

Successful Schools for African American Children: A Case Study of Franklin Elementary School

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SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN:
A CASE STUDY OF FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

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Abstract
SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN:
A CASE STUDY OF FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Staci L. Kimmons

Marquette University, 2012

The goal of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of what makes a successful school for African American children. Theresa Perry's (2010) *Theory of Practice for African American School Achievement* provided the framework for my study. Perry states that schools need to have two characteristics for African American students to be successful. First African American students must be members of a community of practice, which normalizes achievement. Second, schools must offer a broad range of supports that allow students to learn, to practice, and to receive reinforcement with regard to the behaviors and practices that are necessary for one to be an achiever. Guided by Perry's framework, I conducted a case study of a Franklin Elementary, a school whose academic achievement test data indicate that they are successful in educating African American children.

Three forms of data were collected and analyzed for this study: survey, interview, and documentations. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Interview and documentation data were analyzed using the cut and sort method, in which documents were cut and repeatedly sorted to detect themes related to Perry's framework.

I applied my findings to operationalize Perry's framework, in an effort to provide helpful guidance for other schools serving African American children. The knowledge gained in this study contributes to a better understanding of what makes a successful school for African American children

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Staci L. Kimmons

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Lastly, I thank Mrs. Nola Starling-Ratliff for serving as a mentor, colleague, and friend. Your support of me throughout this process has been invaluable. I could not have completed this without you.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the educators in my life, my family.

First, I would like to dedicate this to my parents: Charles and Rosalind Johnson. My parents have always preached the value of education and made many sacrifices to provide me with the best education. I am thankful to have parents who pushed me to attain the highest level of education possible and thus encouraged me and supported me throughout this journey.

I also dedicate this to my grandmother, Anna Baker and my uncle, Dexter Baker. Though both have passed on, they were among my first teachers. I am thankful for the example they provided me with both as educators and individuals.

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Chapter One

Introduction To The Study

One widely known fact among educators is that there is currently a racial gap in educational achievement at schools across the country. An achievement gap is reflected in the discrepancy between majority and minority group students in a variety of educational measures, such as grades, graduation rates, and most notably standardized test scores. In terms of academic performance, White students regardless of socioeconomic status are outperforming African American students (Gosa & Alexander, 2007). Effects of the achievement gap persist, negatively impacting college admission and completion rates (Pressley, M., Raphael, L., Gallagher, J., & DiBella, J., 2004). While much research has been devoted to describing the problem of the racial achievement gap, educators and scholars acknowledge that efforts must shift from admiring the problem to finding real and long-term solutions.

Many reform efforts and policy initiatives have been developed and implemented in effort to provide solutions. For instance, accountability measures such as No Child Left Behind, once thought to be a major engine of change have done little to reduce educational inequality (Payne, 2008). Other reform efforts include restructuring traditional public schools into charter schools and publicly funding private schools through voucher programs (Payne, 2008). However, to date, none of these reform efforts have had a significant impact on the achievement gap (Payne 2008, Ravitch, 2010). Perhaps of greater significance is the work of scholars such as Theresa Perry. Rather than seeking quick-fix type solutions, this work provides us with insight into key behaviors and practices that could be implemented at schools to bring closure to the racial achievement gap, and to specifically improve the educational outcomes of African

American students. The field needs a long-term, comprehensive approach to deal with educational inequities. The work of scholars such as Theresa Perry provides a framework for doing so.

Conceptual Underpinnings for the Study

Perry's (2010) *Theory of Practice for African American School Achievement* provides a theoretical framework for examining successful schools for African American students. Perry states that schools need to have two characteristics for African American students to be successful. First African American students must be members of a community of practice which normalizes achievement, meaning African American students must be given the opportunity to participate as full members in an educational organization or program, in which membership means being an achiever. She argues African American students will be more successful in schools where their competence rather than incompetence is assumed. Second, schools must offer a broad range of supports that allow students to learn, to practice, and to receive reinforcement with regard to the behaviors and practices that are necessary for one to be an achiever. She notes that these behaviors and practices include persistence, hard work, thoroughness, and a commitment to excellence.

Payne (2008) reinforces this framework. Like Perry, Payne refrained from examining causes for the current racial achievement gap and instead focused on characteristics of what he termed "gap-closing" schools, referring to schools that have experienced success in educating African American children. Payne cited a study conducted by Lee (1999), which tried to assess the relative impact of social support as against academic pressure. Lee and his colleagues surveyed 28,000 Chicago sixth and

eight graders and more than 5,000 teachers in 304 elementary and middle schools. In language parallel to Perry, Payne concludes “social support and academic press each independently made a meaningful difference, but when both are present at high levels, the results can be striking” (p. 100).

This theoretical framework is supported by empirical-scholarship discussing African American student achievement. Anderson’s (1988) *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* examines the development and operations of the first African American schools. This work identifies characteristics of successful schools for African American children. The schools in his study exhibited high expectations for all students and accepted nothing less. With the schools as the core of the community, the students were afforded supports for achievement both at school and at home. Delpit’s *Other People’s Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom* (1996) reinforces Perry’s (2010) framework by highlighting the importance of specific supports for the achievement of children of color. Delpit specifically emphasizes parental involvement, the importance of relationships and trust, and acknowledgement of the important role that both culture and power play in educating other people’s children.

Oakes (2005) and Fullan (2001) used a different framework to examine effects of structural components of contemporary schools on African American children. In a study of twenty-five junior and senior high schools throughout the country, Oakes’ presents the ways in which schools inhibit the learning of minority students. Specifically, Oakes discusses how educator bias leads to minority students being placed into lower level classes, characterized by low levels of instruction, poor student-teacher relationships, and lack of preparation for their educational future. She notes that “Much of the curricular

content of the low-track classes was such that it would be likely to lock students into that track level- not so much as a result of the topics that were included for instruction but because of the topics that were omitted” (p. 78). These practices, she argued fostered low levels of academic performance. Fullan appears to support Oakes’ findings. He found that schools structured to achieve success with all students first need to change their beliefs, specifically teachers’ beliefs that all students are capable of achieving.

The work of Perry, Oakes, Fullan, and others have piqued my interest in looking at schools that are showing success with students, specifically African American students. If one school can achieve success, we can presume that others are also capable of doing so.

Statement of the Problem

We need to know more about schooling that positively affects African Americans. Little is known about schooling that positively affects African Americans (Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher, & DiBella, 2004). As Payne (2008) states, “One success tells us more than a thousand failures: one success tells us what is possible” (p. 7). A study of a school, such as Franklin Elementary, in which African American students are experiencing academic success is important and needed for several reasons. Exploring a traditional public school, which shows signs of eliminating the achievement gap, provides us with hope of establishing a model for successful reform and long-term solutions to the achievement gap between African American and White students. I believe such schools and their attributes can provide us with models for the very deliberate actions that must be taken for us to have the long-term solution to the educational inequities that our African American children experience.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of what makes a successful school for African American children. Using Perry's (2010) theoretical framework, I pose three research questions:

- 1) In what ways do African American students at Franklin Elementary School belong to communities of practice that normalize academic achievement?
- 2) What routines, policies, and practices occur within Franklin Elementary School that support academic achievement?
- 3) What factors (if any) beyond Perry's framework emerge as central to academic achievement of African American students at Franklin Elementary School?

While literature supports Perry's (2010) framework for examining successful schools for African American students, a major weakness was that evidence illustrating the framework remains anecdotal. In my review of current empirical studies I found that Perry's theory, while supported by some empirical literature, has not been directly applied to an empirical study. My aim was to test Perry's framework by using it to guide a study of a school that has been successful with African American students. Perry's (2010) theoretical framework of African American achievement is plausible, but neither grounded in empirical evidence nor articulated in actionable language. My hope was that this case study, will be able to operationalize Perry's theory and provide insight into some of its strengths and limitations in describing an actual school. I employed several types of data including:

- Surveying teachers and students to assess whether communities of practice normalizing academic achievement exist at the school.
- Surveying teachers and students to assess what (if any) supports exist to support student academic achievement.
- Surveying teachers and students to assess what (if any) factors beyond those identified in Perry's framework contribute to the high level of academic achievement at the school.
- Reviewing documents including the school website, school calendar, school improvement plan, school newsletters, and state assessment data.
- Interviewing the school principal, selected teachers, and selected parents of African American children to share the findings of the survey and to provide them with the opportunity to share any factors beyond those identified in the survey which contribute to the high level of African American academic achievement at the school.

I further hope that the findings will provide usable strategies for other schools, in efforts to replicate similar success for African American students. Finally, I hope that applying Perry's theory to the study of a school will make it less ambiguous and identify potential limitations of the theory, including factors not identified by Perry.

The Role and Background of the Researcher

As an African American female, this topic has personal significance to me. My father has a high-school education and worked in a local factory for forty years. My mother holds two graduate degrees and spent over thirty-five years as an educator in the public school system. My mother states that her observations of the low expectations and stereotypes that many of her White colleagues held for African American students led to my parents' decision to enroll me in private schools. For lower school (elementary) and middle school, I attended a private college-preparatory school. For high school I attended my mother's alma mater, a Catholic school. Having completed a bachelor's program and two master's programs, I can honestly say I have do not feel like I encountered any negative judgments based on my race, throughout my education. To the contrary, as a student, I have always felt that my teachers genuinely wanted me to succeed and believed in my ability to do so. My K-12 schools were small and supportive, and family involvement was the norm. While I attended large public, state universities for both college and graduate school, I still do not feel I was judged based upon my race.

It was not until my later experiences in the world of work that I would be enlightened to the discrimination my parents deliberately shielded me from and what I believe has contributed to our current racial achievement gap. I observed educators with low, and in some cases, no expectations for African American students. I observed potentially beneficial information about programs and opportunities being withheld from African American students and families. And I observed educators using Special Education referrals as a means of segregating African American students, particularly African American boys.

I saw the color line when I entered my first job as an educator. I worked as a school counselor at a public high school in a small city in Southeastern Wisconsin. Although public, this school was a specialty magnet school for students interested in pursuing careers in Business, Communications, and Biotechnology. My first observation was not a difference in expectations for African American students or stereotypes about African American students, but rather an absence of African American students. I could only conclude that either African American students were not interested in these areas of specialty or African American students and parents were not educated about the availability of the programs provided at this school. I tend to believe the latter.

In my second job as a school counselor was at a public school located in a small, working-class city outside of Atlanta, Georgia. This school was predominately African American, with a small population of Hispanic, White, and Vietnamese students. It would take me two years to digest what I observed at this school. While described as a comprehensive high school, it was anything but. There were two programs of study: College Preparatory and Career Preparatory. The course requirements for each of these programs were markedly different, with the Career Preparatory program essentially disqualifying students from college admissions due to the low-level Mathematics, Science, and English coursework. Students in the Career Preparatory program were discouraged from taking the ACT or SAT, and as a new counselor I was told not to give Career Preparatory students information about or registration materials for either exam, as they would lower the school's scores. I was disheartened to observe that the majority of students enrolled in this program were African American and Hispanic, with the College Preparatory program composed primarily of White and Vietnamese students. The program of study was largely decided before students even reached high school, with middle school teachers

making the determination of which program they felt students would be most successful in. I found it ironic that they clearly felt that the African American and Hispanic students would be most successful in a program of study that would clearly disqualify them from the most successful career and college options after high school.

I would go on to work as a counselor at another high school in the Atlanta area, which was once, described by *Atlanta Magazine* as “the most diverse school in Metro Atlanta”. Located in an affluent suburb, this school was composed of White, African American, Hispanic, and Asian students. Like my previous school, this high school had two programs of study College Preparatory and Career Preparatory, as well as a Magnet program for Mathematics and Science. However, classification in the programs was not racially identifiable. The African American and Hispanic students at this school were just as likely to be enrolled in the College Preparatory and Magnet programs as their White peers. In fact, very few students of any race enrolled solely in the Career Preparatory program. It was far more likely that students graduating for this school would fulfill the requirements of both the College and Career Preparatory programs, giving themselves some exposure to the world of work, completing internships, and establishing a career network that would be useful beyond high school. I also observed a young, diverse group of teachers who held high expectations for their students and for themselves. Students and teachers worked closely together in and outside of the classroom, teachers were present to support students whether it was in the classroom or at an extracurricular or sporting event, and there were very close ties between the home and the school. It was not uncommon for teachers at this school to socialize with the parents of their students.

