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Mentoring Urban African American Male Students in Secondary School

David Jacoby Collins
DePaul University

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Mentoring Urban African American Male Students in Secondary School

A Capstone in Education
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David J. Collins

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of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
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I approve the capstone of David J. Collins

Thomas F. Noel, Jr. signature

Thomas F. Noel, Jr. PhD
Assistant Professor
DePaul University
Chair of Committee

<u>Date</u> May 1st, 2022

Certification of Authorship

I certify that I am the sole author of this capstone. Any assistance received in the preparation of this capstone has been acknowledged and disclosed within it. Any sources utilized, including the use of data, ideas, and words, those quoted directly or paraphrased, have been cited. I certify that I have prepared this capstone according to program guidelines as directed.

Author Signature _Daniel J. Collins_ Date _4/12/2022_

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Executive Summary

Purpose of the Study

The rationale for this narrative inquiry study is that the results are a resource for educational leaders who desire to design and implement subsequent school-based mentorship interventions for African American male students nationwide. The background for this narrative inquiry study came from the data that shows that African American male students are a low performing group of students in the United States school system, compared to other groups. Also, my personal experiences as an African American male who was educated in the United States school system and who subsequently became an educator in that system, have left me with a desire to find more effective ways to help that group gain academic success. This narrative inquiry study is a useful resource in improving the academic performance of an underserved group of students nationwide.

Institutional Context

This narrative inquiry study took place in a large Midwestern school district in the U.S. The school was a large high school in a township district comprised of approximately 4,000 students. The population was approximately 50% Hispanic, 25% White, 21% African American, and 4% other. Approximately 46% of students in the school were labeled as chronically truant (missing at least 5% of school days without a valid excuse). The school staff was 87% White, approximately 5.5% Hispanic, and less than 5% African American. The school administration was actively endeavoring to implement interventions that would help their African American male student population (their lowest performing group of students) increase their identification with academics. This narrative inquiry study attempted to help the school district achieve its endeavors.

Research Questions

This narrative inquiry study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants identify with academics?
2. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants perceive whether they matter to the school which they attend?
3. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants perform academically?

Significance

School-based mentoring is a popular subject of study in the field of education. Although there is much research on the impact of school-based mentoring, the research on how school-based mentoring affects identification with academics, perception of mattering, and academic performance of African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States is limited. This study adds to the literature and offers new insights about how educators can effectively use school-based mentoring to contribute to efforts

to increase identification with academics, increase perception of mattering, and increase academic performance of African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States. The results of this study offer educational leaders insight on the lived experiences of African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States and a comprehensive guide on how to use mentoring interventions to serve them.

Important Findings

This narrative inquiry evaluated how a school-based mentorship program called The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention, which serves exclusively African American male students in high school, impacted the participants' identification with academics, perception of mattering to their school, and academic performance. The program was evaluated using a pre-interview and a post-interview of all participants, daily field notes of activities, and weekly journals. The study found that participants who regularly attended daily intervention sessions for ten weeks increased their identification with academics (value of school). The study also found that participants who regularly attended daily intervention sessions for ten weeks perceived they mattered more to their school. Finally, the study found that participants who regularly attended daily intervention sessions for ten weeks improved their overall academic performance. The study also found that students who did not fully apply the lessons of the intervention did not improve their academic performance as significantly as those who did apply the lessons. Ezra, a senior, said, "I'm so glad to be in the Chamber of Scholars. This is the whole reason I come to school. I'm getting my grades up, working on procrastinating, and really trying to be better."

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Background

Introduction

Within this narrative inquiry study, I wove rich narratives from my life, and those of the research participants throughout the document. The Review of Literature section featured key literature and personal narratives from my own life and experiences that related to the literature. The Application section feature narratives from the research participants and their reactions to The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. I chose to write it like this because educational practices and the lives of students are inseparably interwoven together. As educators improve themselves, they will also improve their students. If educators neglect to grow, then the growth their students will be compromised. If students lack adequate support, suffer prejudice, or are left unheard, then the field of education lacks the integrity it needs to fulfill its purpose. Both the growth of the field of education and the growth of individual students engages and impact each other; therefore, this narrative inquiry study intertwined the two in this work from the heart of a passionate educator.

Researcher Positionality[1]

I am an African American male educator. I was raised by a single mother whose highest educational attainment was a high school diploma. Our household income was always below the poverty line. The neighborhood in which I lived was impoverished and crime infested. Many of my peers, including my cousin, Carl, turned away from school and toward gang activity. The high school I attended was populated by mostly Hispanic and African American students. The teaching staff was populated with mostly White teachers. As a student, I always wanted African American mentors in school, but they were very few. As an educator, I strive to be a mentor for the African American student population, especially the boys. My aim is to give African American male students hope for a prosperous future and guidance to success. My personal experiences and educational philosophy drive my desire to perform this research to serve an underserved population of people: African American male students in secondary school.

My personal experiences as an African American male student in secondary school are inescapable. I experienced being tracked into classes that were well below my ability. I experienced seeing my fellow African American male classmates drop out, get kicked out, or just get left out of academic opportunities. I remember craving academic guidance from teachers who looked like me and understood my background. I was fortunate enough to be noticed by Mr. Brown, who took special interest in my academic and personal development, but so many of my peers were not. I watched Calvin, my childhood friend, repeat seventh grade two times before dropping out of school. I often saw him hanging out on the streets looking more and more like a vagabond. I watched KJ, one of the most charismatic young men I have ever met, sit in school daily while being ignored by our teachers before he used his natural talents to start a local gang and drug business. His potential could have been and should have been recognized and refined in school. What a waste. I also watched my cousin, Carl, receive more praise from KJ than he did from our teachers and administrators. He was recruited into KJ's gang before he officially entered the 9th grade.

Carl's gang activities quickly earned him dismissal from his mom's (my aunt's) nurturing home to the much less stable and loosely regulated apartment of his hands-off father. Within a year of leaving his mom's home, Carl was in the emergency room after an attempted gang assassination on him. He was 17. Carl took his near-death experience as a warning and returned home with a mindset to succeed. He left the street life behind

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[1] To protect the identities of the individuals referenced within this section, all names have been replaced with pseudonyms, and other identifiable details have been altered.

and focused intently on his grades. He earned a 4.25 GPA on a 4.0 scale his senior year, which boosted his cumulative GPA to 1.89. He was required to take a single class during the summer to earn enough credits to earn the minimum 2.0 cumulative GPA required to graduate. To his mom's strong protest, my cousin was not allowed to participate in the graduation ceremony. When my aunt explained to administration how much maturity Carl gained within the last year, they continually cited their rule which required a 2.0 cumulative GPA to graduate. One administrator coldly said to my aunt, "Your boy waited too long to get serious. He should have thought about graduation freshman through junior year."

That was the moment I decided to become an educator. I thought my cousin's story was a success story. He was on his way to becoming a juvenile delinquent, but he turned it completely around. The school should have praised such a dramatic transformation. Instead, they brought up his past and used it against him. They callously took away his rite of passage regardless of his newfound maturity. My cousin's experience, along with my tracking experience was the inception of my realization that African American male students are not valued in the American public school system. I have since used every moment of my life as an educator to combat such a terrible system and help this vulnerable population.

Significance

The problem of practice this narrative inquiry study addressed is the national need for targeted interventions to help African American male students improve their academic performance. This need is based on information compiled from the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics which shows that African American male students have higher than average dropout rates, out of school suspension rates, truancy rates, and lower test scores in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Practice (Maynard et al., 2017; NCES, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2019.) Such a problem reveals that African American male students are underserved by their schools. This narrative inquiry study sought to understand the effectiveness of a targeted mentoring intervention on the academic performance of African American male students. Mentoring is a solution worth examining because it has been proven to help students improve academically, increase identification with academics, decrease truancy, develop post-high school aspirations, and feel as if they matter in school (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Biggs, Musewe, & Harvey, 2014; Ellis et al., 2018; Hanlon et al., 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013; Tolbert & Maxson, 2015; Wyatt, 2009).

"You will NOT stifle my Black son!" My righteously indignant mother slammed her hand on the boardroom table creating a booming shrieking sound that sent shudders down the spines of the school counselor, the two administrators, and the second-year teacher (the person toward whom the livid exclamation was aimed) who were all sitting in the meeting. At that faithful moment, my teacher, who was overcome with a mixture of shame, fear, regret, and uncontrollable tears, ran out of the room, and never returned. The meeting concluded with my counselor transferring me from the vocational track to the coveted honors college track. I was 14 years old.

How this meeting happened: School had only been in session for about two weeks when my mother realized that her Black son was in danger of becoming a statistic at the hands of the United States school system. Her veteran antennas activated when I came home and told her that I realized that I should join the United States military after high school. My mother thought this was odd because I had already decided to become a Supreme Court Justice. I talked about becoming a judge constantly. She questioned my sudden change of mind, "David, I thought you wanted to be a judge on the Supreme Court. What happened?"

"Oh, my teacher told me that it would be too expensive for me to go to college and law school. She said most people can't get scholarships and the Supreme Court is almost impossible to be on. The military would at least help me pay for college, and maybe I could be an attorney after that." I told her what my teacher said with the innocence of any freshman from an impoverished community.

Her eyes squinted, mouth quivered, voice lowered. "What else has this lady told you?" That conversation happened on Tuesday. My mother, counselor, administrators, and teacher were in a meeting on Wednesday.

According to data compiled by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the dropout rate of African American male students is 6.8%, which is 1.7% higher than the national average (all students) of 5.1% (NCES, 2020). The out-of-school suspension rate of African American male students is 17.6% – higher than the national average in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The truancy rate for African American students is 11.2%, the second highest nationwide (second to Hispanic students -- Maynard et al., 2017). African American students consistently attain the lowest composite scores on the National Assessment of Educational Practice (NAEP) – a U.S. Department of Education national assessment – in math and reading in both 8th and 12th grades compared to their counterparts of other racial/ethnic backgrounds in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2019a,b,c,d). These national standardized testing data are cited in this study because standardized testing is a major assessment tool in United States public education. This information is not cited to indicate that standardized testing is the only measure of academic success but is meant to further demonstrate the academic disparities between African American students and students of other ethnic backgrounds. These facts expose a sinister reality about the United States school system: it underserves African American students, especially African American male students.

Given such underservice of African American students, particularly African American male students, by the U.S. school system, it is a notable achievement when an African American male student successfully completes secondary school with a strong academic record, a positive self-image, and an optimistic outlook on life. Such an achievement, which should be a simple rite of passage for all students, is considerably more impressive for urban African American male students due to the unparalleled sociological obstacles that they regularly face in school. Given the data on African American students, it is apparent that African American male students are more deeply impacted by the oppressive ecological conditions of the U.S. public school system. It is the duty of educational leaders who serve African American students to understand this nationwide problem and execute the necessary measures to eradicate it.

In order to eradicate the systematic miseducation of African American students in the United States school system, educational leaders who serve African American students must become attuned to the educational challenges facing urban African American adolescent males, a student group that has traditionally struggled to perform academically at similar levels to other student groups in the United States (Gordon et al., 2009; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010; Wittrup et al., 2019). Mentoring is an appropriate intervention to help urban African American male students identify with academics and improve academically. Academic improvement can be indicated by the following: increase in GPA; increase in attendance rate; increase in graduation rate; decrease in disciplinary infractions. Mentoring can be a powerful instrument in helping urban African American male students increase their academic performance, and therefore, should be implemented by educational leaders who serve African American male students nationwide (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Biggs, Musewe, & Harvey, 2014; Ellis et al., 2018; Hanlon et al., 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013; Tolbert & Maxson, 2015; Wyatt, 2009).

Mr. Brown came into my life at the right time. By the age of 15 I needed someone other than my mother to help me navigate life as an African American male. Mr. Brown, who was 30 when we met, helped me understand and accept my identity as a young Black male. He gave me advice about high school, college, girls, manhood, discipline, business, gang activity, police etiquette, family, marriage, leadership, faith and so much more. Most of all, he taught me about the importance of character, and how your character determines the outcome of your life. He stepped into my life as a male role model because I didn't have any before him. He identified and filled the void my absentee father left when he abandoned his paternal responsibilities when I was the tender age of two years old. Mr. Brown, my high school role model and current friend, saved my life.

Mentoring can be a powerful solution to help urban African American male students better identify with academics. Urban African American male students in the United States school system have historically exhibited a lack of identification with academics, which is the extent to which a student values academics (Gordon et al., 2009; Osborne, 1999; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010; Wittrup et al., 2019). Research shows that lack of identification with academics is directly related to poor academic outcomes such as lower grades, truancy, disciplinary infractions, and higher dropout rates (Gordon et al., 2009; Osborne, 1999; Osborne, 2004; Wittrup et al., 2019). Researchers have attributed African American male students' lack of identification with academics to multiple factors including their immersion in the Eurocentric middle-class culture of the United States school system which inhibits their learning experiences due to cultural discontinuity (Tucker et al., 2010). Also, research implies that African American male students experience discrimination in schools including stereotyping and lack of positive male role models which contribute to their academic difficulty (Holcomb- McCoy, 2011). School-based mentoring is an adequate intervention which addresses these problematic circumstances to potentially improve the academic performance of African American male students (Gordon et al., 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Osborne, 1999; Osborne, 2004; Tucker et al., 2010; Wittrup et al., 2019).

My school counselor was no help. Neither of my parents had been to college, and besides the local junior college, I had never been on a college campus. In fact, the only university I had ever seen was on the movie Drumline. At seventeen years old, all I knew was that I didn't want to be poor anymore and that college could help with that. People always talked about how doctors made lots of money, so I figured I become an anesthesiologist (the only thing I knew about it was that the starting salary was above $150,000). When I told Mr. Brown that I was going to college to become an anesthesiologist, he asked me one question, "When's the campus visit?" My eyes glossed over in dumbfounded confusion. It had never crossed my mind to visit a campus. I shrugged my shoulders and asked how to do it.

The following weekend, Mr. Brown and I were at a university with a renowned medical program. I toured the entire campus! I met practicing doctors who were professors, medical students, and even saw the dormitories. This campus had everything I could have imagined! It was perfect… but not for me. Mr. Brown noticed my lackluster reaction to the campus tour and asked about my feelings regarding the university. I told him that I saw sick individuals in some of the hospital rooms, and I felt deep sorrow. I saw a family who had just lost a father/grandfather. I told Mr. Brown that I could not work in such an environment and that my life plans were ruined. I was set to graduate in less than a month, and my plans to become a doctor came crashing down in a single day. My mentor, in his fatherly voice asked another question, "David, what do you love to do so much that you'll do it for free?"

I looked at him in the eye and said, "I'd love to do for other young men what you've done for me."

Key Terms

Mentor, Mentorship, School-based Mentoring. Educational leaders, specifically principals, can support the academic growth of their African American male population by implementing school-based mentoring programs. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), a mentor (n.d.) is

A person who acts as guide and adviser to another person, [especially] one who is younger and less experienced; a person who offers support and guidance to another; an experienced and trusted counsellor or friend; a patron, a sponsor, a trainer.

Mentorship (n.d.), according to OED, is "advice and guidance provided by a mentor." According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (MWD), mentor (n.d.) is defined as, "a trusted counselor or guide; tutor, coach." Furthermore, MWD defines mentorship (n.d.) as "the influence, guidance, or direction given by a mentor."

