate number of suspensions assigned to African American students.

These results led to the researcher’s second conclusion that the negative educational outcomes of African American students at Suburbia High School are also the result of the school’s lack of assistive intervention programs and supports for this student population. Evidence of this is seen in the high proportion of African American students receiving suspensions at Suburbia High School combined with data collected from staff participants regarding the definition of defiance. Student data also demonstrated an absence of assistive intervention programs and supports, as only 26% of students identified Academic Success as a positive academic support and only one student mentioned teacher-provided tutoring. The fact that students did not provide feedback
regarding any other academic or behavioral support programs is evidence that either such programs do not exist, or such programs may exist but are not being utilized by this population of students.

Regarding staff definitions of *defiance*, it was evident in data collected that staff members at Suburbia High School do not agree on which behaviors demonstrate *defiance*. This lack of agreement would indicate inconsistency in the assignment of discipline referrals for defiance. Furthermore, given the behaviors that student participants identified as being culturally significant and accepted as part of “acting Black,” it is likely that African American students’ behaviors earn them significantly more discipline referrals than other racial groups at Suburbia High School. This exclusionary discipline practice could be exacerbating already identified problems concerning the low-skills and abilities of low-achieving African American students and their disengagement from school (Finn, 1989; Kinsler, 2011). As students are removed from the classroom for a wide and inconsistent interpretation of defiant behaviors by classroom teachers, they are missing valuable instruction which only perpetuates their underachievement. This, in turn, leads to more misbehavior as students become more disengaged upon reentering the classroom setting being even more behind academically (Horner et al., 2010; Lipsey & Derzon, 1998). However, more research is needed to determine the type of behaviors for which African American students receive discipline referrals the most frequently.
Additionally, while staff participants identified a significant need to address the low skills and inappropriate behavior of African American students, it appears that no school-wide program exists to address this need. Students identified that Academic Success was helpful in informing them of their academic progress, but not that it provided meaningful intervention or instruction. Furthermore, the Academic Success program in place at Suburbia High School is intended only to provide academic support, not behavior support, which appears to be a greater need for this subgroup. This would be even more crucial if additional research confirmed that the low-achieving African American students at Suburbia High School are, in fact, suffering significantly lower levels of socioeconomic status than that of their higher achieving peers. Providing explicit instruction regarding appropriate behavior and social and emotional learning supports, combined with more structured academic interventions, appears to be the most beneficial action Suburbia High School can take to promote more student achievement among its African American student subgroup.

Finally, a third conclusion of the researcher is that colorblind racism and teacher bias is evident at Suburbia High School. The school’s disciplinary practice of treating all students equally regardless of color or race does create inequitable outcomes for its African American student populations and low-socioeconomic subgroup. These students also appear to suffer lower teacher expectations of behavior and academic achievement. This is due in large part to the preponderance of staff’s assumption that African American students lack suitable parental support, all originate from lower-socioeconomic families,
and have poorer academic skills and motivation that that of their Hispanic/Latino and White peers. This perception by some staff that African American students do not care about school, do not have adequately functioning parents, and do not respect or wish to be involved in their school community is not entirely correct, based on the findings of this research. Instead, these students demonstrated a high value for education, a desire to do well, and most indicated involved parents who also value education. Where students felt disconnected and unmotivated was in regard to the engagement and relevancy of the school curriculum and the lack of staff-to-student relationship.

**Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommends that Suburbia High School’s administrative leadership and teachers consider the following actions to improve the student performance of its African American student subgroup:

1. **Work with staff to develop a singular definition of defiance.**

   It is clear from the varied and expansive responses by staff to Question 6 that staff members have widely differing definitions of student defiance. Working with staff members to develop one cohesive definition would improve student discipline practices at Suburbia High by ensuring that students are receiving referrals for defiance uniformly by all staff members. Furthermore, this uniformity would more effectively communicate, and more consistently reinforce, the behavioral expectations of the school to all students.
2. **Implement a school-wide positive behavioral interventions and supports program.**

Evident by the perception of staff that African American students, whether a result of low socioeconomic status or lack of parental guidance, do not demonstrate appropriate behavioral norms for the school setting, Suburbia High School would benefit from the implementation of a school-wide behavioral interventions and supports program, such as Restorative Justice or Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports (PBIS). Programs such as these aim to establish learning environments that are less reactive and exclusionary and more responsive, preventative, and engaging (Gregory et al., 2010; Hopkins, 2002; Horner et al., 2010; Kinsler, 2011; PBIS, 2014). These programs would also support staff members at Suburbia High School by providing best-practice strategies and techniques for improving student engagement, preventing unwanted behaviors before they occur, and explicitly teaching behavioral expectations to all students to improve school culture.