My final job as an educator was in a small, urban school system located outside of Milwaukee. It should be noted that this school system is in my hometown. In this system I

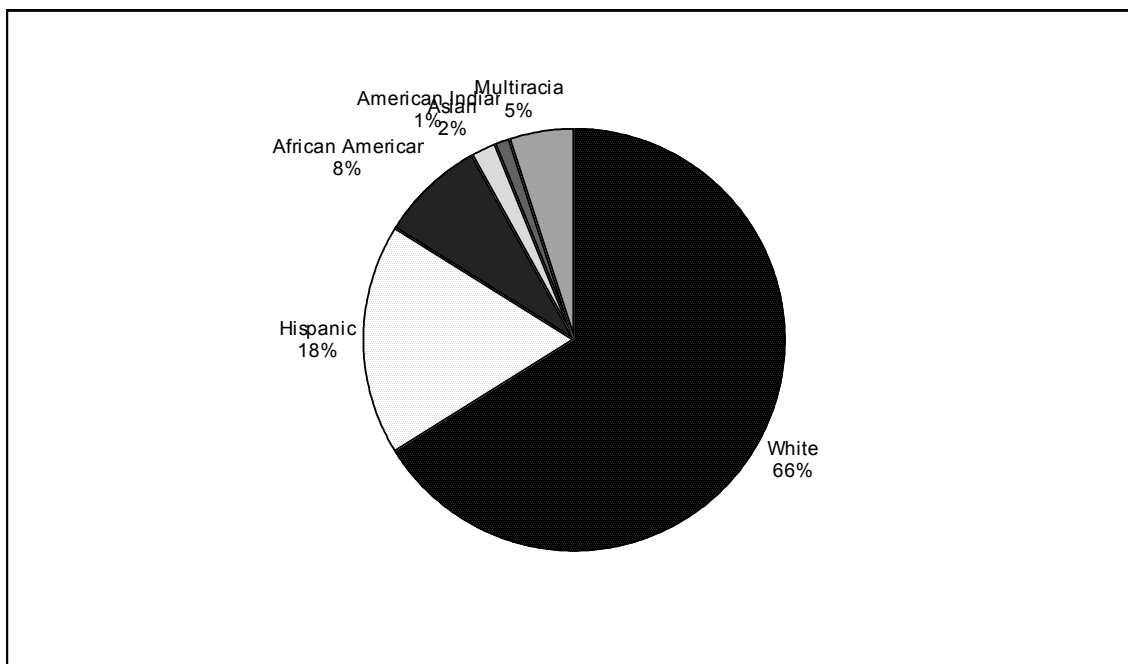
served as an administrator at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. Each of my schools was racially diverse, with a large composition of African American and Hispanic students. In each of my school's African American and Hispanic students struggled to achieve at the level of their White peers, with Hispanic students outperforming the African Americans. Sadly I observed very low expectations for students throughout this system, regardless of race. The high school graduation requirements were minimal and did not prepare students to enter competitive colleges/ universities, much less to be successful at non-competitive ones. This low-level of expectation was consistently blamed on the high level of poverty in the community and the lack of parental education and involvement. In this community, which is my hometown, it was very discouraging to see the plight of all students but particularly African American students. While many of our discussions centered on closing the achievement gap, the low-level of expectations at the district office, in the schools, and throughout the community in fact perpetuated the gap. The students, especially the African American students, did not have a chance at school and in life.

It was the collection of my experiences as an educator, but most specifically this most recent one, that prompted my interest in studying successful schools for African American students. It is my hope that I might identify factors that may be replicated to increase the level of achievement for African American students at all levels in urban, public schools and promote more positive outcomes for them. My long-term career goal is to work as a district administrator, in a large, urban school district, coaching principals and teachers in the area of school improvement. The knowledge gained in this study will support this goal as our schools become more diverse and the closing the achievement gap for African American students becomes a more pressing topic.

Franklin Elementary School

To that end, I envision conducting a study of a school, which I will call Franklin Elementary School. I selected this site due to several factors including the achievement data, location, demographic make-up, and trends. Most important, I selected this site as it shows evidence of closing achievement gaps despite increasing racial and socioeconomic diversity. This site was also notable as typically African American students are segregated into highly homogenous schools. Yet this group of African American students is experiencing a high level of success despite being a minority. Located in Southeast Wisconsin, the school is located between two major cities, drawing transients from both. Franklin Elementary currently serves approximately 400 students in grades PK-5. This school has experienced major changes in its racial and socioeconomic demographics over the years. Fifteen years ago, over ninety percent of the student body was White and only twenty percent of the student population qualified for free/ reduced meals. For the 2010-2011 school year, the enrollment is more reflective of the community it serves with a population composed of 66% White, 18% Hispanic, 8% African American, 2% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 5% multi-racial students. A little over 50% of the students qualify for free/reduced meals. The school became Title One for the 2011-2012 school year.

Figure 1.1
Enrollment at Franklin Elementary School in 2010 (by race)

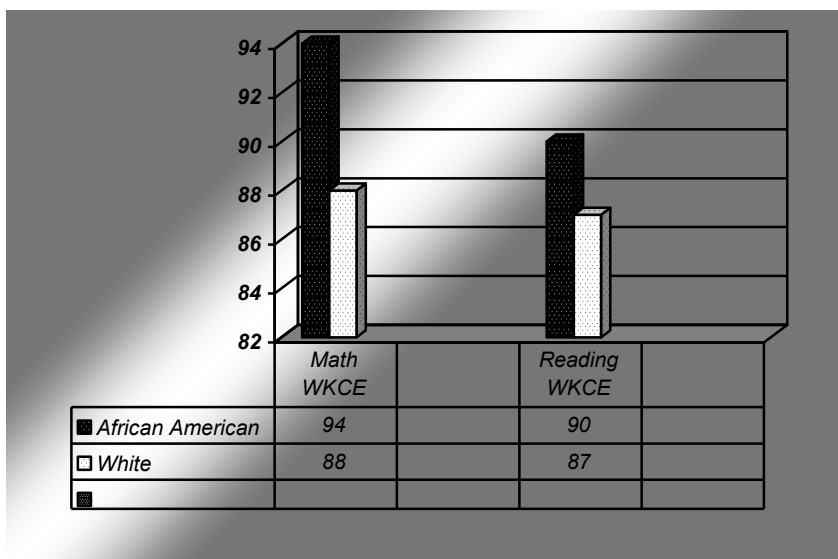


Other studies of African American student achievement have focused on charter schools and private schools, in which students are selected for admission and can be removed from the program at any time. It is possible this could have a positive impact on their student achievement data. Franklin Elementary, a traditional public school, is composed of a diverse student body that is not hand-picked, yet the achievement gap appears to be non-existent. African American and other minority children perform as well as, or better than White children on all academic measures including school attendance, the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts (WKCE) Reading Examination and the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts (WKCE) Mathematics Examination. According to 2010 AYP data provided by the *Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools*,

ninety percent of minority students at this school met or exceeded standards on the Reading WKCE as compared with 87% for White students. Minority students also outperformed their White peers on the Math WKCE. 94% percent of minority students at this school met or exceeded standards on the Math WKCE as compared with 88% percent of White students. These numbers are representative African American student performance as compared directly with White students, as well as shown in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2

Percentage of students who scored proficient or advanced on the 2010 WKCE



Summary

This dissertation is divided into five chapters and an appendix section. In this first chapter I have introduced the topic of successful schools for African American children and the rationale for this study of Franklin Elementary School. Chapter Two presents a comprehensive review of the literature. The third chapter will describe the research methods including how the research site was selected, the forms of data

collection, how data will be analyzed, and the role of the researcher. Chapter Four presents and highlights details of the analysis. In addition to providing details of my findings, I also discuss themes that emerge. The final chapter will present results of the study, strengths and limitations of the study, a conclusion, implications for practice, and references. There is also an appendix section that includes copies of the informed consent forms for the participants in the study (students, teachers, and the building administrator), survey protocols, survey results, interview questions, interview transcripts and documents provided by the school for purposes of this study.

Chapter Two

Review of Related Literature

This selective review of literature describes characteristics of schools throughout the nation in which African American students are performing as well or better than White students. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a context for my study. I conducted a case study of a school in which African American students are achieving academically at high levels. Rather than dwell on the existing racial gap in academic achievement, I elected to look at a school in which African American students are doing well academically. Using Perry's (2010) Theory of Practice for African American Student Achievement as a framework, I planned to identify factors that may be replicated to duplicate such success in other schools. What is it about these schools that allow African American children to succeed academically? What characteristics do these schools, their staff, and/ or their school leaders possess that promote academic achievement for all students? What makes a success school for African American children? I define *success* using Mandara's (2006) definition of academic achievement: "Academic achievement is broadly defined to include those outcomes related empirically or conceptually to school achievement (i.e. grades, academic motivation, and behavior problems)" (p. 207). I examined empirical literature reporting on schools in which African American students are experiencing success, for the purpose of offering strategies for closing the racial gap in academic achievement.

Following an overview of the current racial gap in academic achievement, I will move to an in-depth discussion of Perry's (2010) Theory of Practice for African American Student Achievement. I will specifically discuss the two factors which Perry deems necessary for schools to be successful in working with African American children: Membership in a

Community of High Expectations and a Broad Range of Supports. Membership in a Community of High Expectations includes both effective school leadership and effective teachers. The broad range of supports include school based supports, including financial resources and extended day programs, as well as external supports such as parent and community involvement.

The Current Racial Gap in Academic Achievement

There is currently a racial gap in educational achievement at schools across the country. The achievement gap may be defined as the discrepancy between majority and minority group students in a variety of educational measures such as grades, graduation rates, and most notably standardized test scores. As Lewis, James, Hancock, and Hill-Jackson (2008) state, “literature on African American achievement has become exhausted with the reality of high academic failure” (p. 127). As more time has passed, we have failed to make up ground and the achievement gap continues to grow. African American students continue to lag behind their White and Hispanic peers. In terms of academic performance White students, regardless of socioeconomic status, are outperforming African Americans. This phenomenon has given rise to the term *achievement gap*. As more time passes, we are failing to make up ground and the achievement gap continues to grow, placing African American students at a disadvantage.

While much attention and research has been devoted to the problem of the racial achievement gap, there are few who elect to view it through a more solution-focused lens. Ladson-Billings (2006) argues that our focus on the achievement gap has led us to search for “short-term solutions rather than addressing the long term problem” (p.4). Future efforts must shift from the short-term focus on the achievement gap, toward a focus on finding real and long-term solutions.

A logical first step in this process is to examine schools that are experiencing success with African American students. These schools and their attributes provide us with models for the very deliberate actions that must be taken for us to have the long-term solution to the achievement debt that our African American children deserve.

A Theory of Practice for African American School Achievement

I have selected Theresa Perry's *Theory of Practice for African American School Achievement* as the framework for examining the selected literature. In her framework, Perry (2003, 2010) states that schools need to have two characteristics for African American students to be successful. First African American students must be given the opportunity to participate as full members in an educational organization or program, in which membership means being an achiever. African American students will be more successful in schools where their competence rather than incompetence is assumed. Second, schools must offer a broad range of supports that allow students to learn, to practice, and to receive reinforcement with regard to the behaviors and practices that are necessary for one to be an achiever. These behaviors and practices include, persistence, hard work, thoroughness, and a commitment to excellence.

Theresa Perry (2003, 2010) asserts that the main reason African American students are failing to achieve at or above the level of their White and Hispanic peers is rooted in the long held belief in society that African Americans are intellectually inferior to other racial groups. This belief is communicated to African Americans both in and outside of the classroom. Perry (2003) asserts that various forms of media serve to reinforce the intellectual inferiority of African Americans, using such clichés as: pulling oneself up by the bootstraps, everyone can make it if they want to, and personal responsibility. Asian Americans and immigrants are used as examples that “you can make it if you try” (p. B10).