Additionally, The National Mentoring Resource Center (NMRC), a division of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, defines school-based mentoring as a flexible relationship-based interaction between school personnel or volunteers and students which emphasizes facilitating academic gains, improving school connectedness, increasing attendance rates, personal growth, artistic expression, future planning and goal setting, and social-emotional development (School-Based Mentoring, n.d.). The NMRC holds school-based mentoring as a cost-efficient way to increase positive relationships in students' lives while improving their school experiences from academic performance to social-emotional growth. Correspondingly, The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) defines school-based mentoring as pairing students with positive role models to help students develop self-confidence and resilience, build character, or raise aspirations ("Mentoring," 2011). The EEF encourages school-based mentoring sessions to happen at least one hour a week in school over a sustained period of time during the school year. Both the NMRC and the EEF hold that mentoring programs have an academic component but should also help students grow and develop beyond academics in areas of personal growth and social development.

Based on the definitions provided by the OED, the MWD, the NMRC, and the EEF, within this study, a mentor was defined as a trusted and influential person who guides, advises, supports, and trains another both academically and socially. Accordingly, within study, mentorship was defined as the act of a mentor providing guidance, advice, support, and training to another both academically and socially. Also, school-based mentorship was defined as the act of an encouraging, constructive, supportive school employee or adult volunteer who interacts with students to help them improve academically as well as grow socially and develop emotionally via personal relationship building. Practically, a school-based mentor is more than what a dictionary can define. A mentor is a supportive guide, a caring influence, a reason to succeed. A mentor is a person who identifies the needs of students and strives to meet them so students can be successful in school. To an urban African American male student, a mentor can be an African American male adult who shares their background, praises their culture, and supports their personal and academic growth and development while acting as an ally for them within a school system that is not designed to serve them.

Identification with Academics. Since the United States school system is not designed to serve urban African American male students, many of them struggle to identify with academics. A major goal of this narrative inquiry study is to help those students better identify with academics. Doing so requires an adequate definition of identification with academics. Within this review of the literature, Osborne's (1999) definition of identification with academics was used. He defines identification with academics as the extent to which a student personally values and strives toward academic excellence.

Urban African American Male. In order for school principals to understand how to support the academic growth of their urban African American male students, they must fully understand the identity of an urban African American male. An exhaustive examination of the OED reveals the word urban (n.d.) to have several meanings including urban blight. The OED defines urban blight (n.d.) as "the development or existence of derelict or unsightly areas in a town or city." Another related term found in the OED is urban contemporary (n.d.) which is defined as, black [African American] cultural trends "frequently reflecting inner-city social themes and attitudes." Based on the definitions provided by the OED, within study, urban was defined as relating to African American cultural themes and attitudes within a generally low-income town or city context.

Additionally, the OED defines African American (n.d.) as, "An American (esp. a North American) of African origin; a black American." The OED states that African American is the preferred term among African Americans since the 1960s. Another term for African American is Black American. The OED defines black (n.d.) as, "Designating a member of any dark-skinned group of peoples, esp. a person of sub-Saharan African origin or descent." Based on the definitions provided by the OED, within study, African American was defined as a United States American person who has easily observable African origins and a combination of specific characteristics such as dark skin, coarse hair, other African physical features, resides in a generally low-income town or city, and demonstrates Black cultural trends reflecting inner-city social themes and attitudes.

Overall, within this study, an urban African American male was defined as a male United States American who has easily observable African characteristics such as dark skin and coarse hair, demonstrates Black cultural trends and attitudes, and resides in a generally low-income town or city. This includes students who have at least one parent who identifies as an African American. This definition is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. Frankly, there is no way to adequately define an entire group of people. African American males are not a homogenous group of people. This definition is designed to simply give a small glimpse of insight into the characteristics of urban African American male students that are discussed in this study.

Academic Success/Poor Academic Performance. When urban African American male students increase their identification with academics, they increase their academic success. A major intention for school- based mentorship is its potential to increase academic success. Although academic success can be measured in multiple ways, in for the purpose of this study, academic success was defined as improved markings in any of the following academic categories: grade GPA, content specific grades, school attendance rates, grade promotion, disciplinary citations, graduation rates, identification with academics (the extent to which a student values academics). Conversely, poor academic performance, in this study, was defined as low or decreasing markings in any of the following academic categories: GPA, content specific grades, school attendance rates, lack of grade promotion, disciplinary citations, graduation rates, identification with academics. There are other ways to measure academic performance, but the above was used for the purpose of this study. Mentoring urban African American male students can potentially help them identify with academics and increase their academic performance.

Mattering to Others. Like most students, urban African American male students are more likely to strive for academic success when they feel like they matter to school personnel (Freeman, 1999; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010). A key purpose for this narrative inquiry study is to demonstrate the connection between academic success for urban African American male students and school-based mentorship. School-based mentors reveal to students that they matter to them. Students increase their academic efforts when they believe that they matter to someone in their school. Mattering to others, an important concept in mentorship, was defined within this study as the feeling of assurance a person gets when he or she feels important to, special to, noticed by, and supported by others in their social context. Feeling like they matter to someone in school may boost the willingness of urban African American male students to strive for academic success (Freeman, 1999; Maslow, 1968; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010).

Review of Literature

Urban African American Male Students Struggle Academically

"Well class, David was the only one who earned an A… again. What's bothering me though, is that he ain't the only one who can do well in school. We all Black up in here, and we all have the potential to excel. We laid the groundwork for civilization as we know it! We created algebra and astronomy. A is for AWESOME!
And we are some awesome Black people up in here!" Those were the words of my Black History teacher, Mrs. Blackmon, who was my favorite high school teacher. Her class was the only class I took with a Black teacher and all Black classmates. "Remember, y'all got this! A is for AWESOME!"

Richie, my antagonistic classmate who sat right next to me, blurted out, "David's A is for a**hole!" Several students began to laugh at his tasteless comment. I sat quietly, unsure of how to react. You see, this was my senior year, and I had been in all honors classes. For three and a half years my teachers and the majority of my classmates were White. I deferred taking Black History until my final semester as a way to reward myself for completing high school. Sadly, I did not connect as well with my Black peers. I did not understand how doing well in class could merit ridicule. Frankly, Mrs. Blackmon was such a good teacher, I did not understand how so many of my peers could score anything less than an A on any of her assignments. I was in a different world. A Black world within a White one.

"Your grade is J!" Mrs. Blackmon fired back at Richie in front of the entire class. *"You get a J for JEALOUS! David is an honors student trying to learn something about his culture and you're teasing him for taking it seriously?! I thought I taught y'all better than that! If you don't change, Richie, you gon be working for that a**hole!"* Clearly embarrassed, Richie put his head down. Noticing a nearly broken spirit, Mrs. Blackmon lightly touched his shoulder, and in a motherly tone said, *"But I already see that you're a king. You just needed to be reminded. Be friends with David and all your Black brothers and sisters so y'all can work together to be great. We need you to build our future together, Richie."* He smiled and never bothered me again. Richie earned an A by the end of the semester.

Urban African American male students in the United States school system have historically demonstrated a lack of identification with academics (Gordon et al., 2009; Osborne, 1999;). Osborne (1999) defines identification with academics as the extent to which a student personally values and strives toward academic excellence (success). Osborne (1999), in his analysis of why African American male students demonstrate lack of identification with academics, explains that they are discouraged to excel academically due to three main social factors: stereotype threat (fear of failing academically; thus proving negative stereotypes against African Americans), cultural-ecological perspective (viewing school as a system created by an oppressive group), and cool pose (a façade of masculinity that feigns confidence, aloofness, and disregard for academics). Gordon et al. (2009), in their action research report about mentoring African American male students in middle school, documented that lack of identification with academics is directly related to poor academic outcomes such as lower grades, lower standardized test scores, and higher dropout rates. Scholar Signithia Fordham (1985), in her analytical report on how Black secondary students in Washington D.C. cope with the conflict of excelling in school while not "acting White," explains that due to the oppressive ecological conditions in schools with African American students, "Black students experience inordinate ambivalence and affective dissonance around the issue of academic excellence in the school context" (p. 2). The historical lack of identification with academics demonstrated by African American students is neither a cultural nor biological factor; instead, it is a result of historical and current immersion in an educational system that was never designed to serve African American people.

A Historical Account of the Deprivation of Education from African American People

From a historical perspective, the ability to thrive in academics was stolen from African Americans during the era of American slavery. As far back as the 1700s, British colonies (now American states), instituted anti-literacy laws to prevent enslaved Africans from gaining adequate intellectual independence from their masters which would threaten the institution of slavery in the British controlled Americas. For example, the South Carolina Act of 1740 forbade the teaching of reading and writing to slaves, and the employment of slaves in jobs that required reading and writing. Infractions of this act incurred hefty fines (An Act For the Better Order And Governing Negros And Other Slaves in this Province, 1740). The Revised Code of the Laws of Virginia (1819) forbade the assembly of slaves or free African Americans in any context in which reading, and writing would be taught. The penalty for an infraction of this code would be a fine for a White person, and a beating for an African American person. White fear of intellectually independent Africans drove the drafting of these inhumane laws which persisted throughout the era.

Such fears were heightened when presumably literate Africans organized sporadic slave escapes and slave revolts. Decades of deep fear loomed over American slave owners following the successful Haitian revolution of the late 18th Century, and subsequent Caribbean uprisings. Nat Turner's rebellion of 1831 deepened those fears and caused Southern slave owners to tighten their control over slaves, including outlawing literacy. Literate African American preachers and abolitionists used rhetoric to convince people that the institution of slavery was inherently wrong, threatening the very institution itself. In 1829, Georgia passed its anti-literacy law following a season of mysterious fires allegedly caused by literate slaves who were conspiring to burn the town down (Tolley, 2019). By 1831, Virginia created its own anti-literacy law (Acts Passed at a

General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia, 1831), and Alabama followed in 1833, further stealing the right of education from African American people (A Digest of the Laws of the State of Alabama, 1833).

Following emancipation, former slaves thought of literacy as a means to obtain freedom. Literacy was synonymous with educated, and education was necessary to do basic tasks like record a deed or mail a letter. Freed slaves desired to obtain literacy and pass it on to their children to build successful successive generations. Unfortunately, anti-literacy took on a different form following the conclusion of American slavery. That different form came as a result of the Supreme Court landmark decision of Plessy v. Ferguson (1896) which established and legalized the idea of "separate-but-equal."

As a result of the separate-but-equal doctrine, the United States school system became a deeply segregated institution which favored White Americans and scorned African Americans. African American students were denied the same quality of education (facilities, materials, opportunities) as White students. This sad reality, which hindered the educational advancement of African American people was exposed and overturned in 1954 with the Supreme Court landmark decision in Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka (1954) in which Chief Justice Warren wrote,

> Segregation of white and colored children in public schools has a detrimental effect upon the colored children. The impact is greater when it has the sanction of the law, for the policy of separating the races is usually interpreted as denoting the inferiority of the Negro group...Any language in contrary to this finding is rejected. We conclude that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place. Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal.

The Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision exposed the different form of anti-literacy on African Americans. Clearly stated, African American people were no longer legally excluded from learning to read, but they were legally hindered from enjoying ideal conditions for learning to read and becoming educated, self-sufficient, independent citizens. Unfortunately, anti-literacy against African Americans took on another form after Brown v. Board of Education (1954).

Following the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision, schools were legally required to desegregate although many communities did not want to do so ("School Segregation and Integration", n.d.). In 1974, people took advantage of their opportunity to supersede the spirit of the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision with the lesser-known Milliken v. Bradley (1974) decision, which ruled that integration efforts could not cross school district lines (Chang & Mehta, 2020). In short, Milliken v. Bradley (1974) allowed White people to self-segregate by settling in communities with their own school districts. Researcher Rebecca Sibilia found that "predominately white school districts get collectively $23 billion more per year than predominately nonwhite school districts" (Chang & Mehta, 2020, p. 2). Activist Jonathan Kozol calls this (the practice of legally segregating schooling and favoring White schools) apartheid schooling (Kozol, 2006). Unfortunately, these practices of miseducation still plague African American male students currently, feeding their lack of identification with academics, and perpetuating a cycle of poor academic performance.

A Modern Account of the Deprivation of Education from African American People

Further, more modern, research attributes African American male students' lack of identification with academics to the historical miseducation of African American male students in the United States school system (Fordham, 1985; Tucker et al., 2010; Wittrup et al., 2019). In her seminal qualitative analysis of how African American students learn to underachieve academically in the American public school system, Fordham (1985) explains that African American students' "efforts to achieve school success are riddled with conflict and uncertainty" (p. 50). Her analysis implies that African American students are ridiculed by dominant society and by their intragroup society when they excel academically because they are acting White. Fordham (1985) argues that African American students do poorly in school because they experience derision regarding academic effort

and success. She justifies this claim by explaining that White Americans traditionally refused to acknowledge that African Americans were capable of academic achievement, and that African American students began to doubt their own academic ability while attributing success to only White people and discouraging their peers from achieving academically to guard against acting White.

Moreover, not acting White while succeeding in the United States school system can be nuanced and challenging for African American students because the United States school system was designed to promulgate, promote, and preserve White culture. Tucker et al., (2010), in their qualitative study about academically successful urban African American male high school students, posit that immersion in the Eurocentric middle-class culture of the United States school system inhibits the learning experiences of African American male students due to cultural discontinuity. In this context, cultural discontinuity refers to the lack of interconnection between African American culture and White culture in public schools (Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006). According to Tucker et al., (2010), as a result of the cultural discontinuity between African American culture and White culture in public schools, "Administrators and teachers are less likely to view this population [African American males] of students as interested in education, and some hold the belief that many African American male students will likely end up in prison" (p. 136). Their study was designed to find a connection between the academic success of urban African American male high school students and mattering in school.
The research results suggest that urban African American male students are more likely to be successful academically when they feel like they matter to school personnel such as teachers and counselors. Mentors can demonstrate that urban African American male students matter to them and encourage them to strive for academic success. Without mentors, those students may feel unwelcomed and even discriminated against in their school context.

In comparison to the findings of Tucker et al. (2010), Wittrup et al. (2019), in their quantitative study, found that perceived discrimination is correlated with poorer academic performance by African American students. In this study, perceived discrimination is defined as attitudes demonstrated by school personnel that African American students interpret as discriminatory in nature. Also, in this study, the poorer academic performance by African Americans is in comparison to their White counterparts. Wittrup et al. (2019) specify that African American students who perceive racial discrimination in school have lower graduation rates than White students. The study was designed to investigate how natural mentor relationships (NMRs), relationships with a non-parental adult advisor, impact the academic performance of African American students. They surveyed a sample of 663 African American students about their NMRs and tracked their academic performance. The researchers found that African American students with NMRs in schools have potential to perform higher academically than African American students who do not, despite perceptions of racial discrimination.

Additionally, the value of mentors for urban African American male students is further substantiated by Holcomb-McCoy (2011), in her qualitative analysis of why African American students experience academic and social difficulty when transitioning from middle school to high school. She asserts, that the scarcity of African American male teachers in schools deprive students, especially urban African American male students, of academic role models and they often choose athletes to emulate. Without available African American male mentors at the school level, urban African American students may experience negative impact of discriminatory factors in school, including stereotyping, lack of positive role models, cultural schisms, and exploration of ethnic identity. According to Holcomb-McCoy (2011), African American male students are often stereotyped by school personnel as excellent athletes, yet poor academics. She also asserts that teachers and counselors unconsciously influence African American students to become what they expect them to become, even if their expectations are negative. Available mentors can buffer these unconscious influences and help urban African American male students succeed academically.