3. **Continue to provide and evaluate the Academic Success intervention.**

Since 26% of the student participants in this study identified Academic Success as a helpful academic intervention program, the researcher recommends that school leaders continue its implementation. However, that only 26% of student participants identified it as useful indicates that more evaluation of the intervention program is needed to make it more effective for more learners. The
researcher recommends that more research be gathered by school leaders to determine how Academic Success quantitatively affects the academic achievement of its African American student population, and to further adapt the program for greater success.

4. **Provide staff development that focuses on the needs of African American students and addresses staff perceptions of African American students and families.**

Few staff participants identified a need for staff to be more culturally-inclusive of African American students in activities, curriculum, and personal interactions. That the majority of staff members feel that poor academic achievement on behalf of African American students is due to family- and student-influenced factors is concerning. This may suggest that staff members feel incapable of overcoming the obstacles that African American students arrive to school facing. This apathy may result in lower expectations of African American students by their teachers and a lack of outreach to African American students by staff. Therefore, the researcher recommends that school leadership implement several professional development sessions aimed at addressing these preconceived stereotypes of African American students and work with staff to develop an action plan for improving the inclusion of African American students into Suburbia High School’s culture and community.
In addition to the abovementioned actions, the researcher also recommends that additional research be conducted in the following areas to better understand the cause of low student achievement among African American students in California high schools: a) the differences in levels of poverty and socioeconomic status among different racial groups and how they correspond to student achievement, and b) the effects that Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports programs have on African American students and students from low-socioeconomic families.
To: SBS Staff
From: Stacey Falconer-Medlin
Subject: School-wide Survey of Academic Performance of African American Students
Date: November 3, 2013

Dear Suburbia High School Staff,

Here is the link to the survey that was mentioned at today's staff meeting:
https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/DRHR9DJ

This survey is very short. It is comprised of seven questions designed to solicit your valuable input and opinions regarding the academic progress of Suburbia High's African American students. Anyone working with students in any capacity at SHS is invited to complete this survey.

Thank you very much for participating in this survey. The goal is to receive at least 40 surveys back by the close of next Friday. Please remember, as indicated during the staff meeting, your responses will be kept entirely confidential and will be destroyed within 30 days of completion of this research study; please feel free to be candid and forthright with your responses without fear of causing offense with your wording.

Thank you for your participation!

Sincerely,
Stacey Falconer
Student Agreement to Participate in Research

Stacey Falconer at Sacramento State University is asking you to participate in a research project on how well your particular school is doing at meeting your needs as a student. She will interview you and ask you 22 questions about what you like and dislike about your school, whether you think discipline practices by teachers and administrators are fair, how well your teachers support and help you, and how you spend your time before and after the school day ends.

Your opinions will be kept entirely confidential, and nobody at your school will ever know how you answered each question. All of your answers will be reported without your real name, and any information collected about you will be destroyed within three months of the end of the study.

Your parents have already been asked whether it is okay with them for you to participate in this research project, but the final choice is yours. If you decide not to participate, now or in the future, it is completely okay.

Please write your name and today’s date on the line below if you are willing to be in the research study.

_________________________________________________  __________________
Student’s Name   (Printed)                   Date
Parent/Guardian Agreement to Participate in Research

Stacey Falconer at Sacramento State University is asking for your consent to allow your son/daughter to participate in a research project about whether our public high schools are meeting the needs their diverse student populations.

Your child, if selected to participate, will be asked 22 questions regarding their opinions and perceptions of the school they attend, the attentiveness and quality of the teachers they have been assigned to, the consistency and fairness of discipline practices at their school, and how they spend their personal time out of the classroom before and after the school day. These questions will be asked through a 10-15 minute interview to be conducted on school grounds during the regular school day.

The purpose of these questions is to gather research about how students of diverse cultural backgrounds and social groups perceive the effectiveness of their learning environment and the importance of public education. At no time will your child’s responses be shared with any staff within his/her school or school district. Your child’s confidentiality and rights to privacy will be maintained by the use of a pseudonym in published researcher, instead of your child’s given name, and by destroying all written transcripts of your child’s interview within three months of completion of this study.

By signing below you agree to allow your child to participate in this research, confirm that you are the student’s legal guardian, and acknowledge that you, or your child, may withdraw consent to participate in this study at any time without consequence.

_______________________________
Child’s Name (printed)

_______________________________
Parent/Guardian’s Name (printed)

_______________________________   __________________
Parent/Guardian’s Signature                         Date
APPENDIX C

Staff Survey Questionnaire

You are being asked to participate in a research project, to be conducted by Stacey Falconer of Sacramento State University, about possible factors that may contribute to the academic performance of African American/black students in California high schools.