Whereas historically the African American community was active in promoting what has been termed a *counter-narrative*, placing an emphasis on education and using it as a means to gain freedom, current generations appear to have bought into society's labels and beliefs that they are intellectually inferior and incapable. This belief has not only become ingrained in the minds of African American children, it has created a learned helplessness in them. In some settings, African American children believe that they cannot do well in school, that they are not as intelligent as their White peers, and therefore see no point in trying (Perry, Steele, & Hilliard, 2003). In their discussion regarding *the counter-narrative*, the authors reference the social education that African American students in the South received from their teachers. In addition to excelling in subjects such as reading and math, these students were educated on the importance of being achievers in the classroom, carrying themselves with dignity, and being confident.

As previously stated, looking at the achievement debt is more appropriate than focusing on just gaps in achievement. The achievement gap represents only a small portion of the achievement debt that we have amassed over a significant period of failing to bring our African American students up to the same level as their Hispanic and White peers. To illustrate this point in financial terms, Ladson-Billings (2006) likens the achievement gap to the interest payments, whereas the achievement debt is the balance of the loan. We will never finish paying if we continue to just focus on the short-term interest. Our efforts must instead be focused on eliminating the long-standing achievement debt. Perry provides a framework for doing so.

Perry (2010) holds that these two components- membership in a community of practice which normalizes achievement, combined with a web of supports scaffolding achievement- are both necessary and sufficient to promote African American student success. In the following

sections, I review extant empirical literature to regarding how these two components match the empirical literature describing successful schools for African American students.

Membership in a Community of High Expectations

In the first part of her framework for successful schools for African American students, Perry (2003) states that schools must have high expectations for all students and allow all students the opportunity to participate as full members of the school community. Perry emphasizes that participation, as full members, must include the expectation that all students will/ can achieve academically. In my review of the empirical literature describing schools that are successful with African American students, I found two factors that are consistently observed that address this: effective school leaders who acknowledge and deal directly with issues of racial diversity and racism, and effective teachers who believe that African American students are capable of being academically successful.

Effective School Leadership

In her 2007 study, of three schools, all of which were experiencing significant growth in their African American student populations, Evans collected data via interviews (with staff and principals), observation, and examination of archival data and documents. She states, “most school leaders are not taught or trained to deal with sociopolitical or sociocultural matters” (p.160). Such matters inevitably include the acknowledgment, discussion regarding, and deliberate actions regarding race. Ironically, while school leaders are not trained to deal with diversity they are charged with developing the vision for and setting the climate within racially diverse schools. Thus in order to create an atmosphere in which all students, regardless of race are acknowledged as members of the school community and allowed to participate fully, matters of race cannot be ignored.

Evans (2007) explored how school leaders defined and made sense of issues of race. She defined sensemaking as “the cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages the meaning for individuals” (p. 161). Sensemaking with regard to race is an especially important area to address. “Diversity in the principalship is virtually nonexistent as approximately 88% of this nation’s principals are White” (p. 164). The views that White principals, in particular, hold of African American children may impact their perception of, decision-making regarding, and dealings with them, thus largely impacting whether students feel that they are members of the school community. Their views regarding race may also impact the message conveyed to those closest to African American children, the teachers.

In her study, Evans (2007) found that the principals’ own race and his/ her views about race had a significant impact on the way in which they responded to African American children. In one case, the principal (a White man) preferred to remain color-blind, that is he treated the African American children as though they were no different than their White and Hispanic peers. The differences in needs, experiences, and views that African American children bring to school were not acknowledged and not valued. As Perry’s theory states, all students must be viewed as members and allowed to participate fully as members, thus they must be allowed to contribute the unique characteristics that they bring with them as well. This did not happen in this school environment.

In another school setting, one in which the school leader was an African American woman, African American students were treated as a special entity in the school. The principal felt that her experience as a Black woman allowed her “to see race and racism as a part of social reality” (Evans, 2007, p.180). Ultimately, she gave African American students a pass because of

their race, making excuses for poor behavior and poor academic performance. As a result, she failed to maintain the same high expectations of achievement for the African American students that she did for the White students in her building.

In the third school, Evans (2007) presented a principal (another White man) who despite not having a great deal of experience with African Americans or African American students, choose to take a more proactive stance. He hired an African American assistant principal, increased the number of African American staff members, offered multicultural curriculum and diversity training for staff, and allowed African American students to showcase their unique talents and interests. For example, the school held its first ever Black History program allowing the African American students to showcase their knowledge of Black History as well as their unique talents. This principal demonstrated the importance of creating an inclusive community and responding to the diverse needs of all students, specifically African Americans. This research suggests that one way school leaders create a community that normalizes achievement is by being deliberate in making sense about race.

Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher, and DiBella (2004) also show the importance of effective leadership for schools serving African American students. The authors spent two years conducting qualitative research at an urban school, serving primarily African American students, in an attempt to answer the question: “What goes on in classrooms and schools that are effective in working with African American students?” (p. 216). The school in this study is characterized as high-achieving based on a range of data including, standardized test scores (their students consistently performed above the national norms), graduation rates, college admissions, and college completion rates. As opposed to many high-achieving schools that primarily serve middle to upper class, White, suburban students, Providence- St. Mel School (PSM) served

African American students (99.9 percent) from working-class families. Six out of ten students are from single parent homes and four out of ten students receive free or reduced lunch.

School staff, students, and parents credited the principal with the level of achievement. The school principal was a strong instructional leader and modeled accountability for her staff. As one staff member stated, “Grades matter at PSM” (Pressley et al., 2004, p. 220). In a school of seven hundred students, the principal took time to carefully monitor student progress and held each student accountable for his/ her academic performance. The principal sought out students who are not performing academically, and informally praised those who are doing well. Those who failed to perform academically were given supports and interventions to assist them, which I will discuss in a later section. The principal created an environment in which achievement was not only the norm, but also the expectation, and nothing less was accepted. To that same end, she created an environment where the focus was on academics and each student was seen as capable of achieving.

In this culture of achievement failure and misbehavior were the exception. Students who did not adhere to the prescribed code of conduct or did not perform in the classroom were given the time and supports needed to do so. However, it was understood, refrain from getting into trouble and focus on achievement, or they would be expelled and no longer be members of the PSM school community. “Many of the teachers attribute the success of the school in part to the discipline policy and the exclusion of students who might be disruptive. They noted that it made for an environment where the focus could be on academics rather than on misbehavior” (Pressley et al., 2004, p. 222). All students at PSM were viewed as capable of achievement and those who did not achieve up to the level of expectation; both academically and behaviorally, were given warnings and opportunities to turn themselves around. As mentioned, the principal frequently

had one-on-one interactions with the students to discuss their academic progress. She provided struggling students with academic and behavioral supports and interventions aimed at helping them reach their maximum potential. Finally, she gave struggling students a window of time to show that they were serious about their performance in school. However the few that did not subscribe to the expectation of achievement could no longer remain at PSM. The principal at PSM was serious about maintaining a school environment in which achievement was the norm, and not the exception.

Effective Teachers

Effective teaching is a second factor that emerged from the literature regarding fostering membership in a community of high academic expectations. While the principal is certainly the most important figure in setting the tone and expectations for the school community, no one is closer to the students than the teacher.

Scholars such as James Anderson (1988) and Vanessa Siddle-Walker (2010) have highlighted the prominent role of the teacher. In their work on the history of African American education, Anderson and Siddle-Walker found that teachers of African American students have been seen as teachers, role models, disciplinarians, and extended family members. The role of these teachers went beyond reading and math instruction. Teachers of African American students were expected to instill high character, morals, and a sense of responsibility to the race. High expectations were a given. High levels of achievement were the norm. This is illustrated in the oral history study conducted by Patterson, Mickelson, Peterson, & Gross (2008), who studied the history of Douglass School in Parsons, Kansas.

Effective Teachers in a Segregated School

Opened in 1908, Douglass was an all-Black K-8 school operating during the time of

legalized segregation. From the Fall of 2005 until the Spring of 2007 Patterson et al. (2008) conducted interviews Douglass alumni who at the time ranged in age from 55 to 98. In addition they examined artifacts such as pictures, yearbooks, and newspaper clippings. The purpose of their study was to take what was learned from the oral history interviews and decipher implications for the education of African American students today. The authors wanted to know specifically: What cultural and educational practices were vital to the success of their students? While the school is no longer operating, closing its doors in 1958, the success that this school experienced with African-American students is relevant as we struggle to replicate this same success today. Three themes emerged from their study. First, the teachers were “caring, involved members of the community” (p. 313). Second, teachers were authority figures, and disciplinarians. And third, the teachers were, “role models who communicated high expectations and racial pride” (p. 313).

Douglass teachers were visible in the school community and developed relationships with the students and their families much like extended families. They lived amongst their students, went to church with them, and often socialized with their families. One alumnus recalled that her 8th grade teacher also served as the superintendent of Sunday School (Patterson, et al., 2008, p.313). Such presence allowed the message of high expectations to extend beyond the classroom. Teachers and parents were on the same page and had a common message for the students. Much like an extended family, teachers bore the responsibility for the students’ achievement and actions.

Along with caring for their students, teachers at Douglass provided strong discipline. Patterson et al., (2008) report the recollection of one alumnus: “You had to mind. At Douglass School, you couldn’t act, up, you had to mind”(p. 314). The students viewed teachers at the

school as authority figures and disciplinarians. Physical punishment for disobedience or misbehavior was not unheard of. Students were guided by routines such as finishing all lessons until they were not only complete but also done to “the teachers’ specifications” (p. 315).

Patterson et al. saw these two factors as connected: the strict and authoritative style balanced by a caring and concern for the students well being. Underlying the discipline was the message that the teachers believed in the students’ ability to achieve and expected that they do so.

Third, teachers at Douglass did not allow students to use their race, the school’s lack of resources (compared to the White schools), or anything as an excuse for not doing their best. Interviews with Douglass alumni indicate that teachers had high expectations for all of their students and emphasized racial pride. Students were taught that they were as good as or better than any other student at any other school. Douglass was a place to learn and students were expected to do so. One alumni interviewed for this study sums it up, “There was no such thing as, ‘I don’t understand’. ‘I don’t care’. ‘I don’t want to know’. No. They didn’t play that. You learned.” (p. 315). Students were taught that their own actions, and no one else’s determined their future. They were provided with images of successful African Americans throughout their studies and had Black teachers who served as role models for success. When African American students left Douglass in the eighth grade to continue their education at the White junior high and high schools, they were confident in their abilities to compete with their peers. The positive outcomes of Douglass alumni provide evidence of the positive impact of effective teaching. For instance, Douglass alumni interviewed for this study included: a retired microbiologist, a clinical child psychologist, a physician, an attorney, a city commissioner, and several educators.

In order for contemporary schools to replicate the success of schools such as Douglass, it is imperative that teachers themselves believe that African American students are capable of

achieving at the same level as their Hispanic and White peers, and communicate that belief and expectation to the students. Patterson and colleagues (2008) assert:

What was happening at Douglass School is unfortunately absent in many contemporary school settings where school personnel oftentimes do not understand their students' culture or history, have low expectations, refuse to change their instructional practices to accommodate the needs of learners, and refer far too many students of color for remedial and special education services (p. 318).

Effective Teachers Post-Segregation

In contemporary schools, effective teaching has also been seen as a factor to fostering membership in a community of high expectations. In a study published in 2010, Borman and Dowling attempted to determine the extent that poverty and minority concentration within a school affected students' achievement outcomes. Using the data set from the famous Coleman report of 1966, Borman and Dowling found that going to a high poverty school or a highly segregated African American school has a profound effect on student's achievement outcomes. One of the primary reasons for this finding was teachers' expectations.

Borman & Dowling 2010 concluded that teachers do not see all students as equal members of the school community and do not hold the same high expectations for all students. For example they found that teachers had higher expectations for White students, which resulted in higher academic performance. While they did find "teacher biases favoring middle-class students" (p.1238), race was a more decisive factor. Even when socioeconomic status of the students was the same, teachers held higher expectations for White students from poor backgrounds than they did for African American students from poor backgrounds. Further,

teachers used academic tracking as a way of keeping African American students from being able to fully participate and have access to the same academic opportunities. For example, African American students were not recommended for advanced classes at the same rate as White students, were not recruited for academic clubs/ groups, and were more likely to be referred for Special Education programs.