Overall, achieving academic success in the United States school system can be particularly challenging for African American students, especially for the males (Fordham, 1985; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011). This

population faces historical and current systematic stressors that discourage their academic success. Those stressors include doubt in their academic abilities, cultural discontinuity, feeling as if they do not matter to staff, perceived discrimination, negative stereotype threat, and lack of positive role models (Fordham, 1985; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006; Tucker et al., 2010; Wittrup et al., 2019). Fortunately, mentoring is a solution that addresses each of these issues. When African American students, especially urban African American male students, are exposed to caring mentors in school, their chances of succeeding academically improves (Lovelace & Wheeler, 2006; Tucker et al., 2010; Wittrup et al., 2019).

Mentorship Promotes Academic Success

Mentoring Benefits Students Academically. Researchers overwhelmingly agree that educational leaders should embrace and implement a school-based mentoring program because it can support student academic success (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Biggs, Musewe, & Harvey, 2014; Ellis et al., 2018; Hanlon et al., 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Hurd et al., 2012; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013; Tolbert & Maxson, 2015; Weiler et al., 2019; Wittrup et al., 2019; Wyatt, 2009). For example, in their mixed methods study, Hurd et al. (2012) examined the impact of having a natural mentor (a non-parental adult advisor) on adolescent student academic achievement. The researchers found that "relationships with natural mentors promoted more positive long-term educational attainment among participants" (p. 1196). Students in the study reported feeling more encouraged to view school as an opportunity for personal advancement. Accordingly, Weiler et al. (2019), had similar findings in their mixed-methods study which examined the impacts of attuned mentoring relationships on students (ages 11-18) who demonstrated high risk for delinquency. An attuned mentor is a mentor who is able to perceive the needs of students and appropriately address those needs (Pryce, 2012). The students in the study were referred to a mentoring program called Campus Connections (CC) by restorative justice and diversion programs through the Department of Human Services. Weiler et al. (2019) found that students who had attuned mentors reported a significant increase in perception of school usefulness, and academic self-efficacy, while reporting a decrease in truancy. The results of these studies suggest that mentoring relationships can help students improve academically.

Mentoring Helps African American Students Academically. Mentoring can be particularly beneficial for African American students as they strive to succeed academically. In their quantitative study, Hanlon et al. (2009) examined the effectiveness of an after-school program targeting urban African American youth. The researchers used a mentoring intervention called the Village Model of Care to test the assumption whether an after-school mentoring intervention would produce more favorable academic outcomes for the intervention group in comparison to the control group. The participants of the study came from two similar urban middle schools consisting of mainly African American students. One school received the intervention, and the other did not. The students in the intervention were paired with African American mentors (most of whom where college students or recent college graduates) four days a week and practiced study-skills and discussed various topics including self-control, career planning, and cultural heritage.

Following the implementation of the Village Model of Care intervention, the results revealed academic growth in favor of the intervention group. Hanlon et al. (2009) states, "Grade point average changes from the beginning (first quarter) of the sixth-grade to the end of the school year (fourth quarter) for the intervention versus comparison groups revealed a significant differential effect favoring the intervention group ($p < .001$), with no interaction of intervention condition with either age or gender" (p. 108). The researchers further explain that the highest growth in GPA was achieved by students who attended the majority of the intervention sessions, whereas those who tended to miss sessions regularly only earned minimal GPA growth (Hanlon et al., 2009). The results of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of mentoring programs on the academic performance of African American students.

Another mentoring program, Next Step Up, supports the idea that mentoring programs help African American students succeed academically. Tolbert and Maxon (2015), in their qualitative study, examined the

impact of administering the Next Step Up mentoring intervention on African American high school students in Tuskegee, Alabama. The intervention administrators grouped Tuskegee University mentors with 20 local high school students. The mentors tutored students, did ACT/SAT practice, and discussed social issues. Tolbert and Maxon (2015) found that students who received the Next Step Up mentoring intervention were better prepared to perform academically and pursue post-high school goals such as college or career training in comparison to the students who did not receive the intervention. African American students benefit greatly from in-school mentoring programs.

Since mentoring programs are so valuable to African American students, Holcomb-McCoy (2011), in her qualitative analysis of the transition of African American students from middle school to high school found that African American teens struggle with stereotyping, lack of positive role models, and cultural schisms when transitioning to high school. To remedy this issue, she suggests that schools set up mentoring programs that target African American students. She mentions that mentoring programs have the potential to counteract the effects of racial stereotyping by school personnel, which often influences African American students to perform how they are perceived. Mentoring programs can give positive, academically inclined African American role models to students. Also, the mentoring programs can help students and families work through relevant social issues such as reducing the dropout rate, understanding the college admission process, and enhancing academic self-efficacy. Mentoring programs in schools can be an effective method to help African American students increase academic success (Holcomb-McCoy, 2011).

In combination with the success of mentoring programs helping African American students increase academic success, Wittrup et al. (2019) found that NMRs may promote greater academic engagement among African American students as well. They define an NMR as a relationship between an adolescent mentee and a non-parental adult advisor. In their quantitative study, Wittrup et al. (2019) aimed to examine how NMRs impacted the academic performance of African American students. Six hundred sixty-three students were chosen from urban Midwest middle and high schools to participate in the study. Also, the academic progress of the participants in the study was monitored throughout their school careers. Wittrup et al. (2019) found that access to close natural mentors "was positively associated with academic engagement" (p. 474). The study showed that natural mentors help offset the negative effects of societal stressors and barriers against African American students while simultaneously helping them address academic responsibilities.

To further substantiate the findings of Wittrup et al. (2019), Hurd and Sellers (2013), in their quantitative study about how NMRs impact the academic performance of African American students, found that NMRs contribute to greater academic engagement among African American students. The aim of their study was to find a connection between the NMR that African American students experience and their socio-emotional and academic outcomes. The researchers sampled 259 students who identified as African American (this number includes students who identified as biracial with one African American parent) from three different schools in the Midwest. They surveyed students about their NMRs to determine how closely connected students were to their mentors. They also surveyed students regarding their academic performance. Hurd and Sellers (2013) revealed that students with more connected NMRs reported more academic engagement than students with less connected NMRs. The study defines *more connected* as longer relationship length, more involvement and closeness, and frequent contact. *Less connected* is defined as shorter relationship length, less involvement and closeness, and infrequent contact. This information demonstrates the value of mentors to African American students.

Overall, the literature clearly shows that mentoring programs and natural mentors can benefit African American students academically. Access to positive African American role models who tutor students and connect with them socially promote enhanced academic self-efficacy (Hanlon et al., 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Hurd et al., 2012; Wittrup et al., 2019). School administrators who serve African American students should consider mentoring programs as a key method to serve that population appropriately.

Mentoring Helps African American Males Academically. *It only took five minutes for him to reply.* *"Come see me in my office this week," Principal Ladder's email read.*

I had just been accepted to the college of education at my university. After a year and half of hard work, I was officially a teaching candidate! When I called Mr. Brown to tell him the news, he asked me where I planned to work after graduation. I told him I wasn't sure because I had two years of college left. He giggled and said, "You have to plan now so you don't end up like all those young people with a college degree and no job. Do some research on the school districts in which you're interested in teaching and find out who the principals are. Once you learn who the principals are, send them an email with your resume, a photo, and a short note about your desires to teach one day." I took Mr. Brown's advice to heart and did exactly as he advised.

Principal Ladder was the only African American male principal in the school district in which I desired to work. I sent him my resume, a photo, and a note about my aspirations to be a principal and help students, especially African American male students. When I visited his school, Principal Ladder took me on an entire tour, introduced me to key teachers and ended my visit with a job offer. He said, "Son, the second you graduate, you have a job here. Not too many Black men become teachers. The boys in this neighborhood need you. I'm retiring soon, and I need a replacement. Stick to this job for the kids and you'll make a real difference… better than most people in the world."

Principal Ladder was true to his word. He hired me the moment I graduated and paired me with a veteran Black male teacher. I was tasked with helping facilitate the mentoring program at the school which targeted Black male students with low reading scores. I have been fighting for their equitable education ever since.

Although studies show the value of school-based mentoring programs for African American students, there is particular need for mentoring programs that target African American male students because it gives them access to positive role models who look like them and share their experiences (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Ellis et al. 2018; Gordon et al., 2009; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013). In their quantitative study, Gordon et al. (2009) examined the academic effectiveness of culturally responsive mentoring interventions on African American male middle school students by administering the Benjamin E. Mays Institute's (BEMI) mentoring program. The goal of the BEMI mentoring program is to "impact the intellectual, spiritual, physical, and social needs of the students served through role modeling and mentoring" (Gordon et al., 2009, p. 281). The program was administered at a large urban middle school in Connecticut. The population of the school was 83% African American, and 16.7% Latino. Along with academic requirements to pass the program, students were required to complete Afrocentric rites of passage including learning traditional African dances, performing a community service project, and learning the tenets of the African philosophy Sankofa (go back and fetch it). Sankofa, in short, is based on five African values: spirituality, self-determination, cooperative economics, freedom and justice, and truth (Akbar, 1991; Asante, 2011).

Furthermore, the facilitators of the BEMI mentoring program aim to help African American male students better identify with academics. According to Gordon et al. (2009), "Students' identification with academics is an important component of academic success" (p. 278). The results of the BEMI mentoring program suggest that culturally responsive mentoring programs help African American male students improve academically. According to Gordon et al. (2009), overall academic performance increased for the students in the BEMI group in comparison to the control group. The average post-intervention GPA for the BEMI group was 2.89 on a 4.0 scale. The average GPA for the control group was a 1.06 on a 4.0 scale. According to Gordon et al. (2009), "This study contributes to the literature by providing support for the effectiveness of an Afrocentric mentoring program in fostering academic success and achievement of middle school Black boys" (p. 285). The statistical significance of this information shows the value of mentoring programs. These results show the

effectiveness of a mentoring program and support the claim that administrators should consider implementing them in their schools. In the words of Gordon et al. (2009),

Additionally, the findings of Gordon et al. (2009) are echoed by Orrock and Clark (2018) who, in their qualitative study of systems that promote academic success for African American male students, found that mentoring programs promote academic success. They explain that in a mentoring relationship, emphasis is on the adult-student relationship which serves the social and emotional development of the student. This positive emotional outlet allows the student to be more apt to receiving tutoring and academic support in school. Similarly, Ellis et al. (2018), in their qualitative study of racial identity in African American male students found that mentoring programs promote academic excellence. Ellis et al. (2018) explain that multiple forms of mentoring programs that target African American male students can promote positive academic performance if the programs "offer a consistent space for communication, is structured around goals, and is well-matched according to the needs of the mentee" (p. 918).

Furthermore, Bianco, Leech, and Mitchell (2011), in their qualitative study of African American male high school students who considered teaching as a career, found that mentoring helps students make positive academic decisions. The researchers examined five African American high school boys who considered a career in teaching. Two main factors that influenced the students' career decisions were access to African American male teachers, and the opportunity to mentor elementary students. The students reported that their African American male teachers were caring mentors to them in their academic journey. Others mentioned that they enjoyed being a mentor to younger African American males. In order to encourage more African American male students to become interested in teaching, Bianco, Leech, and Mitchell (2011) recommend exposing more African American male students to African American male teachers and giving them opportunities to mentor younger students. Similarly, Scott, Taylor, and Palmer (2013) in their qualitative study of the challenges that face African American male students, found that available African American male teachers or other figures (pastors, coaches) are natural mentors who influence students to excel academically.

It is overwhelmingly apparent that school-based mentoring promotes academic success for African American male students (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Ellis et al. 2018; Gordon et al., 2009; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013). Male mentors who look like and understand the social and emotional needs of African American male students can influence them to excel academically in school and make positive career choices after graduating high school. Urban African American male students who have constant connection with mentors will be potentially more willing to strive for academic success. School principals should use this information to justify implementing school-based mentoring programs that target African American male students in their schools.

Mentoring and Mattering in School

School-based mentoring, though very successful at helping students increase their identification with academics, has far more benefits that extend beyond academic success. When properly implemented, school-based mentoring helps students feel like they matter in school, which benefits them emotionally and motivates them academically (Freeman, 1999; Maslow, 1968; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010). Mattering to others is a basic human need which falls just behind physiological and safety needs on Maslow's hierarchy of human needs (Maslow, 1968). Freeman (1999) promotes the use of school-based mentors to help African American male students feel like they matter in school and to encourage them to strive toward academic success. According to Tucker, Dixon, and Griddine (2010), "Recent research regarding perceptions of interpersonal mattering to others illustrates that it is related to higher self-esteem and social support, lower depression and academic stress, and greater psychosocial well-being and wellness; these findings were similar among diverse racial and ethnic groups" (p. 135). With regard to the above information, educators should endeavor to help their students feel as if they matter in school. However, there is limited research on how school-based

mentoring programs can specifically affect African American male students' perception of how much they matter to their school, so this study examined it more and add to the literature.

Conclusion

Overall, educational leaders who serve urban African American male students have a very important and impactful job. They must embrace the power of their leadership to serve the needs of that key population, and all the other students in their charge. Implementing relevant educational programming help educational leaders, especially principals, meet their obligations to students. School-based mentoring programs can be effective interventions for students who do not identify well with academics, especially African American male students. For decades, mentoring programs have been implemented by educational leaders to address the needs of their students. Much research has been done about the effectiveness of mentoring programs in schools (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Wyatt, 2009). However, there is limited research on how school-based mentoring programs can specifically affect African American male students' identification with academics, perception of how much they matter to their school, and academic performance. To aid educational leaders who desire to help their African American male students succeed academically, more research is needed to address how school-based mentoring programs can affect African American male students' identification with academics, perception of how much they matter to their school, and academic performance. This narrative inquiry study provides information and recommendations for educational leaders who work with African American males in secondary school.

I should be in poverty. I was raised by a single mother who worked the night shift and barely made enough money to keep food in the fridge and utilities on (and they were often shut off). I should be in prison. I grew up in a poor neighborhood which was infested by drug addiction and gang violence. I should be illiterate. I attended underperforming schools my entire academic career and was tracked in low level classes. I should be hopeless. I did not have access to private tutors, therapists, or affordable after school programs. I should be a statistic... a product of a marginalized group in a historically racist nation who ended up in the prison pipeline as a human tool for cheap labor. I should have ended up like local gang leader, KJ, who went to prison for murder and was later murdered while incarcerated. I should have ended up a drug addict and a petty criminal like my friend, Calvin. I should have turned to gang life for income like my cousin, Carl. I should be a statistic.

Thankfully, I am not a statistic... another Black male who was failed by the United States public school system and thrusted into a life resembling second-class citizenship. I did not inherit the fate of too many of my African American male peers. I am not an anomaly. For, being an anomaly would indicate that my diversion from my expected outcome was inexplicable. Fortunately, a wealth of information proves that my circumstances are neither rare, nor unprecedented. I am the product of a life filled with mentors. My mother was my first mentor. She taught me to love myself and put me on a path of success. Mr. Brown stepped in when I got older and taught me about manhood and higher education. Mrs. Blackmon taught me to be proud of my rich heritage and charged me to build upon my ancestors' legacy. Principal Ladder took the reins and gave me professional opportunity and direction. Those mentors, and so many others, freely gave of themselves to shape my success.
My mentors saved me from becoming another grim statistic and gave me the tools to write my future.

Rationale for The Project

This narrative inquiry study was designed to help the United States school system adequately serve its African American male population of students. The fact that African American male students show lower than average academic performance scores nationwide indicate that there is a deficiency in the United States school system that needs to be addressed. As stated before, as of 2020, the dropout rate of African American male students is 6.8%, which is 1.7% higher than the national average of 5.1% (NCES 2020, May). African American male students have an out-of-school suspension rate of 17.6% – higher than the national average in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2019, February). The truancy rate for African American

students is the second highest nationwide at 11.2%, (Maynard et al., 2017). I created a mentoring intervention to address educating African American male students while incorporating narrative inquiry to tell their individual academic stories, an integral component of learning to best serve this population. The information this study produced is a resource to educators who serve African American male students.