If you choose to participate in this research project, you will be asked to complete an anonymous 10-question survey about your opinions and observations regarding the classroom behavior, attendance, homework habits, test scores, parent communication, discipline, and attitudes of African American/black students that you've worked with in your teaching/administrative career.

This research project is completely safe and poses no risk to you. Your confidentiality and rights to privacy will be maintained by keeping all completed surveys anonymous and by destroying all collected data within three months of completion of this project.

If you have questions regarding this research, you may contact Stacey Falconer at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by email at *****@vacavilleusd.org.

You may decline to be a participant in this study at any time without consequence. By completing and submitting the following survey, you indicate that you have read this page and agree to participate in this research.

Thank you!
Q1. What is your age?

- □ 18-25
- □ 26-35
- □ 36-45
- □ 46-55
- □ 56-65
- □ 65 or older

Q2. How many years of full-time teaching will you have completed by the end of the current academic school year in progress?

- □ 0 – I am not now, nor have I ever been, a teacher.
- □ 1
- □ 2
- □ 3
- □ 4
- □ 5
- □ 6-10
- □ 11-15
- □ 16-20
- □ 21-25
- □ More than 25

Q3. What is your current position? (Please select up to 2 positions that most accurately reflect the majority of your current assignment.)

- □ Administrator
- □ Teacher (English, History/Social Studies, Mathematics, Physical Education, Science)
- □ Teacher (Special Education)
- □ Teacher (Elective courses)
- □ Counselor
- □ Psychologist
- □ Paraprofessional
- □ Campus Supervisor
- □ Custodian
- □ Office Support Staff/Clerical
- □ Other: _________________________

Background Information for Question 4:

White/Caucasian: +30 points
Hispanic/Latino: +53 points
Black/African American: -43 points

SHS’s Black/African American subgroup is the only one of the three major subgroups to be losing API points annually, with a Spring 2013 API score of 617, as compared to the SHS’s White/Caucasian subgroup and Hispanic/Latino subgroup, which scored a 768 and 710 on the API, respectively.
Q4. In your own opinion, to what would you attribute the negative growth of Suburbia High School’s African American subgroup’s API scores from 2010-2013?

Background Information for Questions 5, 6, and 7:

According to the California Department of Education, in 2012-2013, the student population at WCW was...

- 48% White/Non-Hispanic students
- 29% Hispanic/Latino students
- 11% African American/Black students
- 12% Other

In the same year, a total of 317 in-school and out-of-school suspensions were assigned. Below, examine the percentages of those suspensions assigned to each subgroup:

- 36% White/Non-Hispanic students
- 29% Hispanic/Latino students
- 29% African American/Black students
- 6% Other

African American/Black students comprised just over a tenth of WCW's student population, but accounted for almost a third of the total annual suspensions.

Examining only suspensions assigned for "defiance", the breakdown by ethnic subgroup is:

- 33% White/Non-Hispanic students
- 29% Hispanic/Latino students
- 32% African American/Black students
- 6% Other

Q5. In your opinion, what might account for the almost equal number of suspensions of African American students as compared to White and Hispanic/Latino students, given that the African American student population at SHS is significantly lower than that of the two other subgroups?

Q6. How would you define “defiance” as it applies to school discipline?
Q7. Do you feel that suspension (in-school or out-of-school) is an effective and appropriate consequence for truancy and tardiness? Please explain.
APPENDIX D

Student Interview Protocol

1. Who do you live with?
2. How many people live in your house?
3. How many hours during the school week do you spend reading for fun?
4. How many hours during the school week do you spend doing homework?
5. How many hours during the school week do you spend socializing with friends outside of the school day?
6. How many hours during the school week do you spend engaging in entertainment media?
7. How many televisions, computers, and cell phones do you have in your house?
8. How many extracurricular activities do you participate in and what are they?
9. How do you feel about school?
10. How do you feel about your teachers at Suburbia High School?
11. How do you feel about the administrators at Suburbia High School?
12. How do you feel about your classmates at Suburbia High School?
13. How do you feel about the classes that you’re taking at Suburbia High School?
14. Do you think school is important?
15. What helps you to be successful in school?
16. Has anything prevented you from being as successful as you would like to be in school?
17. Do you feel that the staff at Suburbia High School treats all students, fairly and equally, regardless of race?
18. Do you think that the school’s rules and consequences are fair and assigned to students equally, regardless of race?
19. Have you ever heard the phrase “acting white”? If so, what does that phrase mean to you?
20. Have you ever heard the phrase “acting black”? If so, what does that phrase mean to you?
21. Have you ever been influenced or pressured by peers of the same race to behave or act a certain way?
22. What do you think may be causing the difference in the overall API scores of Suburbia High School’s African American students compared to the state average and other racial subgroups?
REFERENCES