Goddard and Skrla (2006) found similar results in their study of teacher efficacy. Using data collected from K-8 teachers in a large, urban school district, they examined how a school's minority student composition affects teachers' beliefs about student achievement. For purposes of this study, the researchers looked at the academic, social, and racial composition of the student body and faculty by race and experience. They defined *strong collective efficacy*, as teachers' beliefs that student achievement was possible and obstacles were viewed as minor setbacks, which could be overcome. They defined *low collective efficacy* as the belief that achievement was not possible and therefore expending extra effort was not needed.

Goddard and Skrla (2006) found that the minority student composition did not impact teachers' sense of collective efficacy. However two other findings in this study have implications for the success of African American students in schools. First, the authors found that teachers of color had much stronger efficacy beliefs than non-minority teachers. They also found that experienced teachers, with at least ten years of experience, had significantly higher efficacy beliefs than did newer teachers. There is irony in the fact that teachers of color and veteran teachers hold high beliefs that achievement is possible. With the racial composition of teachers throughout the country, particularly in grades K-8, it is much more likely that students will have a White teacher as opposed to a teacher of color, or more specifically an African American one. Further in most urban districts, particularly those characterized by low-socioeconomics, the

majority of teachers are new to the field and turnover is rapid.

Low expectations of students by teachers, whether communicated directly or indirectly, counter the first part of Perry's framework related to membership in a community of practice, which normalizes achievement. Reports on Black students' lack of achievement in schools often places the responsibility on the children and fails to address those teaching them. "Almost eighty-seven percent of the United States elementary and secondary teachers are White, while only eight percent of teachers are Black. There is a pressing need to know more about the impact that White teachers have on Black students' outcomes" (Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade, 2008, p. 48). Douglas, et al. explored this in their study of African American students' perceptions of their White teachers.

As Douglas, et al. (2008) state, "Black students' potential will not be realized in classrooms where teachers view Black students from a deficit perspective" (p. 48). In this study, the authors interviewed eight African American students in grades 10-12. The students all had at least one White teacher, for an academic subject, and a minimum of a 2.5 grade point average on a 4.0 scale (Douglas, et al.). The students were asked to describe their experiences as an African American student with the White teachers in core academic courses. The questions explored race and schooling, cultural mismatch, and racism.

After coding all responses four themes emerged, two of which directly relate to effective teachers. The first theme, which the authors note was the most prevalent, was respect. The students felt the teachers did not show them genuine respect as students capable of achieving and contributing in the classroom. Rather, they felt more of a superficial and obligatory level of respect. Secondly, the students felt that the teachers had their own stereotypes of African American students and those stereotypes played a role in the teachers' perceptions of whether the

students were capable of achieving and contributing in the classroom. They also felt the teachers expected them to misbehave in the classroom and cause trouble in the school because of their race. Trying to earn respect and counter stereotypes can be detrimental to African American students. “That extra burden placed on a Black student can be a determining factor to whether they succeed or fail in school “(Douglas et al., 2008, p. 55).

Thompson, Warren, Foy, & Dickerson (2008) conducted a similar study examining the characteristics that K-12 educators and African American students feel make a good teacher. They found that the students’ perceptions of good teachers were extremely different from those of the teachers. Further, they found that African American students and teachers of color had different perceptions of good teachers than White teachers. While African American students and teachers of color focused on relational qualities: such as enthusiasm, humor, and friendliness, White teachers placed more emphasis on quality of instruction such as: making the coursework interesting and relevant, and challenging students academically. “This study underscores the need to understand the qualities of outstanding teachers, particularly those working with diverse students, as schools work to close the achievement gap” (p. 132).

Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade (2008) provide some recommendations for teachers, specifically White teachers, working with African American students. First, as with school leaders, it is important that teachers acknowledge their own views and stereotypes about race as they may influence the way that they interact with and teach African American students. Second, White teachers need to make a deliberate effort to learn more about and understand African American culture. Third, understanding that each student is an individual, it is important that teacher’s get to know his or her students.

Douglass School is a perfect example of this. The teachers interacted with their students

and their families not only at the school, but also in the community. Finally, consistent with Perry's assertion that African American students need to be members in a community of practice that normalizes achievement, Douglas et al. (2008) describe effective teachers as those who hold students, regardless of race, to the same high level of academic expectations.

Broad Range of Supports

The second part of Perry's framework states that schools must offer a broad range of supports that allow students to learn, practice, and reinforce the behaviors and practices that are necessary for one to be an achiever: persistence, hard work, thoroughness, and a commitment to excellence. Perry (2003) cites examples of supports such as: film clubs, literary societies, study groups, and debating clubs. In my review of the literature describing schools that are successful with African American students I found studies discuss school-based, internal supports such as smaller class sizes, experienced teaching staff, intervention materials, and environments that are safe and conducive to learning. The literature also emphasizes external supports such as parental involvement.

Before discussing school-based and external supports for students, it is essential to first discuss financial resources. In order for schools to provide any type of supports they must have financial means to do so. As Condrón & Roscigno (2003) observe, "The amount of wealth in a school district shapes the quality of its schools" (p. 18). Financial resources and spending have a direct impact on instruction, which is key to student achievement (Condrón & Roscigno, 2003, p.21).

In their study, Condrón & Roscigno (2003) examined within district spending between 89 elementary schools in Columbus, Ohio. They showed how these differences, defined by race and SES, impact student achievement for poor and minority students. They found greater

financial resources have the potential to positively impact instruction, affording higher quality, more experienced teachers, and more opportunities for staff development, whereas schools lacking financial resources may attract those with the least experience and expertise. Condrón and Roscigno (2003) also found that items as basic as textbooks and other materials were absent in some schools and thus had a negative impact on student achievement. These factors, ineffective teachers and lack of basic learning tools led to the disengagement of students. Many African American students failed to produce in the classroom, while many others failed to even show up for classes.

The amount of spending in predominately African American schools falls far behind that of predominately White schools, thus limiting the amount and types of supports available to promote student achievement. One example of this is presented in Ladson Billings' (2006) article on the achievement debt (2006). She cites a study which found that the Chicago Public School system, which has a predominately African American and Hispanic student population, spends approximately nine thousand dollars less annually per pupil compared to the nearby suburb of Highland Park, which has a predominately White student population. This is not to say that districts or schools are intentionally spending less or more on the students because of their race, but to suggest that schools often lack the financial resources to provide the necessary supports, both school-based and external.

School Based Supports

Pressley and colleagues' (2004) study of Providence St. Mel School (PSM) provides a blueprint for precisely the types of school-based supports that Perry is referring to. It is important to note that the St. Mel School is private. Unlike a traditional public school, they could select students and exclude students as they chose. Therefore their outcomes cannot fairly be compared to a public school.

At PSM, students are provided with a wide range of supports, which reinforce their achievement. These supports are made available for all students, not just those that are struggling. Extra academic support is available for those that require it, enrichment is provided for those that are doing well in school but want more, college coaching on everything from completing applications, to interviewing and preparing for entrance exams is provided for all students. The fact that these supports are available for all students at the school normalizes them. You do not have to be poor to receive them, you do not have to be failing to receive them, and you do not have to be African American to receive them.

For students at PSM, the school day extended far beyond the traditional hours and the traditional school calendar. Following dismissal, the school remained open for almost two hours. This allowed the students the opportunity to receive after school tutoring, to have full access to school's massive library, and to utilize computers with Internet access and software to support instruction (Pressley et al., 2004, p. 221). When the week was over, students had the opportunity to attend Saturday School to reinforce what they learned during the week, and again to offer the opportunity for tutoring if necessary. These academic supports provided students with reinforcement and for others the push that was needed to counter the norms they observed in their community. Students with below a 2.0 grade point average were required to attend the extended school day and Saturday School programs.

According to students at PSM, school was a "year round operation" (Pressley et al., 2004, p. 220). The school provided a required summer school program, to support students that needed academic remediation. For others, summer school was an option to support their academic achievement. Other opportunities such as university study or study abroad were made available for students who were academically successful. Finally, for those that were close to completing

their studies, PSM offered extensive college preparation. This included trips to visit area colleges, before and after school SAT/ ACT preparation programs, mock admissions interviews, and help with preparing admission applications. Every student at PSM was required to submit a minimum of five college applications. There was no question of whether the students would attend college, but rather where they would attend. The school did not make the assumption that these skills or supports were coming from elsewhere, but rather provided them itself.

The goal was to make PSM a place that not only offered a broad range of supports that allowed students to learn and practice, but to reinforce the behaviors and practices that are necessary for one to be an achiever. In this school located on the West Side of Chicago, an area known for drugs, violence, and crime, the students could work and learn without having to be concerned with their safety or fitting the stereotypical image of African American students and complacent and underachieving. They are in an environment which not only normalizes achievement, but provides the necessary supports for students to understand what it means to be an achiever and to become one.

Thompson (2008) found African American students see the value of school- based supports. Thompson examined the characteristics that African American students feel make a good teacher. Among the many characteristics identified were relationships with their teachers and opportunities for extra help, both of which extended beyond the classroom. African American students stated that good teachers supported their achievement by getting to know them and interacting with them outside of the classroom. “In order to close the achievement gap between African Americans and other students, African American students need better relationships with their teachers” (p. 131). The relationships were characterized by trust, fairness, friendliness, and humor. The teachers demonstrated a commitment to giving the

students the necessary tools to become achievers, including extra help outside of the school day. These African American students felt that their teachers supported them by working with them outside of the classroom, explaining things well, and demonstrating patience.

Patterson, Mickelson, Peterson, and Gross (2008) revealed similar characteristics in their oral history study of the Douglass School. As mentioned, Douglass School was an all-Black school operating in Parsons, Kansas from 1908-1958. The purpose of this study was to take what was learned from the oral history interviews and decipher implications for the education of African American students today. Like the other studies, Patterson et. al. found the importance of supports designed to promote achievement. Recounting their experiences as students at Douglass, the interviewees stated the school was considered a safe haven and school personnel were viewed as extended family. They interacted with students and their families outside of school, providing academic support. The oral history of Douglass School further highlights the importance of supports seen outside of the school setting.

External Supports

Perry's framework focuses largely on providing school-based supports for African American students. However, research has shown that in addition to financial resources to provide for tangible, school-based supports, educators must be deliberate about seeking external supports for their Black students as well. One of the most important such supports discussed in the literature is parental involvement. Mandara (2006) conducted a literature review on the impact of family functioning on African American male academic achievement. Family functioning in the article specifically refers to: parenting style, form of discipline, teaching about race, involvement in school/ homework. Mandara first reviewed literature on this topic finding parental involvement, defined as participation in children's education both at school and in the home, to promote academic achievement regardless of socioeconomic status. In her study,

Mandara found that there was a positive relationship between parent involvement and children's academic achievement specifically as related to grade point average, standardized test scores, work habits, and behavior. In addition to performance, parental involvement has a large impact on teachers' perceptions, which can inevitably impact student performance. In her study, Mandara also found that "if the teacher thought that the parents were actively involved, the child was likely to do better" (p. 215). Ladson-Billings (2006) offers a reason for the lack of African American parental involvement in schools. She suggests that a lack of involvement may be in part due to the fact that African American parents have long been excluded from information and decision-making regarding their children's education.

Schools that are successful with African American children by contrast, provide school-based supports and solicit external supports, such as parental involvement. Student success is not solely the responsibility of teachers and principals, parents also bear responsibility. However it is their responsibility to solicit the presence and participation of parents and make them collaborative partners in the education of their children. Whether through regular home-school communication, membership and active participation in PTA, or by some other means, parents must be made to feel a part of the schools and a vital part of their child's educational well being (Mandara, 2006). In addition, Condrón & Roscigno (2003) cite the importance of not only engaging parents, but also in educating them on the politics of schools and how to advocate for their children. They found that White parents tend to press school boards for resources and supports, which benefit their children, while African American parents largely are absent and unheard. Those African American parents who are actively involved in their children's education, "by monitoring homework and other academic pursuits, limiting nonproductive and destructive activities (such as television, radio, and video games), and creating a constant and

positive dialogue with the teachers and school officials increase the odds of their children succeeding in school” (p.217).