Process

Project Design

This study was framed and approached using an interpretive paradigm, specifically narrative inquiry. According to Bailey (2018), an interpretive paradigm is "a set of assumptions held by researchers used to guide research, which include the assumptions that there is no objective social reality independent of the meanings given in a setting" (p. 244). Through the interpretive paradigm, I formed conclusions about the reality of research participants based on their self-narrated experiences. This paradigm was best because it allowed participants to reveal their reality without the researcher's assumptions interfering. Narrative inquiry was an appropriate research method because it is a qualitative research method that views personal stories as raw data or the creation of raw data (Bleakley, 2005). In other words, narrative inquiry takes a person's experiences and records them as data in story form. Narratives are a humanistic way to make sense of the world and to navigate the phenomenon of living (Ingraham, 2017).

Furthermore, beyond giving people a personal outlet or explanation of life, narrative inquiry offers value to the field of research because it humanizes the process from start to finish. Ingraham (2017) argues that narrative inquiry should be used beyond the literary fields because constraining it in that context "neglects the far greater incidence of personal and, often, mundane stories told by common folk in a vernacular voice.
Studying *their* stories offers scholars the chance to give voice to an otherwise invisible group…" (p. 34). Giving a voice to an unheard group is a key goal of qualitative research. One of the pioneers of narrative inquiry, William Labov (2013), explains that narrative inquiry helps convey the emotions of subjects to the world.

The research in this study gave voice to the participants and conveyed their emotions, thoughts, feelings, and perspectives to the world using narrative inquiry. I strived to make this happen by providing student participants with multiple structured and unstructured opportunities to share their academic stories about being African American male students in secondary school. I used thoughtful interview questions during the formal interview phase to allow students to express themselves. Also, I listened for deeper insights from participants during the less structured times in the intervention, for example, when we discussed the course of the school day.

Also, I fostered a strong relationship with the student participants in order to effectively help them understand the value of school; thus, increasing their identification with academics. While encouraging a deeper appreciation for education within the students, I actively helped them succeed by assisting in schoolwork and introducing resources they need to thrive academically. These combined efforts were aimed at demonstrating to the students that they matter to their school. That sense of mattering in school encouraged them to strive toward academic excellence.

The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention

The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention (COS) is a mentorship intervention designed to help high school African American male students in secondary school increase their identification with academics, feel as though they matter to their school, and improve their academic performance. The setting of the intervention was a large school district in the Midwestern United States. The duration of the intervention was 10 weeks and coincided with the grading period in the school system served. Five to 10 high school intervention participants (ranging from freshmen to seniors), known as Chamber Scholars (Scholars) were grouped with an African American male mentor who acted as the Intervention Facilitator (IF). I, the researcher, was the IF. As the IF, I directly worked with Scholars each school day during their study hall period which lasted 25 minutes. Daily activities included reciting an empowering creed, reading

culturally relevant material, group/personal conversation sessions, homework help, and grade progress check-ins. Scholars were given tasks to complete in order to earn promotions within the group. Such tasks included learning the daily creed and increasing their weekly GPA during check-ins. I encouraged Scholars to find the value in academic achievement, which increased their identification with academics. I was also a daily mentor and guide for Scholars, which helped them feel like they mattered to their school. Finally, I helped Scholars monitor their academic progress and provided targeted academic supports, which helped them improve their academic performance.

I took on multiple responsibilities:

1. Conducted pre-interviews of potential intervention participants
2. Educated chosen Scholars and their families about the intervention and its goals.
3. Performed the daily tasks of the intervention, as outlined in the Daily Agenda (See Appendix B).
4. Recorded the bi-weekly academic progress of Scholars based on GPA, attendance, and behavior records.
5. Recorded daily field notes on interaction with Scholars.
6. Conducted post-intervention interviews of Scholars.
7. Compared the Scholars' pre-intervention grades to their post-intervention grades.
8. Compared the Scholars' pre-interview responses to their post-interview responses.

There are six components required to successfully facilitate the COS (See Appendix C). The first component is the inclusion of an African American male mentor who functions as the IF. Such a mentor gives the Scholars a person who shares their cultural background, increasing the chances that a personal connection may form. A strong relationship between mentor and mentee is beneficial as Scholars listen to advice to adjust their academic habits for improvement. The second component is consistent positive affirmation from the IF to the Scholars. This is intentionally designed to combat the negative stereotypes that the Scholars may have heard about themselves and help them build a positive self-image. Constantly reinforcing a positive self-image increases Scholars' motivation to strive toward academic excellence. The third component is culturally relevant readings. Culturally relevant readings expose Scholars to historical and modern evidence of African (American) excellence throughout human history which reinforces the positive self-image necessary to motivate them to excel academically.

The fourth component is accountability check-ins and rewards. This motivates Scholars to self-monitor daily because they know they must account for their actions. The check-ins are designed to increase grades and attendance, and positive behavior. Small awards, such as pizza parties and gift bags encourage sustained adherence to the standards of the COS. Finally, the culminating COS Awards Ceremony gives recognition to Scholars who demonstrated the principles of the COS. The fifth component is community support. This comes in the form of guest speakers from the community addressing the Scholars and sharing information, opportunities, and resources. Community support is an out-of-school way to reinforce the positive lessons students receive in school. It connects students with individuals, distinct from their teachers, who can help them grow and develop. The fifth component is pre/post grade point average comparison. This is a comparison of the grade point average of Scholars before their participation in the COS intervention and after. The grade point average comparison shows whether the intervention was successful at increasing student academic performance. This also opens avenues for further discussion such as determining the most effective method of the intervention. The sixth component is a pre/post interview with Scholars (See Appendix A). The pre- interview is a way to determine how well Scholars identify with academics and their perceptions of mattering in school before the COS intervention. The questions inquired about students' experiences with school and how they feel about how they are perceived. The post interview is a method to determine whether the COS intervention was successful at increasing their identification with academics and helping them feel that they matter to their school.

Motivation for This Research Project

This research project was designed to help the United States school system adequately serve its African American male population of students. Solving this problem is important to the entire nation because justice and equity are two of its core principles. Within the United States school system cries of no *child left behind* and *free and appropriate public education* and *all children can learn* ring out. The spirit of these words can only materialize when teachers teach all students the way they need to be taught. Since the aforementioned data about the academic performance of African American male students showed them to be among the lowest performing in academics, attendance, and discipline, this narrative inquiry study is valuable to the nation's teachers who serve African American male students. Part of its value comes from the fact that it allowed the students themselves to inform educators how they experienced education, which gave educators a basis for how they should design instruction for African American male students. The information this project yielded is a resource to educators who serve African American male students.

The goal of this narrative inquiry study was to tell the academic stories of African American male students in secondary school who participated in a school-based academic mentoring intervention. The intervention exclusively targeted African American male students in secondary school for the purpose of helping them increase their identification with academics, helping them feel that they matter to the school which they attend, and helping them improve their academic performance. Utilizing narrative inquiry, this study answered the following research questions:

1. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants identify with academics?
2. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants perceive the extent to which they matter to the school which they attend?
3. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants perform academically?

Participants

The population in this study consisted of three students who identified as African American male students who are in high school in the Midwestern United States. The program consisted of 10 students, six of which volunteered to participate in the research. Of the six participants, one withdrew permanently, and two never showed up to intervention meetings. Three students were the participants of this study. High school students (freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors) were the focus because they had several years of past school performance upon which to reflect, and to which their intervention results can be compared. African American male students were chosen because of the particularly harsh sociological and ecological obstacles they face in the United States school system such as stereotype threat (Steele, 1997), cultural discontinuity, and lack of culturally relatable role models (Fordham, 1985; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Osborne, 1999; Tucker et al., 2010). Such conditions may be considered when explaining why African American male students have a 6.8% dropout rate while the national average is 5.1%, and a higher than average out of school suspension rate of 17.6% (NCES, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Furthermore, I worked closely with school administrators from the site of this narrative inquiry study and requested a list of African American male students with diverse academic records. Specifically, I asked for honors students, students with average academic performance, and students who were failing most classes.

Once I receive a list of names, I directly approached each potential participant at their school and invited him to join the program. I used a recruitment script during each initial recruitment interaction (See Appendix D). I selected scholars from diverse academic and behavioral backgrounds. A diverse group of scholars offered data from various perspectives, producing a richer, more humanistic study. Scholars were pre-interviewed at their high school about their academic experiences as African American male students and their interest in joining the COS. Interview questions were constructed to understand how interviewees identified with academics, the extent to which they felt they mattered to their school, and their current level of academic performance. After each interview, the interviewees were offered the opportunity to participate in the COS.

Collection of Data Procedures

The data for this narrative inquiry study was sourced from personal interviews of Scholars, observations and field notes, written journals, and posted grade reports. In my role as the IF, I conducted a pre-interview with potential intervention participants with goal of understanding how well they identify with academics, the extent to which they feel they matter to their school, how they are performing academically. During the facilitation of the COS, I observed Scholars and took daily field notes reflecting significant occurrences. I asked students self-report their grades for the week and recorded their progress. I also assigned and analyzed weekly journals in which I asked the students to explain how the intervention was working for them. Upon the conclusion of the COS, I conducted a post-interview with Scholars to determine how well they identified with academics, the extent to which they felt they matter to their school, and how they performed academically as a result of their participation in the COS.

Informed Consent

Each student who indicated interest in participating in the COS was given a permission slip for his parents to sign and authorize his participation in the intervention. All participants maintained the option to withdraw their participation in the intervention at any time. The school principal and superintendent's office authorized the participation of students who participated in the COS. In order to protect the privacy rights of intervention participants, all students, and the school which they attended, remained anonymous in the study.

Interviewing

Interviewing is a qualitative mode of research aimed at understanding the lived experiences of people and the meaning they draw from those experiences. According to Seidman (2013), the heart of interviewing is understanding people's stories because they have worth when endeavoring to understand culture or make sense of experiences. As a mode of qualitative research, interviewing can be very effective at revealing valuable information. People can talk, think, reason, feel, express emotion, transmit valuable information in seconds (Bertaux, 1981). A properly conducted interview gives people an avenue to reflect upon, make meaning of, and share their experiences.

Within this study, interviewing was used to allow Scholars to reflect upon, make meaning of, and share their lived experiences as African American male students in secondary school. Their stories were used to the research questions: how they identify with academics, whether they feel they matter to their school, and how they perform academically. They were given an opportunity to share essential stories from their academic journey and evaluate them. This study is about people's stories, and interviews deliver them effectively (See Appendix A).

Each research participant was interviewed twice: at the start of the intervention, and at the conclusion. The duration of each interview was approximately 30 minutes. The interviews took place at the high school. I recorded the interviews using a personal voice recorder. I transcribed the interviews using the voice transcription feature of the word processor on my personal computer.

Observations and Field Notes

Bailey (2018) states, "If you are not writing field notes, then you are not conducting field research" (p. 125). In essence, she is saying that field notes are fundamental for effective field research. Although different researchers have various definitions for field notes, Bailey's (2018) definition was used in this study. Bailey (2018) explains that field notes are "a detailed, written record of observations and interactions in the field that you can use to conduct a rigorous analysis" (p. 125). Field notes are a written depiction of researcher observations. Due to the fragility of human memory, without a detailed, organized recording system for managing daily field observations, the researcher may be prone to forget key details when endeavoring to analyze the observation data.

Within this narrative inquiry study, I facilitated the COS sessions and took field notes throughout. I typed the field notes on my personal password protected laptop and stored them in an encrypted file folder. I stored my laptop in a locked room that only I had access when it was not in use. At the end of each intervention day, I used my personal computer to type the written field notes. I used my recorded field notes of the daily sessions to identify and organize themes. Since the study incorporated field research, taking field notes was an appropriate method for collecting data.

Student Journals

Reflective journals help students reflect upon and articulate deep learning and personal experiences (Green & Batool, 2017). Arter et al. (2016) explain that when used appropriately, reflective journals can be a useful learning tool for students. Effective journaling goes beyond knowledge retelling, it allows students to transform and apply their knowledge. In order for journaling to be effective, it must be intentional, well- planned, and assigned to students on a consistently frequent basis (Arter et al., 2016). Furthermore, timely feedback to student journals encourages students to continually write substantive journal entries. Journaling can be an effective tool for educators to understand student perspectives.

In this study, I used journaling to gain an understanding of Scholars as they progressed through the COS. Journal questions were given with the intention of learning how Scholars feel about their academic efforts and their perception of the extent to which they matter to their school (See Appendix E). Since this narrative inquiry study is aimed at learning and sharing the personal stories of the intervention participants, journaling is an appropriate mode of research because it is their voice being conveyed. Scholars completed one journal at the end of each week of the intervention, totaling 10 journal entries. I encouraged Scholars to write at least three paragraphs as they journaled. I supported them by giving immediate feedback as they developed their journal writing.

Student Grade Reports

Student grade reporting is a singular measure of academic progress. Student grades are designed to quantitively reflect how a student is performing within a class according to posted standards. I strongly note that grades are not the only measure of student academic progress; however, they are the most popular in the United States school system. Due to the widely accepted practice of including student grades when evaluating student academic achievement, student grades were used in this study to inform how the COS intervention impacted student academic performance.

The school in which the research took place requires teachers to post grades weekly. Grades are weighted on a 4.0 scale. During the intervention I maintained bi-weekly records of student grades in each class and used that information to help them create attainable academic goals. This produced five grade checkpoints during intervention. Any score above the baseline GPA was recorded as academic growth, and any score below it was recorded as academic decline.

Data Analyses Procedures

Analysis of Interviews

The information from each interview was filed and coded in an organized manner as prescribed by Ravitch and Carl (2016). The codes included four sections: Theme, Code Description, Code, Code Definition. The information was derived from the transcripts of the interviews. The interviews were transcribed for the purpose of finding and reading the information more readily and interpreting it more accurately. Interviews took place before the first intervention session, and after the final intervention session. I analyzed the interview data immediately following the conclusion of the final interview. I used axial coding during the analysis process. I choose axial coding because it is a qualitative research technique that allowed me to relate data from multiple sources together, identify trends, and reveal codes, categories, and subcategories from participants' personal perspectives (Allen, 2017). By using axial coding, I was able to compare themes as they emerged within the data and make claims. This was the most appropriate coding technique for this narrative inquiry study which featured data sourced from individuals who shared their educational experienced.

Analysis of Field Notes

I recorded field notes in an organized manner as prescribed by Baily (2018). Field notes were organized in the following categories: detailed descriptions of interactions, analytic ideas and insights, personal feelings of the researcher, things to think about and do, and reflexive thoughts. The field notes were used to "create data based on observations and interactions in the field" (Bailey, 2018, p. 126). Specifically, I used the field notes to inform my depiction of Scholars in my narrative. I used axial coding during the analysis process.

Analysis of Student Journals

The information from each student journal was filed and coded in an organized manner as prescribed by Ravitch and Carl (2016). The codes included four sections: Theme, Code Description, Code, Code Definition. The information was derived from the transcripts of the journals. Due to some common grammatical and spelling errors, some student journals were slightly revised with corrections for the purpose of easily reading, analyzing, and interpreting understandable documents. Journaling took place once a week on Fridays for 10 weeks. I began the interpretation and analysis of the journals immediately after the final journal assignment was completed. I used axial coding during the analysis process.

Analysis of Student Grade Reports

Student grade report trends were used to determine how participation in the COS impacted student academic performance. Student grades from the previous grading period of the intervention school year were the baseline for grade comparison. Any score above the student baseline was considered academic achievement. Any score below the student baseline was considered academic decline. Grades that were unchanged were recorded as no change.

Ethical Concerns or Conflicts of Interest

This narrative inquiry study has no ethical concern or conflicts of interest. All participants participated in the COS of their own volition. Furthermore, each participant who was 17 years or younger, was required to obtain the express permission of their legal guardian to participate. Finally, the program was overseen by the school principal. The program was educational in nature and did not require any excessive physical strain or emotional toil. All participants and the school district remained completely anonymous during the publication process of this study.

Furthermore, all participants agreed to be honest in their feedback regarding the intervention. I earned their trust by ensuring them that nothing they said in the intervention would be shared with anyone, with the exception of something life-threatening. When they shared stories of skipping class to spend time with friends, I did not discipline them for it. Instead, I encouraged them to value school more. They became more honest as they learned I was a trustworthy mentor. The root of the honesty and trustworthiness was my commitment to transparency. I openly shared personal stories from my life featuring my good and bad decisions. Doing so, demonstrated my willingness to be honest and transparent, and it encouraged the same from the research participants.

Application[2]

Findings

     This narrative inquiry study yielded results that showed how three African American young men developed while participating the COS. Following are the research questions that were answered.

1. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants identify with academics?
2. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants perceive the extent to which they matter to the school which they attend?
3. How does participation in a mentorship program designed exclusively for African American male students in secondary school within the Midwestern United States affect how student participants perform academically?

I started this section with the names and a brief profile of each research participant: Ezra, Mark, and James. I then I answered each research question is it related to each research participant. I also recorded the emergent themes that came about as a result of this study. Finally, I discussed further areas of study that can potentially help African American male students in secondary school.

Research Participants

Table 1
Table 1Participant Name, Age, Grade and Background Information

Participant Name	Participant Age	Participant Grade	Participant Background Information
Ezra	18	12	Ezra desires to be a marine biologist. He struggled to get to school on time, and he was failing two classes. He chose to participate in the COS because he felt it could be the boost to get him on track to graduate and pursue his goals.
Mark	17	11	Mark wants to start a home renovation business. He struggled with going to class and keeping up with his assignments. He chose to participate in the COS because he wanted someone to constantly checkup on him.

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[2] To protect the identities of the individuals referenced within this section, all names have been replaced with

pseudonyms, and other identifiable details have been altered.

James	**16**	**10**	**James desire to be a massage therapist. He struggled with controlling his temper and keeping up with his schoolwork in general. James chose to join the COS because he wanted to be around positive young men.**

Ezra. Ezra is a senior student who is excited about how life will unfold for him. Within seconds of meeting him, one will learn that he is jovial, optimistic, and respectful. He enjoys talking about himself and his plan for success, yet he will happily ask about the welfare of others and listen intently. He has clear goals, the most pronounced of which is his plan to become a world-renowned marine biologist. Overall, he seems like a pleasant student who will have no problem adjusting to adult life. A glimpse at his academic record, however, will reveal a pattern of chronic attendance issues and bare minimum academic performance. This may seem strange for such a positive student, but a deeper conversation with him will reveal his innermost mindset and sub-conscious struggles. He admittedly struggles with procrastination which impacts his academic performance. Also, he is deeply insecure about his value as a person, which stems from his verbally abusive home life. He is willing to work to overcome his procrastination habit and gain a positive self-image.

Mark. Mark is a sophomore student who thinks deeply about his life and how his decisions can impact its outcome. He is very easy to talk to and will happily share details of his life with anyone who shows interest. A single conversation with him will reveal him as a critical thinker who possesses a degree of wisdom and understanding unmatched by his fellows. He often pauses while speaking to think about what he is going to say and how he is going to say it. His personal wisdom renders him quite introspective and reflective in his life. His disposition shows that he is destined to be some type of counselor in life. Though wise and understanding of decisions and consequences, Mark is very youthful in nature and prone to making youthfully immature decisions. He shared stories of being arrested for activities in which he participated while spending time with juvenile delinquents. He also mentioned that he cuts class regularly to hang out with some of those individuals. Although he is aware of the poor decisions that he makes regarding the company he keeps, he seems to be drawn to a more defiant lifestyle. A glimmer of hope exists, however, because he has requested mentorship to help him, in his words, "stay on the right track". Mark is striving to use his natural wisdom to influence his peers to make good decisions.

James. James is an honest, genuine, and pensive young man. He has high goals and a solid idea of how to achieve them. James desires a stable life which includes having a college education, a decent job, a home, and a family to take care of. He carries the emotional burden of a young man who grew up fatherless. His father's absence from his life has defined his mindset. He simply wants to be a better man than his father. He also wants to escape the impoverished environment in which he lives. He hates living in *the hood* and is intent on figuring out how to get out. He knows an education is important to reach those goals. His performance in school, however, shows that he has not mastered the habits to achieve his goals in life. He is chronically absent and has a GPA below 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. He knows his performance needs improvement and he is willing to improve. He does not necessarily enjoy going to school each day, but he is willing to work harder and graduate so he can reach his life goals.

How Participation in a Mentorship Program Designed Exclusively for African American Male Students in Secondary School within the Midwestern United States Affects How Student Participants Identify with Academics

To gain understanding on how participants identified with academics, I asked three questions during the pre-interview. Those questions are:

1. Overall, is school a place you enjoy, dislike, or consider to be a neutral entity in your life? Explain your answer.
2. From your personal perspective, how important is it for you to perform well in school? Explain your answer.
3. What benefits do you personally gain from performing well in school?

The following section describes each participant's responses to the pre-interview questions and my analysis of their answers.

How Ezra's Identification with Academics was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. Ezra's reported feelings about school indicated that he had a low level of identification with academics. During his pre-interview when I asked him how he felt about school, Ezra said, "School is definitely neutral to me. I just come here, do what I have to do, and go home..." He went on to explain that he struggles with attendance and work completions saying, "I have trouble turning in my assignments and getting to school on time each day." He talked about his hectic home life and how getting a ride to school is difficult and often results in him missing his first class, English, and half of the second one. During an intervention session I asked Ezra about his academic weaknesses and he replied, "I'm really lazy. That is my worst trait. I'm just super lazy and I know it's messing me up." Throughout our various conversations, Ezra mentioned his academic difficulties. He did not seem to value important components of academic success such as arriving to school on time and turning in assignments. Although he showed excitement about post-high school life, he seemed to view high school as an obstacle he needed to overcome.

A glimmer of hope, however, shined in Ezra's words and attitude. Although his academic record appeared bleak at best, he demonstrated a solid desire to improve. During his pre-interview, Ezra said, "I really want to improve my grades. It's very important to do well in school. My mom always stressed academic achievement to me my whole life. Also, I understand that I need to do well in school so I can do what I want to do in life. Education is important. Plus, when my grades go up, so does my confidence." Ezra's desire to improve is what I decided to focus on as I pushed him to succeed in school.

After four weeks in the COS, Ezra began to show signs of increasing his identification with academics. During an activity about goalsetting, I asked him what his goal was. Ezra replied, "I'm going to get an A in English. I have an F right now, but my teacher told me I can make up the work. I'm going to do that work and get that A." This was quite different from his pre-interview in which he showed willingness to improve overall, but no hope to improve in English, his first class, which he misses regularly. He also mentioned that he was not fond of his English teacher at all. When I challenged him by asking how he will make up his English grade if he keeps missing class, he said, "I'm going to put my school clothes on at night and sleep in them, so I can get up and go right to school. I'm getting that grade up."

After ten weeks, I conducted a post-interview with Ezra. He showed even greater identification with academics. When I asked him how he feels about school, how important is it for him to perform well, and the benefits he receives for good performance, he said,

> I enjoy school more now since joining the COS. Overall, it's a place I enjoy… It's important for me to do well. I need at least a B overall. I have goals, and I need to reach those goals… When I do well in

school, I get a boost in self-esteem. Like, if I see my grades are all A's and B's, then I'd feel really proud of myself.

Ezra's face held a smile and his voice boomed with excitement as he explained his newfound appreciation for academics.

Based on his post-interview responses, Ezra's identification with academics improved since participating in COS. Before joining the intervention, school was a neutral entity to him. He did not enjoy going to school, and he put very little effort into completing work. His desire to do well in school remained constant, but he understands the importance of academic achievement more than before. He has set clear goals to achieve and is now pushing to achieve them.

How Mark's Identification with Academics was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. Mark's responses to the pre-interview questions indicated that he had a low level of identification with academics. Before joining the COS, Mark had a GPA 1.2 on a 4.0 scale. When I asked him about his feelings about school during his pre-interview he said, "School is an overall nice place, but it can be overwhelming. School requires effort. You can't expect good results without some form of work." When I asked him about the amount of effort he put into performing well in school he said, "To be honest, I put in genuine effort about 60% of the time. I give some effort in school, but out of school, I don't put any effort in academics… I miss assignments when I don't finish homework at school. I tell myself that I'm going to add more at home, then I get home and forget and that's how I miss many assignments." When I asked about his attendance habits he replied, "When I miss class for an unexcused reason it is usually because I am late, or I ditched class. I tend to be late in the morning because my mom has to drop my siblings off. Or else, I'm tired and I'll ditch. I might get an unexcused absence about 2 times a week."

Mark understands the value of school but does not always want to put in the effort. He knows the benefits of education, but also likes cutting class. In his words,

School is good. I enjoy coming to school, learning new things, and meeting new people. Sometimes things get hectic, but overall, it's fun to go to. School is important to me. Putting in the effort brings progress. If you don't put in effort, your grades will suffer. Your effort shows. Good effort brings success. It's important for me to do well. I benefit in school because I focus more. I pay attention. I have learned new things that I never thought I'd learn in school.

His words, which reveal a natural wisdom about the power of effort, indicate that he has a moderate level of identification with academics. He values school, but his actions show that his maturity level has not fully developed. Mark is experiencing an internal conflict. On the one hand, he feels that he must work hard and succeed academically. On the other hand, he wants to play and enjoy his teen years while disregarding academics. He appears to be aware of the internal struggle and is slowly accepting the mature lifestyle he must lead. When I asked him if he wanted me to mentor him and help him stay focused in school he said, "I *want* and *don't want* a mentor to check up on me in school. I say 'yes' because sometimes I do need a reminder and push. But also, I say 'no' because sometimes I know I have work to do, and I just don't do it." Ultimately, he said he desired to improve academically and chose to allow me to mentor him. I chose to focus on Mark's natural wisdom as a means to motivate him to prioritize academic achievement over social popularity.

After four weeks in the COS, Mark began to show signs of increasing identification with academics. One of his biggest problems was his tendency to skip class and neglect turning in assignments. When I asked him about how a goalsetting lesson impacted him, he said, "This lesson influenced me to work hard and do the things I got to do. I will come to school every day, do my work, and get it done. Ain't nothing else to say." Mark has demonstrated great improvement in comparison to his pre-interview in which he admitted to skipping class multiple times a week.

After ten weeks, I interviewed Mark again. During his post-interview, Mark further showed increased identification with academics. He spoke with pride and confidence as he shared his report of academic growth and success. I asked him how he felt about school, how important it is for him to perform well, and what benefits he gains from doing well in school. He said,

> I enjoy school, especially high school. It's new to me. It's got its ups and downs, but I know I gotta push through it. It's important for me to perform well because I got to show people I have the courage to do what I have to do in and out of school. I know doing good in school can help me with getting a job because I'll be able to prove that I'm a hard worker in and out of school… When I do well, I gain self-confidence, self-motivation, and I open up more. There was a time I didn't talk to certain teachers, but now I do. I'm trying to better myself as a person now.

His disposition was positive and self-assured as he spoke about the benefits of improving school performance.

Based on Mark's answers to the post-interview, his identification with academics has increased as a result of his participation in COS. Before joining the intervention, Mark understood the value of school, but he did not perform the actions necessary to succeed such as completing his work and going to class every day. Since joining COS, Mark has gained a new perception of school. He created post-graduation goals and improved his relationship with his teachers. Overall, he is using school as a means to better himself.

How James's Identification with Academics was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. James's academic performance and pre-interview responses indicated that he had a lower level of identification with academics before joining COS. When I asked about how he views school, he said,

> School is kinda neutral to me. I want to be here, but I don't want to be here at the same time. But I gotta get my grades up. School is important to me because I want to graduate, go to college, and do something with my life.

He seems to view school as an institution to tolerate until he is able to pursue his life's desires. He also seems to struggle with consistently putting forth effort in school. When I asked about his academic effort and plan for success he said, "It's hard to know how much effort I put in school. I want to do good, but I also do bad. Sometimes I just do bad and other times I do good. I think I try really hard about 50% of the time." He needs a reason to push himself to academic success.

Fortunately, James genuinely wants to succeed. When I asked him about his GPA, he understood it was low, but made a plan to improve. He said, "My most recent GPA was a 2.17. That's too low. I gotta bring it up. I don't want it to be that low… I just know I gotta bring it up. My plan is to bring it up by doing my work, being on time to school, and being on time to my classes." His plan, which he devised himself without my assistance, demonstrated his understanding of his performance and where he needs to improve. A disposition of deep sincerity accompanied James when he spoke about his desires to improve and be a better student and person. I focused on helping him keep his life goals in mind as he strove to improve academically.

After 10 weeks of being in COS, James completed a post-interview in which he discussed how his identification with academics has evolved as a result of the intervention. When I asked him how he felt about school he said,

> I enjoy school. School is a place to learn. This helps us be something in life. Instead of being a gang banger or something, this is a place to grow and do better… School is important to me because I want to be something in life. So, I do my work and get my grades up… I benefit a lot from school. In several of my classes, I brought my grades up and I'm still going.

James showed excitement to answer the questions with pride and confidence. When I asked him if he had any final words to share, he said, "I already knew school was important, but now I enjoy it more because of The Chamber of Scholars. The Chamber is the reason I'm come to school."

The differences between James's responses to his pre-interview and post-interview indicate that his identification with academics has improved as a result of his participation in COS. Before he joined the intervention, he had a neutral feeling about school, and he did not invest much effort in schoolwork. After ten weeks of participation, he began to enjoy school and put forth higher effort to succeed. He gained a deeper understanding of the importance of performing well in school. Currently, James is still striving to improve his academic record and become a lifelong success.

How Participation in a Mentorship Program Designed Exclusively for African American Male Students in Secondary School within the Midwestern United States Affects How Student Participants Perceive Whether They Matter to the School Which They Attend

To gain understanding on how participants perceived whether they mattered to the school which they attended, I asked four questions in the pre-interview. Those questions are:

1. Describe how much you believe you matter to the teachers/administrators in your school.
2. Tell me about a teacher/administrator who would personally notice and talk to you if you performed very well, or very poorly in school.
3. Tell me about a time, in considerable detail, that a teacher/administrator has demonstrated that you matter/don't matter to them.
4. Do you believe that all or most of your teachers would provide you with adequate academic support if you asked?

The following section discusses each participant's responses to the pre-interview questions and my analysis of their answers.