Active parent participation can in part be credited to the success of students at PSM. At PSM, Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher, & DiBella (2004) found that parents were required to be partners with the school in educating their children:

Parents sign off on their student’s agenda, which is a listing of assignments and a recording of recent grades. When students miss homework or do poorly on tests, letters go home from the teachers. There are mandatory parent-teacher conferences when teachers feel they are needed. For especially serious academic deficiencies or behavioral infractions, parents meet with the principal. Parents are often invited to the school to witness their student’s achievements. There is the daily mixing of teachers and parents at student pick-up in the afternoon (p. 222)

Perry’s framework states that schools must offer a broad range of supports that allow students to learn, practice, and reinforce the behaviors and practices that are necessary for one to be an achiever: persistence, hard work, thoroughness, and a commitment to excellence.

Empirical research supports Perry’s assertion. The findings of various studies demonstrate that schools that are successful with African American implement both school-based, internal supports such as: smaller class sizes, experienced teaching staff, intervention materials, and environments that are safe and conducive to learning, as well as external supports such as parental involvement.

Conclusion

Theresa Perry (2003, 2010) has provided us with a useful framework for looking at

successful schools for African American children. She contends that two components- membership in a community of practice which normalizes achievement, combined with a web of supports scaffolding achievement- are both necessary and sufficient to promote student success. In this review, I have examined how extant empirical literature describing successful schools for African American students aligns with Perry's framework.

The research I reviewed affirms that Perry's theoretical framework provides a promising lens to view schools that are experiencing success, with African American children, characteristics of those schools, and specific strategies that must be implemented if other schools are to replicate this success. For instance, the literature suggests that school principals must be willing to acknowledge the racial differences among their student body and be very deliberate in creating a school vision which promotes inclusivity, allows every student an opportunity for full membership within the school, and promotes achievement for all students. It suggests that teachers must believe that all students, regardless of racial background, are capable of experiencing academic success and must be astute to finding the ways to help all of their students achieve success. Educators, scholars, and community leaders must work together toward promoting our racially diverse schools instead of advocating for a return to segregation, as research shows that diversity improves academic performance of students from all sub-groups. Finally, research shows the importance of internal and external supports. Internal supports, such as financial resources, must be distributed in a way that is equitable and provides for academic success for all students. Students must be provided with extended learning opportunities to reinforce and remediate as needed. Schools must also seek out the support of external resources, the most important being parental involvement.

The characteristics of successful schools identified by Perry (2010) and supported by

empirical literature provide a guide for my examination of a school that is having success with African American students and specific factors to look for.

Chapter Three

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter will address the participants involved in the study, the procedure for collecting data, the design of the research, the instrument used for the study, and the method of analysis of data. The goal of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of what makes a successful school for African American children. I will apply what I learn from the study of Franklin Elementary School to operationalize Perry's framework and find strengths and weaknesses, which may provide helpful guidance for other schools serving African American children.

Research Questions

Using Perry's (2010) theoretical framework, I pose the following research questions:

1. In what ways do African American students at Franklin Elementary belong to a school community that normalizes high expectations?
2. What routines, policies, and practices occur within Franklin Elementary that support academic achievement?
3. What factors (if any) beyond Perry's framework emerge as central to the academic achievement at Franklin Elementary?

Population and Sample

In an attempt to gain the perspective of both educators and students, participants in this study were current school personnel at Franklin Elementary School, including the school principal, the teaching staff, and current third, fourth, and fifth grade students. I limited the educator participants to school administration and classroom teachers, as the majority of the survey questions dealt specifically with instructional practices and classroom procedures. These

questions examined the existence of high expectations and supports. This line of questioning would not be relevant to support staff such as clerical or custodial staff, or paraprofessionals, as it does not reflect their job duties or relationship to students at Franklin. I surveyed approximately two hundred thirty students at Franklin. I limited the student participants to third, fourth, and fifth grade students as I don't believe the survey would be appropriate for younger children due to the amount of reading involved and the ability to understand the questions. Further, only students in grades three, four, and five take the standardized tests which I am using to demonstrate the lack of achievement gap at Franklin. Parents also participated in my student as interview subjects.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

Survey

Researchers study large and small populations by selecting and studying samples chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence, distribution, and interrelations (Kerlinger and Lee 2000). The primary method of studying a population for this study was a survey (Appendices F & G). The goal of the survey was to determine whether there is evidence of a community of practice normalizing achievement, as well as what supports, if any, exist to support student achievement, and what other factors exist at Franklin Elementary that may be enabling African American students to achieve at such high levels. I also aimed to determine not only the existence of these three key elements, but to what degree educators and students feel they are present,. Finally, I aimed to analyze the differences in perceptions of their presence, between educators and students, and within each of these groups. I utilized questions from the survey used by Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Eaton (2009) in *Organizing Schools for Improvement*, their analysis of the Chicago Public School system. The survey,

which has been tested for validity and reliability, contains specific questions, which allowed me to analyze respondent perceptions of the following factors identified by Perry (2010) and further supported by literature as creating successful schools for African American students: high expectations, high-quality instruction, parental involvement, community involvement, peer support, relationships/ trust, acknowledgement of the role of culture, safe learning environment, commitment to the school/ students, and it also allowed me to identify other potential factors not identified by Perry or research literature. It is important to note, I did not use the survey in its entirety. I omitted some questions that did not pertain to my research. As a result, this may have impacted the validity of my findings.

Prior to administering the survey to educators at Franklin, I conducted a pilot with six educators who were not involved with the study. The purpose of this pilot study was to insure that the survey functioned properly, there were no technological problems, and respondents had an understanding of the questions. I also conducted a cognitive interview with one of the pilot subjects, having that individual complete the survey in real time and give me their understanding of each question, to make sure the questions made sense and that their understanding of the questions was as I intended.

Following the pilot, I invited the principal, approximately forty educators, and approximately two hundred fifty students to complete an online survey. Using a five point Likert scale, the principal and teachers were given fifty-eight questions to report participation, with multiple response options for each question to reflect agreement or disagreement. Similarly, student participants were given twenty-five questions to report participation with multiple response options for each question to reflect agreement or disagreement.

As mentioned, the survey was distributed and completed online using *Survey Monkey*. The beginning of the survey provided participants with information including the purpose of the survey, survey instructions, and a notice that participation was not required. Respondents were asked to complete the survey within a one week time period. While the identity of the respondents remains confidential, demographic data was collected including:

1. Educator Respondents
 - a. Position (Principal or Teacher)
 - b. Gender
 - c. Race of respondent
 - d. Years of experience working in education
 - e. Grade Level Teaching Currently
 - f. Years of experience working at other schools
2. Student Respondents
 - a. Gender
 - b. Race
 - c. Current Grade Level

While data for all students in grades 3-5 was collected, the primary focus of this study is African American students. Therefore the responses of African American students were the primary focus of analysis, with the responses of other students used for comparison.

Rubin and Babbie (1998) indicate that an adequate response rate is 50%, a good response rate is 60%, and a very good response rate is 70%. It was my hope that I would have closer to a 100% return rate given the convenience of the online survey. As a former colleague and mentor, the principal at this school is very supportive of this study.

Therefore, I planned to enlist her to encourage teachers and students to complete the survey.

Document Analysis

The second form of data collection was an analysis of documents. These documents include the following: the school website, the school improvement plan, school newsletters, the school calendar, and state data. The purpose of analyzing these and related documents was to validate survey results and determine whether what teachers and students reported is congruent with what is actually happening at Franklin. Further these documents were used to establish whether a community of practice exists at Franklin Elementary School and to determine what (if any) supports are in place to reinforce student achievement. I gathered most of this information via the school website, with some assistance from the school principal. I aimed to get the information without being burdensome to the school. For example, the link to the online survey was given to educator participants with explicit instructions that they could complete it anytime within a one-week window. Therefore, participants were free to complete the survey during their planning time, lunch break, or outside of school. Secondly, while I selected a specific date to conduct interviews with the teachers and principal, I allowed the educator participants to select the time of the interviews. Therefore, I was able to conduct interviews during teacher planning times, before school, and in some cases after school. Finally in an effort to expedite document collection, per the principal's request, she and I communicated prior to my official visit to the school to discuss the specific documents I needed access to. This allowed her to have these items ready for me upon arrival.

School Website

I systematically reviewed the school website to look for several factors. First, I needed to determine if the school website was actually that, meaning an actual homepage for the school that is regularly updated and maintained, as opposed to a district maintained website giving only general contact information about the school. Second, I looked for evidence of a community of high expectations for student learning. I anticipated this being found in the vision and mission statements. I also looked for cross-link pages such as links to school achievement data, the school improvement/strategic plan, teacher/ class web pages, online grade book, and educational resources for parents. I also reviewed the website to determine whether the school has any active relationships with businesses and/ or organizations in the community. This would be evidenced by the presence of community partnerships that are usually noted on the website.

School Improvement Plan

I conducted a content analysis of the school improvement plan, termed *SmartGoals*, to look for evidence of strategies, which reflect high academic expectations for African American students. I looked for evidence of strategies to improvement the quality of instruction at Franklin (i.e. classroom walk-thrus, professional development, collaborative planning, etc.). In relation to parent and community involvement, I looked for evidence of staff attempts to engage parents at Franklin Elementary and to determine whether the school has active partnerships with any businesses or organizations in the community and how these partnerships impact student achievement. For example I looked for evidence of community/ business partners providing funding for books, after

school programming, or honors programs, and mentoring students at the school. Finally, I looked for evidence of attempts to maintain a high level of trust and good working relationships between administration & staff, staff & staff, staff & students. This included examining the process of creating and revising the school improvement plan, and who has a role in it as well as looking at the strategies listed for improving student achievement, and for monitoring progress. I also sought this information in my interviews with the principal and selected teachers.

School Newsletters

I conducted a content analysis of the school newsletter to examine what types of clubs, groups, and other enrichment activities are present at the school to support academic achievement (i.e after school programs). I reviewed the school newsletter to determine whether the school has active partnerships with any businesses or organizations in the community. If so, what is the nature of these partnerships? Are the community partners taking an active role in promoting student achievement? Similar to my examination of the school improvement plan, I looking for evidence of community/business partners providing funding for books, after school programming, or honors programs, and mentoring students at the school. Lastly, I examined school newsletters to determine whether there is any acknowledgement of cultural holidays, school programs acknowledging culture, or enrichment programs related to culture. I wanted to know whether students were encouraged to celebrate not only their own culture, but the increasing racial diversity at the school.

School Calendar

I systematically reviewed the school calendar to examine when clubs, groups, and activities supporting academic achievement, meet/ take place, as well as the frequency of these activities. I looked for evidence of community partners taking an active role in promoting student achievement (i.e. presence at school programs). I examined the school calendar to determine whether there is any acknowledgement of cultural holidays or school programs acknowledging culture. I looked to see how often these events occurred, what cultures were acknowledged, and who was involved in these programs.

In addition, I analyzed the daily calendar to assess how much of each student's day is spent on instruction and where that instruction is taking place. More specifically, I looked the number of minutes spent on instruction in each subject area and the number of minute spent on non-instructional areas (i.e. recess, lunch, and transition between classes). I was also interested in looking at students grouping to determine whether any form of tracking exists and what supports may be in place to meet students individual academic needs. For example, what percentage of students leaving the classroom for support services (Special Education, ESOL, Gifted and Talented) are African American? How many instructional minutes are spent on support services?

State Data

I examined state data to determine whether the self-reported racial identities of staff and students participating in the study coincide with the state demographic data for the school. I was also interested in exploring whether the racial composition of the staff is reflective of the student population, as this related to the important factor of acknowledging culture in a school. I also looked at Franklin Elementary School's data in

relation to other schools in the state with similar demographics, to assess whether African American students at these schools are achieving at the same levels.

Interview

The third form of data was interviews with the principal and five teachers, selected by the principal, who teach African American students in grades K-5. These interviews were semi-structured. I was interested in their reactions to the results of the survey, such as their opinions regarding why participants may have responded the way that they did. There were two primary purposes for these interviews. First, I assessed whether there were other factors contributing to the success of African American students at Franklin that may not have been captured by the survey and school documents. Second, similar to the document analysis, I determined the degree of congruence between what teachers and students report (in the surveys) with what is actually happening at Franklin (according to the interviews).