How Ezra's Perception of Whether He Mattered to the School Which He Attended was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. Ezra does not believe he matters to the school overall. He feels that he matters to individual teachers who demonstrate how much he matters to them by their actions. In the pre-interview, he said, "Overall, I think I matter very little to the teachers here. I'm just another number in the crowd. Individually, teachers care more." He excitedly talked about Mrs. Zeta who selflessly helped him enjoy his prom. He also mentioned Mrs. Sigma who consistently checked on his academic progress. About those two teachers he said,

> Two good teachers are Mrs. Zeta and Mrs. Sigma. They care a lot. Mrs. Zeta really showed me she cares. I remember needing a corsage for prom, but it cost $36, and I didn't have it. She just went and bought me one with her own money. She reached in her pocket and gave me $36! Mrs. Sigma is the best teacher ever. She will make sure I'm doing my work. If I start slipping, I will hear from her.

He believes that his teachers will help him if he requests. At the same time, he believes that students who neglect to ask for help will probably not get any. He said, "Most teachers will help you if you make it known. You have to take the responsibility of asking for help. If you just expect help, but say nothing, then you will probably not get it. You have to make it known that you need help." Based on his responses to the interview questions, Ezra believes he matters to specific teachers based on their treatment of him. Although good teachers like Mrs. Sigma will continually check on him, he believes that to receive help from his teachers he must take the initiative and request it.

During his ten-week post-interview, Ezra explained his perception of how much he matters to his teachers. I asked him \ about how much he mattered to his teachers, about teachers that impacted his academic career, and whether he has adequate teacher support at school. He responded,

> There are at least 3 teachers who care a lot. Mrs. Zeta, Mrs. Sigma and you, Mr. Collins… When Mr. Collins asked me to be in the Chamber of Scholars I was honored. Like, you could have helped anybody, but you asked me. You're trying to help me have a better life. You don't have to do that… I know I'll get help from my teachers if I asked. Now that I'm in the Scholars, I ask teachers for help. Before, I would have just saw my grade and moped around. But I'm trying to do better.

Based on his responses to the post-interview, Ezra's perception of mattering to teachers in the school has increased due to his participation in COS. During his pre-interview he said that he matters "very little" to the teachers in the school. He mentioned only two teachers, Mrs. Zeta and Mrs. Sigma, as the only two who demonstrated that he mattered. During his post-interview, he added me, Mr. Collins, to his list of teachers who demonstrated that he matters. He also feels more comfortable approaching his teachers for help.

As I continued the post-interview, I asked Ezra how he felt about having a mentor. He said, "Having a mentor has been a good enjoyment. I have a reason to do better." Initially, he said he wanted a mentor to check up on him regularly. He is now working harder in school and learning to monitor his own progress. He knows that his mentor will check on him, so he is more motivated to work harder so he can give good daily reports.

How Mark's Perception of Whether He Mattered to the School Which He Attended was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. Mark believes he matters to individuals who show interest in his wellbeing. When I asked about the teachers and administrators to whom he matters, he said,

> I can't speak for the teachers and administrators, but I know the security guards care. I guess I never had a problem with teachers or administrators, so I guess they care… but Mr. Delta the security guard would check up on me and show me he cares. Mr. Delta pulls me to the side to talk to me when I ditch class. He taught me the cause and effects of ditching. He taught me to persevere through things like class even if I don't like it. He says that I'll be successful if I just press through the hard stuff in life.

His response showed that he values the attention and advice he received from Mr. Delta the security guard. His response also indicated that he had no prominent indication that he mattered to his teachers. He connected not having problems with his teachers as an indication that they care. The attention he received from Mr. Delta impacted him more greatly. He did, however, say that if he asked for help, he would receive help from his teachers. Finally, he asked for a mentor to help him stay focused on academics. Mark seems to believe that he matters to those who take time to work with him.

After ten weeks, Mark and I completed a post-interview which included questions about his perception of mattering to his teachers. I asked him to share his experience of mattering to teachers and how they have shown it to him. He said,

> I believe I matter… but I think there are a lot of kids, so I might have to make it known that I need something, then they will show they care. Mr. Collins shows me that he cares. He pushes me to be my best. When he sees me trying, he says, keep pushing, focus on what you have to do. He taught us to manage our time, focus on work, and aim for success. Out of all the teachers I ever had, he's the only one who called me over the weekend to check on me. He wrote a letter to me telling me I'm a good person, born to succeed, I have a good mindset, and things of that nature. I know he cares for real.

Based on Mark's answers to the post-interview questions, his perception of mattering to his teachers has

improved tremendously as a result of his participation in COS. Before he joined the intervention, he believed he mattered to the teachers simply because he had no problems with them. The one individual he felt genuine care from was a member of the security staff. Since joining COS and getting a mentor, he showed a more positive attitude about how much he matters. He appreciates the personal attention from his COS mentor, but he also understands that his other teachers are available to him if he speaks up. He showed desire for a mentor during his pre-interview, and it has worked out for him so far.

How James's Perception of Whether He Mattered to the School Which He Attended was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. James believes he matters to the teachers who pay attention to him. During the pre-interview he said,

> Some of the teachers I probably matter to, and to others I don't. The classes that I go to, I matter. You, Mr. Collins, are a good teacher who would look out for me. When I'm not doing so good in school, you would talk to me and get me on the right track.

James values personalized attention from teachers. He believes that he would get help if he asked. He also said he appreciates teachers who take time to check on him when he is having a bad day.

After 10 weeks of participation in COS, James shared his perception of how much he matters to his school in the post-interview. When I asked him how much he thinks he matters to the teachers in his school he said,

> The teachers are actually mean. I rate them 5.5 out of 10. There are lots of other students, so I'm not their main priority. I mean a lot to deans... I never met the principal. Mr. Collins and Dean Lambda are the only two who are on me and pushing me to be successful right now. Mr. Collins tells me every day to go to class every day, and to be on time every day. Dean Lambda tells me that she does not want to see me next year, so I better graduate this year. And all of my teachers would help me if I asked.

James's post-interview responses indicated that his perception of how much he matters to his teachers has changed very little. He initially felt unsure about how his teachers felt about them. Now, he seems sure that he is not their "main priority." Again, he acknowledged Mr. Collins as a teacher to whom he matters. He also mentioned a very involved dean who strives to make connection.

James's participation in COS may not have helped him believe that he mattered to the majority of his teachers, but it undoubtedly helped him feel like he mattered to his mentor. He also learned to identify other educators who strive to make personal connections with students while pushing them to success. In his pre-interview, he did not acknowledge Dean Lambda, who has a track record of being personally supportive of students. Now, he appreciates that quality in her.

How Participation in a Mentorship Program Designed Exclusively for African American Male Students in Secondary School within the Midwestern United States Affects How Student Participants Perform Academically

To gain understanding on how participants performed academically, I asked five questions in the pre-interview. Those questions are:

1. What is your current GPA, and what is your plan to improve it?
2. How often do you put forth genuine effort to do well in school?
3. About how much time do you invest doing schoolwork during class and after school?
4. How often to you miss class for an unexcused reason?
5. How often do you forget to submit assignments?

The following section describes each participant's responses to the pre-and-post interview questions and my analysis of their answers.

How Ezra's Academic Performance was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American

Male Mentoring Intervention. Ezra's academic performance before joining the COS was mediocre at best. He had poor study habits and a problem with procrastination. When I asked him about his GPA during our pre-interview, he said,

> My most recent GPA was a 2.5. I think my most recent GPA should be higher. It should be at least a 3.2. A 2.5 is too low. I understand why because I failed English. I want to get it up because I want to go to college.

I followed his response with questions about his school effort, study habits, attendance, and assignment completion. To those questions he replied,

> I will put in effort. Sometimes I stay up really late, like 1 AM, to get assignments done. I tend to procrastinate, so I end up staying up really late to get assignments in, and sometimes I turn them in late. When I have an English assignment due, instead of putting it off, I will rush through it in advisory and turn it in… In school, I don't invest a lot of time doing schoolwork. I invest hours to work on schoolwork outside of school… I miss class for an unexcused reason almost every day. I'm late to school every day. I mostly miss English because it is my first class. I make the effort to make it to class, but I'm often late… I forget to turn in assignments very often. I might start an assignment and want to add more to it later, but forget to turn it in. I know due dates, but if I'm not actively checking on my computer, then I will forget.

Ezra's responses indicate that he has not learned and applied the skills necessary to perform well academically. Specifically, he procrastinates, regularly arrives to school late and misses class, neglects to do schoolwork at school, and neglects to turn in many assignments. I chose to help him gain the habits needed to perform better academically.

When we started our post-interview, Ezra was ready and willing to honestly share his account of his academic performance. I re-asked each of the pre-interview questions about his GPA, personal effort, study habits, attendance, and work completion. I started by asking about his most current GPA and his plan to improve it. He looked it up on his laptop and found it to be 2.432, 0.068 points lower than his original GPA of 2.5. He said, "Wow, I know I went down in some classes. I was focusing on getting my English up and I forgot all about history. I haven't been doing anything in that class." We examined his grades and noticed that his history class dropped from a 100% to a 20%. That was clearly the cause of his overall GPA drop. Although his GPA dropped, Ezra still had a success story.

Without including the drop of 80 percentage points in his history class, Ezra's grade report showed improvement. He had a significant drop of 14.26 percentage points in his tech class, and a small drop of 3.33 percentage points in his art class. In English, French, and physical education, he eared percentage point growths of 0.8, 2.06, and 44.76 respectively. He had a total growth of 47.62 percentage points compared to his drop of 17.59 percentage points. I told Ezra that his grade report was positive and showed improved effort. He responded by saying, "Yeah, I'm going to get my history up. I'll turn in those missing assignments. I want to see my grades go higher than this."

As we continued the post-interview, I asked Ezra to describe his personal effort, study habits, and attendance. He replied,

> I definitely put in more effort to do better in school since being in the Chamber of Scholars. My problem is I don't always apply everything I learn. Like, I don't invest a lot of time doing schoolwork during and after school. I'm not good at time management. I know we had a lesson on it, and that's something I'm working on now. I still forget to submit assignments a lot. Due dates pass me by. Sometimes I just forget due dates… I don't miss class often. Since coming to Scholars, I try harder. I know that something is on the line, and if I don't do my best it's a betrayal of the group. Sometimes I want to skip, but I think about

Scholars and I can't do that to the group.

He was very clear about the positive impact the COS had on him. The intervention pushed him to put in more effort and to perform at higher levels.

Based on Ezra's answers to the post-interview questions, his overall academic performance improved as a result of his participation in COS. His post-interview answers also revealed that he could have performed better had he fully applied the lessons. Before joining COS, he desired to gain success in life, but he lacked the habits to do so. He often arrived late to school and procrastinated when he should have been completing schoolwork. His poor academic habits caused him to miss due dates for many of his assignments and earn a GPA much lower than he desired. After ten weeks in COS, he has begun putting forth more effort to perform well in his classes. Although he admittedly has not mastered time management, he is working on improving.
His attendance improved because he knew it was a goal of the group. COS has been a strong component of his journey to academic success.

How Mark's Academic Performance was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. Before joining the COS, Mark had a below average academic performance record. He skipped school, didn't study, and neglected to turn in assignments. His grades reflected it. During our pre-interview about his academic performance he said,

> My most recent GPA is a 1.2. I got a lot of work to do so I can get it up to pass. I plan to stay focused in class, get to class on time, and just do everyday school things… When I miss class for an unexcused reason it is usually because I am late, or I ditched class. [Sometimes] I'm tired and I'll ditch. I might get an unexcused absence about 2 times a week… To be honest, I put in genuine effort about 60% of the time. I give some effort in school, but out of school, I don't put any effort in academics. I miss assignments when I don't finish homework at school. I tell myself that I'm going to add more at home, then I get home and forget and that's how I miss many assignments.

Mark's responses indicated that he performed at a very low academic level. He has neglected to do the basic requirements to perform well in school such as attend class regularly and turn in assignments. His desire to get his grades up and pass is what I chose to focus on to help him improve his academic performance.

After ten weeks, I completed a post-interview with Mark about his Academic performance. I started by asking about his current GPA and his plan to improve it. Mark checked his laptop to see his GPA and was ecstatic to show that he raised it from a 1.2 to a 2.4 on a 4.0 scale. I asked him how he pulled it off. He said, "My GPA is up to a 2.4. I've been doing my work before I leave class and turning things in. I've been coming to school every day and asking my teachers for help. All I gotta do is keep going." I couldn't hold my excitement in when I gave him a high five. He maintained a 100% in his academic support class. He raised his technology grade from a 65% to 85.91%. He raised his math grade from 36% to 47.2%. he raised his physical education grade from 78.46 to 87.16. Finally, he had a very small drop in art class from 90.81% to a 90.05%. Excitedly, I continued the interview and asked about his effort in school and study habits. He said,

> At the beginning of the year, I did not put in a lot of effort. But since joining the Scholars, I try. I make sure I'm on track to graduate. I'm asking my teachers if I'm improving and if I'm on the right track to graduate… Now I invest about half my time doing my schoolwork. When I'm at home I'll try to get my work done before I do anything else. Since joining the Scholars, I'm working on submitting my assignments. Even if they are half-done, I'll submit them, then work on them after I get feedback.

Mark's responses to the post-interview questions and his academic progress indicate that his participation in COS had a substantial impact on his academic performance. In his pre-interview, he indicated that he did not complete his assignments very much and that he spent no time studying outside of school. Now he spends time doing assignments before doing other activities and he endeavors to turn them in on time.

Continuing with the post-interview, I asked Mark about his attendance habits and how he enjoys having a mentor. He said,

> I've been going to class a lot more now. I did miss a class this week because I woke up late, but I'm trying… It's good having a mentor. Having someone by your side who will help you, support you, check up on you, tell you that you're a good person, that you're destined for more, it's nice. Since joining the Scholars, I'm doing much better. Before, I didn't really try, but I get it. When you work, you succeed. You achieve.

According to his post-interview answers, Mark's participation in COS helped him gain understanding about the importance of effort in school. He puts forth effort to come to school on time and he values his mentor's advice. His effort and willingness to heed good advice helped him perform at a higher academic level than before he joined COS.

How James's Academic Performance was Affected by The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. Before joining the COS, James had a subpar academic record. During the pre-interview, I asked him about his GPA and overall academic performance. He replied,

> My most recent GPA was a 2.167. I gotta bring it up. I don't want it to be that low. I just know I gotta bring it up. My plan is to bring it up by doing my work, being on time to school, and being on time to my classes… I miss class sometimes, but not all the time. Sometimes I try to make it, sometimes I don't. I miss class about 2-3 days a week. It's hard to know how much effort I put in school. I want to do good, but I also do bad. Sometimes I just do bad and other times I do good. I think I try really hard about 50% of the time. I ain't gonna lie, I miss a lot of assignments, but I still get my grades up, though.

James's low academic performance come from his daily habits. He missed class regularly, put in effort only 50% of the time, and missed several assignments. I chose to help him by teaching him the habits of a successful student and by pushing him to focus on his academic improvement plan.

The post interview was an exciting event for James, who had been striving to improve his academics for the past ten weeks. When I asked James about his grades and school performance during his post-interview, he said,

> I'm still working to get my grades up. I'm getting better at submitting assignments. Sometimes you still have to remind me, but I've been working on turning in my work. Now I'm starting to get my assignments and turn them in on the day I get them. I turn in work more now that I'm in the Chamber of Scholars.

Continuing the post-interview, I asked about his effort in school, assignment management, and attendance. He replied,

> I put a lot of effort in school. I wake up every morning, come to school on time, and go to all of my classes. I usually do my work in class. If I'm taking a class with no work to do, I'll do my other work there. Whatever is left, I do it at home… Since joining the Scholars, I'm working harder to do well in school. I'm working on improving myself... My attendance habits got a little better, but I still have to improve that.

James was not sure about his current GPA, so I allowed him to look it up. He was excited to see his growth and results of his consistent effort. Although he was wearing a medical mask, a large smile was revealed itself on his face. His GPA grew from a 2.167 to a 2.31, an increase of 0.143. When we examined his grade record, it showed consistent growth in every class but one: a biology course in which he earned a 90.75%, the same percentage he earned the previous grading period. His algebra grade increased by 7.35 percentage points; his technology grade increased by 0.9 percentage points; his physical education grade increased by 9.22 percentage points, his history grade increased by 37.56 percentage points; and his English grade increased by 43.94 percentage points. When I asked him how he improved so much, he said, "I want to be something in life. I'm doing what I got to do. The Scholars helped me see that."

Based on his interview responses and grade reports, James's participation in COS directly impacted his academic performance. He evolved from being indifferent to school to being a motivated student. He learned the value of high academic performance and that he had the ability to achieve more. He began to turn in assignments, improve his attendance, and strive to improve his overall academic performance. His confidence grew when he saw the higher marks on his grade report. The COS was successful at helping James improve his academic performance.

Emergent Themes

During the conduction of this study other themes, unrelated to the research questions, began to emerge. One theme is how the intervention became an emotional outlet for the students. It also became a place for students to learn self-value and actively engage in self-improvement. Finally, a theme of supportive brotherhood emerged. Along with addressing the research questions, these emergent themes made the intervention process more meaningfully humanistic for the students and me.

Emotional Outlet. The COS evolved from a targeted mentoring intervention into an emotional outlet for the members. The Scholars talked about the pain of having absentee fathers, living in violent neighborhoods, trust issues, and being in difficult romantic relationships. Planned lessons were often postponed so Scholars could have time to vent about the emotional issues they experienced. These unplanned venting sessions and conversations helped forge a deeper group bond. Also, these sessions created a context in which I, as the group mentor, could teach the Scholars various life lessons such as good decision-making, time management, goal setting, etc. (See Appendix B)

Absentee Father Issues. Mark and James talked about their issues with absentee fathers. Like me, Mark and James were deeply hurt and affected from growing up fatherless. I shared how I used to cry daily because I missed my father. I talked about my disappointment on Friday evenings when he would cancel his scheduled time to take my brothers and me to his house for the weekend. Sharing my personal father issues allowed me to relate to the Scholars more closely. They were more willing to talk candidly about their father issues. As a group, we talked about our father issues and discussed positive ways to cope with them.

Mark, for example, talked about how his father lives within walking distance of him, but never comes to see him. With tears swelling in his eyes, he said, "My pops just don't care. I live right around the corner from him, but he always busy. Like, he don't never make time for me. That's why I don't even mess with him no more." He tilted his head up to hold in the narrowly escaping tear. He spoke further about how he doesn't want children until later in life when he can take care of them.

James, too, spoke about his absentee father. He said, "I've only seen my daddy three times. The last time was at my 12th birthday party. I don't really know where he is now." James talked about how he really wants to be a dad one day so he can do a better job at parenting than his father. I asked him about his plan, and he said, "I don't want much. All I want is a way to take care of my family, so I can be there for them… a job, a nice house in a safe neighborhood and a good wife." Having a family is a motivating factor in James's development.

During our intervention sessions, we talked about planning to be fathers. I encouraged them to pursue education and training so they can start successful businesses or obtain gainful employment. I also encouraged them to postpone starting a family until they were well-established in life with the means to provide. I shared my story of waiting until I was 31 years old before having a child. The Scholars were very receptive to the lesson and planned to establish themselves before starting families.

Living in a Violent Neighborhood. The school site of The COS is characterized partly by poverty and gang violence. News of an enrolled student dying or being wounded from neighborhood violence is unsettlingly commonplace in the school. The constant threat of violence is a source of great stress and anxiety for some of the Scholars. Several intervention sessions included conversations about our experiences with gang violence. I talked about Carl's (my cousin) gang activities and the toll it took on our family, especially my aunt. The Scholars spoke about having lost siblings to gang violence and the prison system. Most sad, though, is the constant fear they have of leaving the house to play outside. We discussed ways to avoid gang violence, including choosing the right friends to spend time with.

Mark shared the story of how his older brother had a friend who was a gang member with violent enemies. One day, Mark's brother was in the car with his gang affiliated friend when rival gang members attempted to kill him. Tragically, a bullet meant for his brother's friend fatally wounded his brother instead. The person who pulled the trigger was never identified. Mark said, "Like, my brother wasn't even doing anything wrong. They was going to the gym to shoot some hoops… now he's gone. That's why I don't even like going outside around here. They shooting every day." Mark's eyes held a sorrowful look of desire for a better life… a safer existence.

Similarly, James talked about his anxiety about walking home each day. He mentioned how his older brother, who is incarcerated, has gang enemies who want to kill him. He said they know he is the younger brother and they've spoken to him before. He fears that his brother's activities might cause him harm. During an intervention session, James said,

> I'm not in no gang, but I can't get away from it. My uncle lives with me and he's gang banging. They shot at my house the other day 'cause they thought he was inside. Them guys know my brother is locked up, but I think they might try to hurt me to send a message to him. It's hard out here! I wish I can just go outside and hoop, but it's just too much going on.

James's face is characterized by a perpetual look of worry and stress. He regularly talks about wanting to move as far from the violence of his neighborhood as he can. During our intervention sessions, I encouraged Mark and James to remain vigilant each day and to separate themselves from gang violence as much as possible. I encouraged them to distance themselves from friends and relatives who live dangerously, and to reject the mentality of gang affiliation. I told them to stay focused on their life goals, and to move to a safer community when they can.

Relationship Issues. Ezra, for example, spoke candidly about the trouble he was having in his relationship with his girlfriend. He stated, "Mr. Collins, I'm insecure. Like, you can say, 'I love you,' and I'll still be like, 'But do you really love me'? That's how I feel. And I think my girlfriend doesn't like that about me." I told him that a good relationship can't work unless he loves himself first. I encouraged him to appreciate himself and know that he is absolutely loveable, regardless of what anyone says. In his reflective journal for that week he wrote, "I can use this week's lesson to make my life better. I need to work on what I don't like about myself. I matter." The emotional outlet component of the intervention is helping him learn to love himself more.

Self-Value. Self-value was a recurring theme throughout the intervention process. As the intervention facilitator, I encouraged the Scholars to value themselves and believe in their academic abilities. I taught them that believe comes before success. In response to weekly reflection journals the Scholars said the following:

"The lessons made me think more about myself and my life… I need to work on what I don't like about myself. I matter. I know my self-value has increased because of The Chamber of Scholars. I'm not sure how much, but I know it increased." – Ezra.

"What I learned is in this class is that we have a bright future, and we are special… I know I have wisdom. I'll use it to show others how we're supposed to live… I feel like I value myself a lot more. I can push myself to higher things in life." – Mark

"I think I'm a lot better than I used to be. I'm a higher person than I used to be. I used to not come to school, but I come now. I've improved." – James

Their reflections show young men who are learning to value and respect themselves. Their budding self-value and self-respect are contributing to their desires to be positive examples and consistently evolving individuals.

Self-Improvement. Self-improvement was a major takeaway for the Scholars. Every session of the intervention stressed the importance of self-improvement in one form or another. I repeated the idea that we all could become greater individuals if we consistently worked on improving ourselves. I encouraged the Scholars to improve academically, improve their attendance, and improve their attitudes. In response to weekly reflection journals the Scholars said the following:

I can use what we talked about and adapt it into my life… I have to work on procrastinating less and making myself happy… I'm working on applying good advice so I can be better that I have been… I focus on myself more and I reflect so I can improve.

 – Ezra

This class can help me be a better me. I'm bettering myself… This lesson has taught me to do better as a person and a student. Since being in Scholars, I learned how to talk to people. I learned to open up and express myself. – Mark

I'm working on improving myself. I'm working on going to class. I learned a lot this week. I learned to always be positive and not negative. I've improved in going to class. There was a time I didn't, but now I'm going and I'm trying. – James

The Scholars have responded well to the daily encouragement to improve themselves in various facets of their lives.

Brotherhood. A supportive cohesion among the Scholars developed with each session. As they became more familiar with one another, the spirit of support and brotherhood grew. It became a common sight to see them encouraging each other to strive for success. The Scholars even began recruiting other African American male students to join the group. In response to weekly reflection journals the Scholars said the following:

"On the first few days of the Scholars, I felt awkward with the guys because I didn't know them. But now we talk and throw the ball around, eat pizza and have fun. The Scholars are my brothers." – Ezra

"I learned in this class we are all brothers… We a brotherhood really. We're creating a bond slowly but surely. When we see each other in the hallway, we talk to each other, and we spend time together. We getting tighter all the time." – Mark

"I definitely feel like the Scholars are my brothers. The guys in this brotherhood are there for me and I'm there for them. We stay close with each other. If my brothers don't turn their work in or come to school on time, I get on them about that. And they get on me too." – James

James and Ezra brought a potential recruit to the COS to meet me. While telling him about the intervention James said, "This is a place where you can get with your friends and really work on being better in school"

Ezra followed up and said "You gotta get your grades up and attendance, but really we together in this. We all trying to do better together"

One of the activities we did was a game called goalsetting catch. The object of the game is for the Scholars to make goals before catching a ball. The thrower of the ball is supposed to make it difficult to catch, which shows that not all goals are easy to achieve. I noted that when a Scholar would miss a catch, the other Scholars would shout, "Pick up your goal! You can't quick just because it fell! Pick it up!" This was a very encouraging moment in the group which showed brotherly support.

Recommendations for Educators

Help Students Increase Identification with Academics

Identification with academics is the extent to which a student personally values and strives toward academic excellence. A common goal of school-based mentorship programs like COS is to help students gain higher levels of identification with academics. In order to do so, educators must first establish and maintain a personal, trusting relationship with the students in their care. This can be done by simply asking about students' interests and sharing their own. Once a meaningful relationship is formed, an educator may directly ask students how they feel about school and why. At this point, educators should listen intently to students' answers because they generally reveal valuable information that can be useful when helping students learn to value academic excellence.

Furthermore, educators should use their knowledge of their students' personal interests and past academic experiences to explain why academic excellence would be valuable to them. For example, several members of COS expressed interest in playing professional sports. I explained that professional athletic recruiters often visit universities to scout potential players. I then began to explain the college admission process and the value of striving for academic excellence in high school. With that knowledge, the students gained a deeper appreciation for the role of academics in the grand scheme of their lives.

Also, educators should consider incentivizing academic achievement with small, consistent rewards. A simple acknowledgement of a student's academic growth can greatly affect change. I gave members of the program pizza once a week if they showed any level of academic growth, no matter how small. Students began to give themselves goals such as going to class all five days of the week or making up at least one missing assignment that week. The result of the incentive encouraged the students to value academic growth.

Help Students Believe They Matter to their School

Mattering is the feeling of assurance a student gets when he or she feels important, special, noticed, and supported by the teachers in their school (Freeman, 1999; Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine, 2010). Again, educators have the responsibility to establish personal, trusting relationships with students. Once those relationships are established, educators, especially those facilitating a mentorship program, should make intentional efforts to demonstrate to their students that they matter to them. There are many ways to do this, the simplest of which may be to tell them daily. Educators can also frequently display small, personalized gestures to help students feel like they matter. I told the participants that they were important to me every day. I also talked to each

student individually at least once per week to inquire about their wellbeing. The students showed appreciation for mattering me by periodically giving me thanks for my role in their lives. Ezra, the senior, completed several assignments for a class and told me he did it so he wouldn't let me down.

Additionally, educators can display simple gestures to demonstrate to students they matter. I listened to the issues his students experienced in their daily lives and gave them personalized encouraging greeting cards addressing those issues at least every two weeks. I also called them on the weekends to ask if they were doing their homework. Furthermore, I often made myself available to students during my personal lunch period when they needed to talk or make up work. The list of what can be done to demonstrate to students that they matter can be extensive, but the principal is simple: listen to the needs of students and be available to serve those needs of students daily.

Help Students Improve Overall Academic Performance

Improvement of academic performance within this study is any improvement in any academic area. Mentorship programs like COS generally strive to help students improve academically. Since educators cannot perform *for* their students, they must learn to influence their students to perform at higher levels on their own. Before educators can significantly influence students to strive to improve their academic performance, they must first establish and maintain a personal, trusting relationship with their students. The closer students feel to their teachers, the more willing they are to listen to them and please them. In mentorship programs like COS, the intervention facilitator showed great joy when students performed well. He also, showed measured disappointment when they did not perform well. Part of why the members of COS strove to improve academically was to please their mentor.

Additionally, educators can ensure that students have all the academic supports necessary to improve academically. Learning what those supports are may require educators to review students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), talk to all students' teachers, call students' parents, or simply ask students what support they need. This can take considerable time, but it is necessary to help. I contacted all the teachers of his students and asked them about their performance and what needed to be done to improve. I used that information to tailor intervention sessions to fit the needs of students.

Finally, educators must constantly encourage students to perform better. Doing so shows that academic performance is highly valued. Encouragement can be a cheerful boost for students to do their schoolwork, or it can be an assuring declaration that students are capable of success. The intervention facilitator told his students that they had greatness in them every day. He told them that they were more intelligent, capable, and powerful than they could know. He praised every effort to improve. The members of the intervention appreciated the constant encouragement.

Conclusion

Conclusion of the Problem

Nationwide, African American male students are a low performing group of students in the United States school system, compared to other groups. They account for higher-than-average dropout rates, out of school suspension rates, truancy rates and lower test scores in reading and math on the National Assessment of Educational Practice (NCES, 2020; Maynard et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This narrative inquiry study addressed the national need for targeted interventions to help African American male students improve their academic performance by evaluating a mentoring program call The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. Consistent with the literature, this study found that mentoring helped student participants increase their identification with academics, feel as if they matter in school, and improve academic performance (Bianco, Leech, & Mitchell, 2011; Biggs, Musewe, & Harvey, 2014; Ellis et al., 2018; Hanlon et al., 2009; Holcomb-McCoy, 2011; Orrock & Clark, 2018; Scott, Taylor, & Palmer, 2013; Tolbert & Maxson, 2015; Wyatt, 2009). My role as a supportive mentor who insisted on academic growth helped the students strive to earn academic gains which is a sign of increased identification with academics. My consistent attention and concern for the welfare of the students, which included giving them weekend phone calls and personalized greeting cards, helped the students feel special and appreciated, which is an indication that they believed they mattered to me. Finally, each student increased their rolling GPA since starting the intervention, which indicates that they improved academically since starting.

Conclusion of the Purpose

This narrative inquiry study told the academic stories of students who participated in a school-based academic mentoring intervention that exclusively targeted African American male students in secondary school. The rich stories from participants demonstrated the transformative power of mentorship on a marginalized group. Each story, unique in its telling, ended the same: with young African American male students increasing their identification with academics, feeling that they matter to their school, improving their academic performance, and gaining strong bonds with a supportive group of fellows and a caring mentor. The safe environment which consisted of all African American male students focused on academic achievement helped them increase their identification with schooling as was indicated by Gordon et al (2009). The sense of mattering to the school helped the students become more willing to strive toward academic excellence as was shown by Freeman (1999) and Tucker, Dixon, & Griddine (2010). The overall academic growth the students in the intervention indicates that mentoring is a useful resource for helping students improve academically.

Suggestions for Further Study

The information provided by the results of this narrative inquiry study can be a resource for educational leaders who desire to design and implement subsequent school-based mentorship interventions for African American male students nationwide. The information may also be applicable to other sub-groups such as female students, or even a broader group of students. Educators should consider repeating this study with students who demonstrate need for academic or mental/emotional support.