There were five teacher interview subjects. I have given all subjects pseudonyms, in efforts to protect their identities. My first interview subject was Sandy. Sandy teaches the Fifth Grade Enrichment class. She has been at Franklin for over ten years. Next I interviewed, Camille. As a relative newcomer to Franklin, this is her second year; Camille has the large task of being the Instructional Coach for all grades Kindergarten thru Fifth. She works with teachers to implement best practices in working with their students. I should also note that, Camille came to Franklin from Columbus Elementary one year before the school's closing. Having worked as the Kindergarten teacher at Columbus for many years, she knows many of the students and families who have recently transitioned to Franklin. My third interview was with Sally, the school

counselor. Sally has worked at Franklin, in various capacities, since the mid-1970s. Over the years, Sally has experienced changes in leadership, in instructional programs, and in the demographic make-up of the student body. Her tenure at the school has made Sally somewhat of the unspoken leader of the school. Of the teachers I interviewed several referenced Sally as being the best source of information. The fourth interview was with Christina. Christina taught for ten years at Columbus Elementary. After the school closed last year, she was involuntarily transferred to Franklin. She admits to having a rough time with the transition to a new school. She did not feel that the staff at Roosevelt worked together in the manner which she was accustomed and did not feel the staff was used to or accepting of working with racially diverse students. At the time of our interview Christina was teaching fifth grade, but was excited to begin teaching third grade, which she had done for her entire career until now, for the 2012-2013 school year. My final staff interview was with Delbert. Delbert is a Second Grade Enrichment teacher. Having worked in the school district for thirteen years, Delbert has been at four different schools. He appeared to be very adaptable to new people and situations and presented himself as the voice of reason amongst the teaching staff. Delbert has aspirations of being a principal and works closely with the principal Mrs. Cobb on the school's daily schedule and supervision at school activities. Complete transcripts of my interviews with the teachers/ staff can be found in Appendices O-S.

I also conducted interviews with two parents of African American students, selected by the principal. There were supposed to be four to seven parents but only two showed up. I was interested in obtaining their opinions regarding why their children are doing so well as Franklin. I was further interested in determining, based on their

opinions, what policies and practices are occurring at Franklin that are helping African American students succeed at such a high level that is not characteristic of other urban, public schools. Both interview subjects were new to the Franklin Elementary School community. Joanne is the mother of four children, three of who attended Franklin at the time of our interview. Her children were in 1st, 4th, and 5th grades. The fourth child recently transferred to a nearby school due to special education accommodations. Marquitta is the mother of two children, both of whom attend Franklin in the 1st and 3rd grades respectively. I found both subjects very candid and eager to share.

There was also supposed to conduct a focus group to consist of African American students at Franklin Elementary. The goal of this group was to obtain information, from the perspectives of the children, about why they are doing so well in school. Specifically, what the school (teachers, principal, and community partners) are doing to help them achieve such a high level of academic success. For some reason that remains unexplained, I was not given access to the students for the purposes of conducting interviews.

Reflective Journal

Throughout this project I kept a reflective journal and field notes. The purpose of a reflective journal is to allow the researcher to record his/ her feelings about the research, as it unfolds. My reflective journal was helpful in examining my own emotions and biases, as this is a topic that has personal significance to me.

Data Analysis

I created Microsoft Word files for the interviews, documents, and journal entries. All files were saved in my portable hard drive, which only I have access to. I used cut

and sort for coding of these qualitative documents. My units of analysis included: teacher interview data, principal interview data, and parent focus group data, as well as the aforementioned school documents. These units developed into multiple codes. Ultimately, I looked for evidence to support or refute Perry's theory. In other words, I looked for evidence of a present of a learning community, which clearly displays high expectations for all students, including African Americans, and evidence that these expectations are communicated to and how they are communicated to the students. I looked for evidence of the existence of supports for students' academic achievement, such as clubs, activities, community partnerships, and parental involvement in the school.

I used the SPSS 20.0 software program for quantitative data management and analysis. Survey responses were analyzed using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), to examine the difference in responses between the groups: students, teachers, and administrations, as well as within group differences. With student achievement as the dependent variable, I analyzed the perceived impact of high expectations, high-quality instruction, supports including parental involvement and community involvement, and other factors including relationships/ trust, school climate. Looking at the means of the responses, I hoped to be able to draw conclusions regarding the factors, which help to create successful schools for African American students.

Ethical Considerations

All participants in this study were treated in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Marquette University Institutional Review Board (IRB). There was minimal to no risk for those participating in the study. Every precaution was

taken to make sure that participants feel comfortable and are informed that they may withdraw from participation at any time.

Summary

In sum, the goal of this study is to contribute to a better understanding of what makes a successful school for African American children, using survey and interview data collected from selected staff, students, and parents at Franklin Elementary School, as well as analyzing school documents, including the school improvement plan, school website, school calendar, school newsletters, and the daily schedule. SPSS software program and cut and sort technique was employed to analyze the data. At the conclusion of the analysis, I attempt to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do African American students at Franklin Elementary belong to a school community that normalizes high expectations?
2. What routines, policies, and practices occur within Franklin Elementary that support academic achievement?
3. What factors (if any) beyond Perry's framework emerge as central to the academic achievement at Franklin Elementary?

Chapter Four

This chapter will present the analysis of the data collected for this project. These data include: the survey administered to students and educators, parent and educator interviews, and review of various school documents. The goal of this analysis is to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways do African American students at Franklin Elementary belong to a school community that normalizes high expectations?
2. What routines, policies, and practices occur within Franklin Elementary that support academic achievement?
3. What factors (if any) beyond Perry's framework emerge as central to the academic achievement at Franklin Elementary?

This analysis seeks to contribute to a better understanding of what makes a successful school for African American children. I will apply what I learn from this study of Franklin Elementary School to operationalize Perry's framework and find strengths and weaknesses in it, which may in turn provide helpful guidance for other schools serving African American children.

Organization of Data Analysis

I organize this chapter into three parts. The first part will discuss the survey. After sharing demographic information about the educator and student survey responses respectively, I will provide an analysis of responses to the questions, which were specifically aligned to answer the three research questions discussed above. I wanted to determine whether there are differences in perception between educators and whether there are differences in perception between the African American students and the remainder of the student body. The second part of the chapter will discuss the analysis of

educator and parent interview sessions. Twelve of the interview questions were specifically aligned to the research questions, with a final open-ended question. The third part of the chapter will discuss my analysis of documents including the school improvement plan (termed SMARTGoals), school newsletters, school website, and school calendar. Throughout my analysis of the survey, interview, and document data, I look for confirming and disconfirming evidence to help me reliably answer my three research questions.

Descriptive Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Educator Survey Respondents

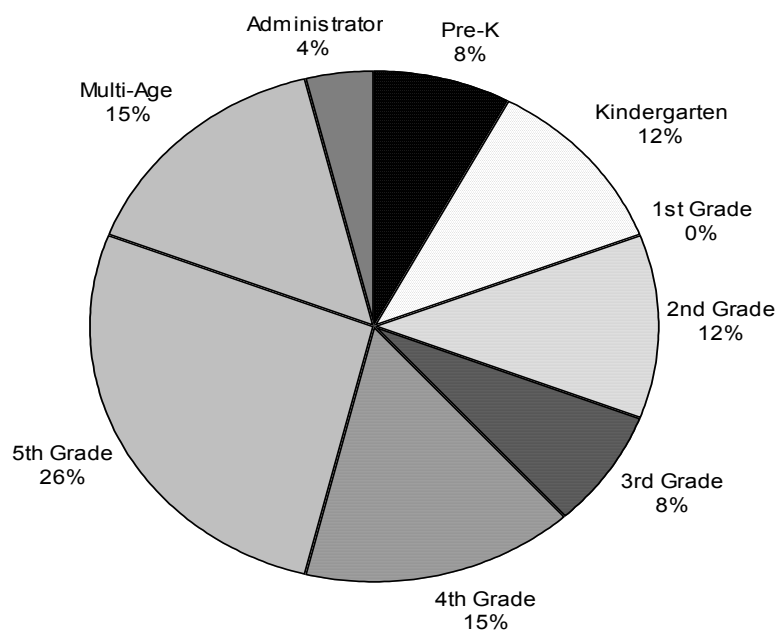
Forty educators at Franklin received the link to complete the survey. Prior to completing any questions related to the school, respondents were asked to provide demographic data including their gender, race, position/ grade-level, number of years teaching at Franklin, and total number of years teaching. I had a seventy percent response rate, with a total of twenty-eight educators completing the survey. Rubin and Babbie (1998) indicate that an adequate response rate is 50%, a good response rate is 60%, and a very good response rate is 70%. It was my hope that I would have closer to a 100% return rate given the convenience of the online survey. The following tables illustrate the descriptive characteristics of the respondents.

Of the twenty-eight educator respondents, twenty-six identified as teachers (96.3%), one identified as an administrator (3.7%), and one declined to identify. While the majority of the respondents identified as classroom teachers, the levels of children they work with varied. As shown in Figure 4.1, two respondents identified as Pre-Kindergarten teachers (7.7%), three Kindergarten teachers (11.5%), three Second Grade

teachers (11.5%), two Third Grade teachers (7.7%), four Fourth Grade teachers (15.4%), seven Fifth Grade teachers (26.9%), four Multi-Age teachers (15.4%), and one Administrator (3.8%). Two respondents declined to identify the grade level they serve.

It should be noted that there are some discrepancies in this self-reporting. The staff roster indicated there are three First Grade teachers working at Franklin, however none reported taking the survey. The staff roster indicated there were three Fourth Grade teachers, however four respondents indicated that they are teaching at that grade level. Finally, the staff roster indicates that there are four Fifth Grade teachers. However, seven respondents indicated that they are currently teaching Fifth Grade. One explanation for this discrepancy could be the large number of staff listed as “specialty area” teachers on the staff roster. These teachers serve as Special Education teachers, Physical Education, Art, and Music Specialists, Media Specialist/ Librarian, English Language Learners teacher, Speech Therapist, Resource and Intervention teacher. These teachers may serve multiple-grade levels. It is unclear then why the number of teachers identifying as multi-age, is not higher.

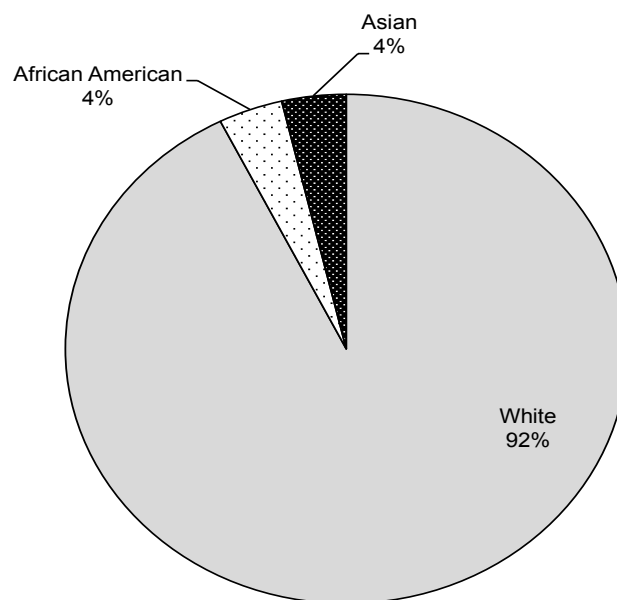
Figure 4.1
Position of Respondents



Consistent with the staff roster, the majority of respondents were female (88.9%) as opposed to male (11.1%). One respondent declined to answer this question.

There was little evidence of racial diversity among the respondents of this survey, consistent with actual staff make-up at Franklin. Figure 4.2 shows that of the twenty-eight respondents, twenty-five identified as White/ Caucasian (92.6%), one identified as African American (3.7%), and one identified as Asian (3.7%). I should note, the one educator who identified as African American is the principal. There are no African American teachers at Franklin. One respondent declined to answer this question.