Based on the results of the study, more research should be done on how African American male students can benefit from African American male teachers. Also, since students regularly participated in group conversations to alleviate emotional stress, research should be done on how group therapy can impact the academic performance of African American male students. Finally, research should be conducted on how classroom teachers can adopt some of the practices of mentors while managing a classroom. I found that the

most productive days in the intervention sessions was when I chose not to do the lesson plan and allow students to express themselves about their personal issues in conversations. If more teachers understood how to do this and effectively teach their lessons, then the field of education can be elevated. These suggestions for further research may lead to findings that can improve the way educators connect with and impact students.

Limitations

A limitation to this study was that it was limited to a single gender and ethnic background: African American male students in secondary school. The results of this study can only be applied to that narrow demographic. Also, the study was open for voluntary student participants only, which limited the range of available student data. My intervention class consisted of 10 students, but only six volunteered to participate. Once the intervention started, two students never showed up, and one student withdrew prematurely. Given the circumstances, I was only able to report on the full progress of three volunteers. Another limitation was confirming the validity of the information in the interviews. Although interviews were anonymous, there was no way to guard against false information. There was also the chance of response participant bias because they wanted to please me, their teacher. Furthermore, a limitation was the students' willingness to answer certain questions or participate in certain activities due to personal apprehensions. Since all participation is voluntary, some students did not fully participate in all the activities. Also, attendance impacted data collection because some students missed school for multiple reasons, which reduced their intervention time. Finally, the data for this study was collected over 10 weeks, a grading period. The data would be richer if it lasted for a full school year.

"Mr. Collins, I just wanted to say thank you for being one of the teachers who really cared about us. High school was a really hard time for me, but you let me know that it was temporary and that I would be okay if I kept moving forward." These words were spoken by Eric, an entrepreneur in the transportation industry, and former member of The Chamber of Scholars: African American Male Mentoring Intervention. I feel deep pride whenever my former students thank me for my service to them, especially my Chamber Scholars. More important to me than their warm expressions of gratitude, though, is witnessing the success they are building in their lives using the lessons I taught them. Since I enjoy the gratitude and success of my mentees, I feel it is only right to express my gratitude to my mentors.

Thank you all for believing in me and pushing me beyond all perceived limits. Because of you, I dedicated my life to the service of young people. I'm paying you back by reaching for my success and pushing others to their success. I hope you are proud.

Thank you!

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Appendices

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

The following interview questions were asked to the intervention participants before and after the intervention.

This interview is being audio-recorded for research purposes. Should you wish to stop the recording at any time, please let me know. Do you agree to being audio-recorded? recording starts now.

1. Overall, is school a place you enjoy, dislike, or consider to be a neutral entity in your life? Explain your answer.
2. From your personal perspective, how important is it for you to perform well in school? Explain your answer.
3. What benefits do you personally gain from performing well in school?
4. Describe how much you believe you matter to the teachers/administrators in your school.
5. Tell me about a teacher/administrator who would personally notice and talk to you if you performed very well, or very poorly in school.
6. Tell me about a time, in considerable detail, that a teacher/administrator has demonstrated that you matter/don't matter to them.
7. Do you believe that all or most of your teachers would provide you with adequate academic support if you asked?
8. What is your current GPA and what is your plan to improve it?
9. How often do you put forth genuine effort to do well in school?
10. About how much time do you invest doing schoolwork during class and after school?
11. How often to you miss class for an unexcused reason?
12. How often do you forget to submit assignments?
13. Do you want a school-based mentor to check up on you regularly?
14. Are you willing to push yourself to perform at a higher level in school?
15. Are you interested in participating in a mentoring program for African American male students called The Chamber of Scholars?

Appendix B

The Chamber of Scholars Daily Activities Agenda

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
1	1	Introduce The Chamber of Scholars Intervention Program	Gives Chamber Scholars an understanding of what they are going to be doing and allows them to opt out if they desire.
		Introduction of facilitator and all Chamber Scholars	Helps build a community of trust and rapport.
		Learn and recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Establishes and reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	2	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Define King and Leader and tell them that is what they are.	Builds the self-esteem of Chamber Scholars by transforming their self-image to something positive and powerful.
		Teach Scholars how to tie a necktie and give the expectation that every Tuesday they will wear business casual attire consisting of a shirt and tie, khakis or dress slacks, a belt, and conservative shoes.	Helps Chamber Scholars become accustomed to professional attire and grooming, so they will be prepared when they enter the professional world.
	3	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Modern article about Black excellence	Gives Chamber Scholars a positive image of what they can aspire to become.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
	4	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.

		Start reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
	5	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
		Weekly Accountability Check: Baseline data (Check attendance, grades. Give attendance and academic goals to each student.)	Gives students an incentive to increase attendance and excel academically because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance.

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
2	6	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Read a modern article about the importance of self-esteem and positive self-worth from a Black perspective.	Gives Chamber Scholars a sense of pride and self-esteem. Helps them understand their identity.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
	7	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.

	Continue reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
8	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Discussion: What does it mean to be a proud Black man?	Encourages thoughtful discussion of the many positive aspects of Black male culture to further reinforce a positive self-image.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
9	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Journal Time: Why are/aren't you proud to be a Black man? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Reinforces a positive self-image.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
10	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work

individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.

| | | Weekly Accountability Check: Baseline data (Check attendance, grades. Give attendance and academic goals to each student.) | Gives students an incentive to increase attendance and excel academically because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance. |

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
3	11	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Read a modern article about the importance of mentorship and explain that they must be leaders and mentors to others behind them	Gives Chamber Scholars a sense of responsibility to others, which encourages higher personal performance.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
	12	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Continue reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants Chamber Scholars time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
	13	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Discussion: What does it mean to be a mentor?	Encourages thoughtful discussion of the many positive aspects of Black male culture to further reinforce a

positive self-image.

		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
	14	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Journal Time: What is the value of a mentor to you? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Promotes buy-in to the mentorship process.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
	15	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally. Demonstrates the seriousness of academics.
		Weekly Accountability Checks (Check attendance, grades, and dress-code compliance of each student)	Gives students an incentive to increase attendance, excel academically, and comport themselves professionally because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance.

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
4	16	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Read a modern article about the importance of networking and brotherhood from a Black perspective.	Gives Chamber Scholars an understanding of the importance of working collaboratively in a community of likeminded individuals.

	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
17	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Continue reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
18	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Discussion: Why is networking and brotherhood important?	Encourages thoughtful discussion of the many positive aspects of Black male culture to further reinforce a positive self-image.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally
19	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Journal Time: If you had the opportunity, who would you like to network with? How would your networking session help you attain your goals? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful discussion of the Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Reinforces the need to network with positive mentors and make goals.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.

		20	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
			Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
			Weekly Accountability Checks (Check attendance, grades, and dress-code compliance of each student)	Gives students an incentive to increase attendance, excel academically, and comport themselves professionally because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance.

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
5	21	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Read a modern article about the school to prison pipeline.	Gives Chamber Scholars an understanding of how the American Justice system can target individuals who look like them. Gives them strategies to transcend the unfair systems in place.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	22	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Continue reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	23	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.

		Discussion: What can you do to avoid the social traps against Black males in American society?	Encourages thoughtful discussion of the many positive aspects of Black male culture to further reinforce a positive self-image.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally
	24	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Journal Time: What social traps threaten you daily? How will you personally transcend them? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Also warns about aspects of American society that may prove detrimental to a developing Black male.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	25	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
		Weekly Accountability Checks (Check attendance, grades, and dress-code compliance of each student)	Gives students an incentive to increase attendance, excel academically, and comport themselves professionally because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance.

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
6	26	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.

	Read a modern article about the importance of goal setting from a Black perspective.	Gives Chamber Scholars an understanding of how important goal setting and life planning is for success.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
27	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Create S.M.A.R.T. Goals	Helps Chamber Scholars develop and apply the practical skill of setting attainable goals.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
28	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Discussion: Why are goals important? What goals are you working on?	Encourages thoughtful discussion of the goals Chamber Scholars have and offers a network of individuals to help them achieve those goals.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally
29	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Journal Time: Create a S.M.A.R.T. goal for yourself. How has your motivation to achieve your goal improved since wiring it down? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Reinforces the importance of goal setting and achievement.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study

			excellence individually and communally.
	30	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
		Weekly Accountability Checks (Check attendance, grades, and dress-code compliance of each student)	Gives students an incentive to increase attendance, excel academically, and comport themselves professionally because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance.

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
7	31	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Read a modern article about anger management.	Gives Chamber Scholars an understanding of how to manage emotions and daily life.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	32	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Continue reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	33	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.

		Discussion: How can you better manage your temper/emotions as you make daily decisions?	Encourages thoughtful discussion of the many positive aspects of Black male culture to further reinforce a positive self-image.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally
	34	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Journal Time: When have you lost your temper? What strategies do you need to implement to maintain control in the future? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Supports use of anger management techniques.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	35	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
		Weekly Accountability Checks (Check attendance, grades, and dress-code compliance of each student)	Gives students an incentive to increase attendance, excel academically, and comport themselves professionally because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance.

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
8	36	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Read a modern article about how drug use destroys individuals and communities.	Gives Chamber Scholars an understanding of how

		dangerous drug use is to individuals and communities.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
37	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Continue reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
38	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Discussion: Why is remaining sober the best path for success?	Encourages thoughtful discussion of the many positive aspects of Black male culture to further reinforce a positive self-image.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally
39	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Journal Time: What factors encourage you to try drugs and alcohol most often? What is your strategy for remaining sober throughout life? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Discourages drug use and encourages a lifestyle of sobriety.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence..

	40	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
		Weekly Accountability Checks (Check attendance, grades, and dress-code compliance of each student)	Gives students an incentive to increase attendance, excel academically, and comport themselves professionally because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance.

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
9	41	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Read a modern article about the options of college, trade school, or the military.	Gives Chamber Scholars an overview of their options after high school.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	42	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Continue reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	43	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Discussion: What is the best route for you after high school? What can you do now to prep	Encourages discussion and reflection about planning for a positive future.

		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally
	44	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Journal Time: How are you going to explore your options for after high school (visit a college, visit a military recruiter, job shadow, etc.)? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Reinforces the need to plan for life after high school.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
	45	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
		Weekly Accountability Checks (Check attendance, grades, and dress-code compliance of each student)	Gives students an incentive to increase attendance, excel academically, and comport themselves professionally because they know they will have to give an account for their weekly performance.

Week	Day	Learning Activity	Rationale
10	46	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
		Read a modern article about entrepreneurship from a Black perspective.	Gives Chamber Scholars an understanding about the benefits of entrepreneurship.
		Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.

47	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Continue reading the textbook *African American History: A Journey of Liberation* by Dr. Molefi Kete Asante	Teaches the true history of Black Americans to instill pride and self-worth.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
48	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Discussion: What skills do you have that you can use to start of business?	Encourages thoughtful discussion and reflection about entrepreneurship.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally
49	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	Journal Time: What type of business would you like to start? What is your plan to make it happen? Continue/review readings. Discuss the week's readings	Encourages thoughtful writing and reflection about the many positive aspects of Black male culture. Inspires entrepreneurship.
	Collaborative Homework Time	Grants students time to study as they work toward academic excellence individually and communally.
50	Recite "The Chamber of Scholars Creed"	Reinforces the positive self-image necessary to be a successful individual.
	The Chamber of Scholars Awards Ceremony.	**Encourages, rewards, and reinforces the positive behaviors taught within The Chamber of Scholars.**

Appendix C

<u>*The Chamber of Scholars Core Components and Rationale*</u>

Component	Rationale
Black Male Mentor - The Chamber of Scholars Intervention Program will be facilitated by a supportive Black male mentor	Chamber Scholars will be more likely to form a personal connection with a mentor who shares their cultural background. A strong relationship between mentor and mentee will be beneficial as Chamber Scholars listen to advice to adjust their academic habits for improvement.
Consistent Positive Affirmation - Chamber Scholars will be given positive affirmations to memorize and repeat daily.	Positive self-image impacts student motivation. Constantly reinforcing a positive self-image will increase the Chamber Scholars' motivation to strive toward academic excellence.
Culturally Relevant Readings - The Intervention Facilitator will give both historical and modern readings about Black cultural heritage and global contributions.	Historical and modern evidence of Black excellence will reinforce the positive self-image necessary to motivate Chamber Scholars to excel academically.
Accountability Check-ins and Rewards Ceremony - A weekly conference between the Intervention Facilitator (in the role of mentor) and Chamber Scholars (in the role of mentee) about the student's performance (grades, attendance, professional attire, positive behavior). Positive check-ins result in weekly rewards. The Program culminates with an Awards ceremony to reward positive changes.	This will motivate Chamber Scholars to self-monitor daily because they know they will have to account for their actions. The check-ins are designed to increase grades and attendance, promote professional attire, and reward positive behavior. The Awards Ceremony will give recognition to Chamber Scholars who demonstrated the principles of The Chamber of Scholars.
Community Support (Guest Speakers) - Guest speakers from the community share information, opportunities, and resources with Chamber Scholars.	Community support is an out-of-school way to reinforce the positive lessons students receive in school. It connects students with individuals, distinct from their teachers, who can help them grow and develop.
Pre/Post Grade Comparison - The Intervention Facilitator will compare the academic performance (overall GPA, and grade in each individual class) of Chamber Scholars before the intervention to their academic performance at the conclusion of the intervention.	A simple examination of academic performance before and after the intervention will show whether the intervention was successful. Other factors, such as what was the most effective method of intervention, can also be examined.
Pre/Post Interview - The Intervention Facilitator will compare the Scholars' pre-interview and post-interview responses.	A method to determine whether the COS was successful at increasing their identification with academics and helping them feel that they matter to their school.

Appendix D

The Chamber of Scholars Recruitment Script

Recruitment Script

Hello Student!

I hope you are in good mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health! I'm Mr. Collins, a High School Teacher at a local High School. I came looking for you because I think you will be an amazing Scholar. I am honored to be The Program Facilitator of The Chamber of Scholars. The Chamber of Scholars is a male mentoring program designed to help African American young men thrive academically and socially and obtain lifelong success. Specifically, we aim to help you increase grades, attendance, and positive social behavior while decreasing behavior issues. It is our hope to see all Scholars become productive, stable, and service-oriented individuals. I was hoping that you would like to join us. Are you interested in checking us out?

If Yes: Hand him Parental Consent Form

Awesome! Come visit me in the classroom indicated on the Parental Consent Form at the specified time. Be sure to give this Parental Consent Form to your parent/guardian IMMEDIATELY. It must be signed for you to participate.

If No: Invite him to visit anytime because enrollment never closes.

That's totally fine. We're always around in the classroom at this specified time. If you ever want to join us, just come on by and we will help you out.

Appendix E

The Chamber of Scholars Research Study

Journal Prompts

1. Why are/aren't you proud to be a Black man?
2. What is the value of a mentor to you?
3. If you had the opportunity, who would you like to network with? How would your networking session help you attain your goals?
4. What social traps threaten you daily? How will you personally transcend them?
5. Create a S.M.A.R.T. goal for yourself. How has your motivation to achieve your goal improved since writing it down?
6. When have you lost your temper? What strategies do you need to implement to maintain control in the future?
7. What factors encourage you to try drugs and alcohol most often? What is your strategy for remaining sober throughout life?
8. How are you going to explore your options for after high school (visit a college, visit a military recruiter, job shadow, etc.)?
9. What type of business would you like to start? What is your plan to make it happen?