Figure 4.2
Race of Educator Respondents



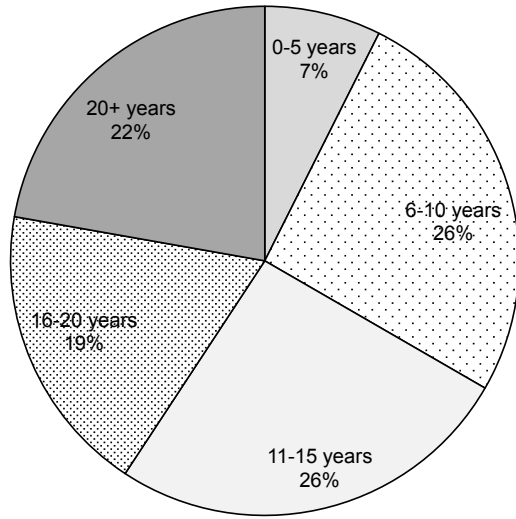
The longevity of this staff is noteworthy. According to 2010-2011 school year data found on the Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools (WINSS) the percentage of veteran teachers at Franklin is higher than the district and state averages. As Table 4.1 illustrates, approximately eighty-eight percent (87.8%) of teachers at Franklin have five or more years of total teaching experience compared to seventy-nine (79.3%) of teachers in the district and eighty-three percent (83.2%) of teachers in the state.

Table 4.1
Percentage of Teachers with 5 or More Years of Total Experience (SY 2010-2011)

Franklin Elementary	87.8%
School District	79.3%
State	83.2%

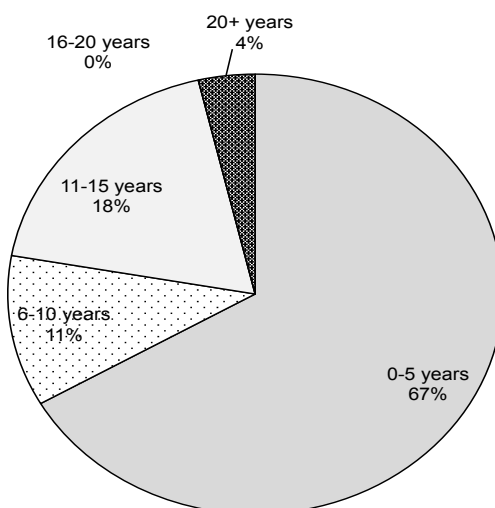
The amount of experience in the field of education varies greatly among the respondents. The majority has between six and fifteen years of experience. As shown in Figure 4.3, of the twenty eight respondents two (7.4%) have between zero and five years of experience, seven respondents (25.9%) have between six and ten years of experience, seven respondents (25.9%) have between eleven and fifteen years of experience, five respondents (18.5%) have between sixteen and twenty years of experience, and six (22.2%) have twenty or more years of experience. One respondent declined to answer this question.

Figure 4.3
Total Experience of Respondents



While the amount of experience in the field of education varies, the majority of respondents are new to Franklin Elementary School. Figure 4.4 shows the amount of experience of respondents. Of twenty-eight respondents, eighteen (66.7%) indicate that they have worked at Franklin between zero and five years, three (11.1%) six to ten years, five (18.5%) eleven to fifteen years, and one over twenty years. One respondent declined to answer this question. So while the educators at this school have a lot of experience in general, many are relatively new to Franklin.

Figure 4.4
Experience at Franklin



Student Survey Respondents

Approximately 241 third, fourth, and fifth grade students at Franklin were invited to complete the online survey. Prior to completing any questions related to the school, respondents were asked to provide demographic data including their gender, race, and grade level. A total of 232 students completed the survey. This represents a 96 percent response rate. The following figures illustrate the descriptive characteristics of the respondents.

The number of male and female students reporting their gender on the survey was almost equal. A total of one hundred ten respondents (50.9%) identified themselves as male, while one hundred six (49.1%) identified themselves as female. Sixteen

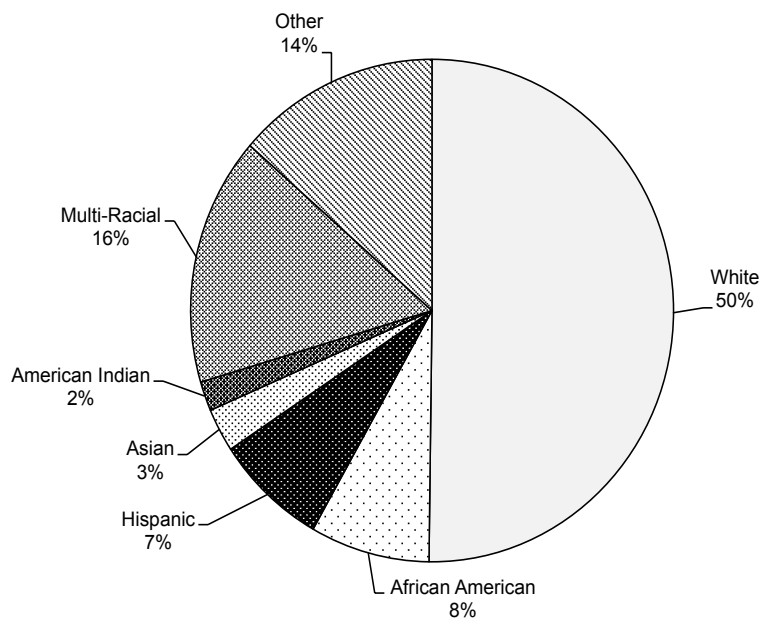
respondents declined to answer this question. According to 2010-2011 school year WINSS data, this is very close to the gender breakdown of the total school population (47.7% female and (52.3%) male.

There was a great deal of racial diversity among the student respondents completing the survey. As shown below in Figure 4.5, one hundred seven respondents (50.2%) identified as White/ Caucasian, seventeen (8%) African American, sixteen (7.5%) Hispanic, six (2.8%) Asian, four (1.9%) American Indian, thirty-four (16%) Multi-Racial, and twenty-nine (13.6%) other. Nineteen respondents declined to identify their race. As shown in Table 4.2, this varies from the overall student demographic information found on the Wisconsin Information Network for Successful Schools website.

Table 4.2
Franklin Enrollment By Race/ Ethnicity (SY 2011-2012)

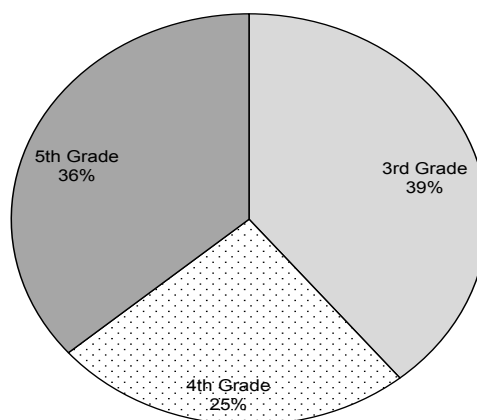
Race	Respondents	Total Enrollment
American Indian	1.9%	0.6%
Asian	2.8%	1.3%
African American	8.0%	10.8%
Hispanic	7.5%	20.0%
White	50.2%	61.6%
Multi-Racial	16.0%	5.6%

Figure 4.5
Race of Student Respondents



There was slight variation in the grade level. Figure 4.6 shows the grade levels of student survey respondents. Eighty-four of the respondents (39.1%) identified as third graders, fifty-three (24.7%) as fourth graders, and seventy-eight (36.3%) as fifth graders. Seventeen respondents skipped this question.

Figure 4.6
Grade Level of Student Survey Respondents



Analysis of Survey Data

Once the educator and student surveys were received, the results were downloaded into SPSS Version 20. Each answer was assigned a value. For example, Strongly Agree=4, Agree=3, Disagree=2, Strongly Disagree=1, and N/A=0. The survey questions, grouped by the research question they were tied to, were then assigned a label. I ran a multivariate analysis (MANOVA) with race, gender, position, grade level, and years of experience as the dependent variables and the individual questions as the independent variables. I was only able to look at race, grade level, and years of experience, because at least three categories are needed for the post hoc tests and gender and position only had two. I looked at the means across my independent variables. I used

Pillai's Trace because it is the least resistant to error, looking for significance of 0.05 or lower.

Educator Survey Analysis

As described earlier, 70% (n=28/40) of the educators at Franklin Elementary School responded to the survey. After answering demographic related questions, respondents answered questions directly linked to each of my three research questions. A complete list of the educator survey questions can be found in Appendix F. As shown in the following tables, there were no significant racial differences were found on questions related to any area of the educator survey. Table 4.3 illustrates the effect of race on educators' perceptions of an existence of a community of practice at Franklin Elementary School. Table 4.4 illustrates the effect of race on educators' perceptions of the effect of supports to reinforce academic achievement. Table 4.5 illustrates the effect of race on educators' perceptions of other factors reinforcing academic achievement. I primarily looked at Pillai's Trace, as it is less resistant to error, than the other tests shown. To determine whether this one-way MANOVA was significant, I looked at the significance column. The lack of a value led me to conclude that Franklin educators' perceptions of the existence of a community of practice, supports to reinforce academic achievement, and other factors were not dependent on race.

Table 4.3
Community of Practice Normalizing Academic Achievement

	Value	F	Hypothesis Df	Error df	Significance	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	.000	b	.000	.000	-	-
Wilks' Lamba	1.000	b	.000	1.000	-	-
Hotelling's Trace	.000	b	.000	2.000	-	-
Roy's Largest Root	-	b	3.000	-	-	-

Table 4.4
System for Academic Achievement

	Value	F	Hypothesis Df	Error df	Significance	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	.000	b	.000	.000	-	-
Wilks' Lamba	1.000	b	.000	3.000	-	-
Hotelling's Trace	.000	b	.000	2.000	-	-
Roy's Largest Root	.000	.000 ^b	3.000	1.000	1.000	.000

Table 4.5
Other Factors

	Value	F	Hypothesis Df	Error df	Significance	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	.000	b	.000	.000	-	-
Wilks' Lambda	.000	b	.000	2.000	-	-
Hotelling's Trace	1.000	b	.000	2.000	-	-
Roy's Largest Root	.000	.000 ^b	3.000	.000	-	.000

I anticipated that I would not get statistical significance due to the small N. While this lack of significance was due to the small sample size, the educator responses to the survey did yield some interesting findings, which informed further research including interviews, informal classroom observations, and document analysis.

Educator survey respondents indicated that the principal was the only African American working at the school. There were no African American teachers. I was anxious to hear the opinions teachers and parents, as to whether they felt this had any impact on African American student achievement at Franklin. With regard to the focus of my first research question, creating a community of practice normalizing high academic achievement, there were some interesting findings related to the learning expectations at Franklin. One hundred percent of survey respondents indicated that the school has high expectations for academic performance and well defined learning expectations for all students. This made me wonder how these expectations are

communicated to students, particularly African American students, and what is done when these expectations are not met. I was also interested to know more about collaboration at Franklin, as the survey results indicate there is not much emphasis on staff collaboration. Franklin is a school in which most students are high achieving, so I expected levels of staff collaboration to be high. These data from the surveys prompted me to seek more information in the interviews. With regard to supports to reinforce academic achievement, the survey results made me want to know more about working relationships between school staff and parents, and school staff and the community.

In the survey I asked several questions about home school relationships, attempting to ascertain whether there was evidence of support for academic achievement outside of the school. There survey data showed consensus among respondents that parents and teachers at Franklin have positive relationships, good communication, and work together to improve the school. On all survey questions related to collaboration between home and school, ninety percent of respondents or higher submitted a positive response. Similarly, one hundred percent of respondents agreed that the relationship between the school and the community is good. This made me curious as to what programs existed to incorporate home and community resources to promote academic achievement, as Perry (2010) emphasized as a necessary component for African American students.

The survey also yielded findings that I did not expect and warranted further investigation. For example, when trying to determine factors beyond those discussed by Perry, I asked educator respondents questions related to the morale of the staff and the perceived level of commitment among Franklin teachers. I asked these questions

because, a high level of staff commitment is evident in many of the schools in which African American students exhibited high levels of academic achievement (as described in my literature review). Surprisingly, only fifty-eight percent indicated that they would *not* want to work at any other school. Put differently, over two in five (42%) *would* want to work elsewhere. This made me want to know more about what is occurring at the school to make teachers feel this way, and how this overall lack of commitment to the school is impacting student achievement. Finally, throughout the survey comments, leadership was cited as a positive factor at the school. This was something I discussed with interview participants to get more specific details of what Mrs. Cobb is doing and how this was impacting student achievement.

Student Survey Analysis

As described earlier, 96% (n=232/241) students in grades 3-5 completed the survey. Like the educator respondents, student respondents first answered demographic questions, then answered questions (see Appendix G) directly paralleling to each of my three research questions. I address each in turn.

Research Question 1: Community of Practice Normalizing High Expectations

The dependent variable for this portion of the study is the students' perceptions of whether they belong to a school community that normalizes high expectations assessed by scores reported on the survey categorized under expectations, caring, encouragement, and the availability of extra help. The main effect is race. As mentioned earlier, each response was assigned a value of 0-4, with 4 indicating strongly agree, 3 indicating a response of agree, 2 equaling disagree, and 1 strongly disagree. A 0 was used to indicate that the question was not applicable. In contrast to the teacher surveys (with low sample

size) the multivariate analysis revealed the significant differences among students as shown in Table 4.6. A 2 (race) x 3 (grade level) between-subjects MANOVA was performed on two dependent variables: perception of a community of practice. Pillai's Trace was used due to a small sample size. Multivariate tests revealed a significant main effect for race [Pillai's Trace=.540, $F(1.512)=60$, $p=.005$]. Franklin students' perceptions of the existence of a community of practice were significantly dependent on their race.

Table 4.6

Community of Practice Normalizing High Academic Achievement

	Value	F	Hypothesis Df	Error df	Significance	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	.540	1.512	60.000	918.000	.009	.090
Wilks' Lambda	.555	1.547	60.000	780.474	.006	.093
Hotelling's Trace	.646	1.575	60.000	878.000	.004	.097
Roy's Largest Root	.134	4.785 ^c	10.000	153.000	.000	.238

As Tables 4.7 and 4.8 show the descriptive statistics on questions related to community of practice normalizing academic achievement. African American students agreed at a higher rate than their White or Hispanic peers on some issues regarding staff encouragement, with a mean of 3.07 and a standard deviation of 1.141 compared with White students who had a mean of 2.78 and a standard deviation of 1.271, and Hispanic students with a mean of 3.06 and a standard deviation of 1.222.

Table 4.7

Teacher Expectations

My Teachers Encourage Me To Do Extra Work When I Don't Understand Something

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.25	.957	2.94	1.432	3.00	1.549
4 th Grade	3.50	.577	2.96	1.098	3.00	1.732
5 th Grade	2.66	1.505	2.50	1.183	3.16	.752
Overall	3.07	1.141	2.78	1.271	3.06	1.222

My Teacher Thinks It Is Very Important That I Do Well

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.75	.500	3.68	.739	3.50	.836
4 th Grade	3.75	.500	3.56	.583	4.00	.000
5 th Grade	3.66	.516	3.75	.500	3.50	.547
Overall	3.71	.468	3.67	.619	3.60	.632

These data suggest that when compared with their White or Hispanic peers, African American students tend to feel more strongly that their teachers encouraged them. One interesting finding was the level of agreement for African American students declined in the fifth grade. Third grade students had a mean score of 3.25 and a standard deviation of .957 compared with fourth grade students who had a mean score of 3.50 and

a standard deviation of .577, both indicating high levels of agreement. However, fifth grade students only had a mean score of 2.66, indicating a moderate level of disagreement.

African American students also agreed that their teachers think it is important that they do well in school. The mean score for African American students surveyed was 3.71 and a standard deviation of .468, compared to a mean of 3.67 and a standard deviation of .619 for White students and a mean of 3.60 and a standard deviation of .632 for Hispanic students. However, again the mean scores for African American students continued to decline by the time students reached the fifth grade. For example, African American third graders and fourth graders had a mean score of 3.75 compared to 3.66 for fifth graders.

While these findings indicate that African American students at Franklin believe they are members of a community of practice normalizing high academic expectations, there are some issues on which African American students disagree to a higher extent than the Hispanic or White peers. Some examples of these issues include, teacher expectations, teachers' beliefs, and willingness of teachers to give help. Table 4.8 shows the mean students responses by grade level and race.

Table 4.8
Community of Practice Normalizing High Expectations
My Teacher Expects Me To Do My Best All The Time

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	2.75	1.892	3.78	.413	3.66	.516
4 th Grade	3.75	.500	3.76	.435	3.00	1.732

5 th Grade	3.66	.516	3.77	.421	3.66	.516
Overall	3.42	1.09	3.77	.417	3.53	.833

My Teachers Believe I Can Do Well In School

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.50	.577	3.78	.703	3.66	.516
4 th Grade	3.50	.577	3.60	.500	4.00	.000
5 th Grade	3.66	.516	3.75	.439	4.00	.000
Overall	3.57	.513	3.72	.568	3.86	.351

My Teacher Notices If I'm Having Trouble With Something

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.75	.500	3.28	.767	2.50	1.516
4 th Grade	2.75	.500	2.84	1.143	4.00	.000
5 th Grade	2.50	1.974	2.88	1.089	3.50	.547
Overall	2.92	1.384	3.03	1.004	3.20	1.146

 My Teacher Is Willing To Give Extra Help If I Need It

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.25	.957	3.15	1.219	3.33	.816
4 th Grade	3.50	.577	3.12	.927	4.00	.000
5 th Grade	2.00	1.897	3.05	.892	3.83	.408
Overall	2.78	1.476	3.11	1.029	3.66	.617

 The Teacher Helps Me Catch Up If I Am Behind

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.00	.816	3.05	1.314	2.16	1.471
4 th Grade	3.50	.577	3.00	.866	4.00	.000
5 th Grade	1.83	2.041	3.16	1.108	3.33	.816
Overall	2.64	1.549	3.08	1.130	3.00	1.253

As shown in Table 4.8, African American students generally agreed that their teachers expect the best of them. However, in direct contradiction to the earlier questions, African American students agree to a lesser extent than White and Hispanic students. African American students as a total group had a mean score of 3.42 (SD=1.09) compared to a mean of 3.53 (SD=.417) for Hispanic students, and a mean of 3.77 (SD=.833) for White students. Another interesting finding was that, African American third graders had a significantly lower mean score of 2.75 (SD=1.892) than African

American fourth graders with a mean score of 3.75 (SD=.500) and African American fifth graders with a mean score of 3.66 (SD=.516).

African American students largely agree that their teachers believe that they can do well in school, however again their mean score of 3.57 (SD=.513), is lower than the 3.72 (SD= .568) mean score of their White and the mean score of 3.86 (SD= .351) of their Hispanic peers. As I will discuss later, I found this affirmed in my interviews with Franklin educators. Ironically, the degree of agreement among African American students again increases as they get older. Both third and fourth grade students had a mean score of 3.50 (SD=.577), whereas fifth grade students had a mean score of 3.66 (SD=.516).

When asked whether teachers notice if they are having trouble with something, in regards to class work, African American students' scores progressively got lower. Whereas African American third grade students had a mean score of 3.75 (SD=.500) indicating a high level of agreement, fourth grade students had a mean score of 2.75 (SD=.500) and fifth grade students had a mean score 2.50 (SD=1.974).

Another interesting finding was in regard to teachers' willingness to give help. The mean score for all White students was 3.11 (SD=1.029) indicating agreement. The mean score for Hispanic students was 3.66 (SD=.617), indicating a high level of agreement. In contrast the mean score for African American students was 2.78 (SD=1.476), suggesting some disagreement. As has been a pattern, the level of agreement among African American students significantly decreased for this group of fifth graders. Third grade students had a mean score of 3.25 (SD=.957), fourth grade

students had a mean score of 3.50 (SD=.577), compared to fifth grade students who had a mean score of 2.0 (SD=1.897)

This pattern continued when students responded to questions regarding teachers providing extra help to catch up on missed assignments. Both White and Hispanic students agree that teachers provide them with extra help to catch up, with mean scores of 3.08 (SD=1.130) and 3.0 (SD=1.253) respectively. However, African American students disagreed with a mean score of 2.64 (SD=1.549). Most interesting is the great decline in agreement between fourth and fifth grades. For example, African American third graders have a mean score of 3.0 (SD=.816), fourth graders had a mean score of 3.50 (SD=.577), compared to fifth grade students who had a mean score of 1.83 (SD=2.041).

The student responses to these survey questions allude to the fact that there is evidence of a community of practice, which normalizes high expectations for academic achievement at Franklin. However, students do not perceive that these high expectations exist for all students. There is something happening to African American students between the fourth and fifth grades, which presents significant difference in their perceptions of teacher expectations, encouragement, caring, and willingness to provide extra help. Possible explanations for this were discovered during the interviews I conducted with Franklin educators.

Teachers do not exhibit the same level of expectations for all students. In particular they hold lower expectations for the largely African American group of students who recently came to Franklin from Columbus Elementary, a neighboring school that closed. This discord transcends students as teacher relationships, particularly at the fourth and fifth grade levels, are strained with the addition of former Columbus

teachers to the veteran Franklin staff. The teachers' inability to collaborate and co-exist appears to be impacting students at these grade levels.

Research Question 2: Supports for Academic Achievement

My second research dealt with Perry's (2010) second factor for successful schools for African American students, a broad range of supports. I sought to identify what routines, policies, and practices occur within Franklin Elementary that support academic achievement. The dependent variable for this portion of the study was students' perceptions of the existence of such supports for academic achievement at Franklin Elementary School based on scores reported on the survey instrument for questions categorized opportunities for peer academic support, peer pressure, and reinforcement for positive behavior. The main effect was race. Once again, the multivariate analysis revealed that significant differences were found. Table 4.9 illustrates the effect of race on students' perceptions of the existence of supports for academic achievement at Franklin Elementary School. A 2 (race) x 3 (grade level) between-subjects MANOVA was performed on two dependent variables: perception of a community of supports for academic achievement. Pillai's Trace was used due to a small sample size. Multivariate tests revealed a significant main effect for race [Pillai's Trace=.547, $F(1.830) = 48.000$, $p=.005$]. Franklin students' perceptions of the existence of a supports for academic achievement were significantly dependent on their race.

Table 4.9
Supports for Academic Achievement

	Value	F	Hypothesis Df	Error df	Significance	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	.547	1.830	48.000	876.000	.001	.091
Wilks' Lambda	.544	1.915	48.000	697.841	.000	.097
Hotelling's Trace	.684	1.985	48.000	836.000	.000	.102
Roy's Largest Root	.380	6.930 ^c	8.000	146.000	.000	.275

Survey responses indicate that African American students indicate that African American students identify their peers as a source of academic support, at a higher rate than White or Hispanic students. Recall that the responses to these questions were 4=Strongly Agree, 3=Agree, 2=Disagree, and 1=Strongly Disagree. Tables 4. and 4.11 show the descriptive statistics for students on survey questions related to supports for academic achievement.

Table 4.10
Supports for Academic Achievement

My Friends At This School Think Doing Homework Is Important

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	2.75	.957	2.97	.940	3.20	.836
4 th Grade	3.25	.500	2.65	.775	1.50	2.12
5 th Grade	2.80	.836	2.83	.696	3.16	.752
Overall	2.92	.759	2.84	.816	2.92	1.115

Students Help Each Other In Class

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.00	2.000	3.16	.654	2.00	1.224
4 th Grade	3.50	.577	2.86	.757	3.00	1.414
5 th Grade	3.00	.000	2.69	.980	3.16	.408
Overall	3.15	1.068	2.91	.833	2.69	1.031

Students Work Together To Solve Problems

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.50	.577	3.00	1.095	2.60	1.516
4 th Grade	2.75	1.500	2.73	.864	3.00	1.414
5 th Grade	2.80	1.095	2.61	.837	3.16	.408
Overall	3.00	1.080	2.78	.955	2.92	1.037

Students Make Fun of Students Who Do Well In Class

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	1.75	.957	1.94	1.094	2.40	1.516
4 th Grade	2.25	.957	1.69	.822	0.50	.707
5 th Grade	1.20	.836	2.19	1.064	1.50	.547
Overall	1.69	.947	1.97	1.031	1.69	1.182

I found a notable difference when analyzing African American students' perceptions of whether completing homework was important to their peers. As shown in the first section of Table 4.10, the mean scores for African American students was 2.75 (SD=.957) for third graders, 3.25 for fourth graders (SD=.500), and 2.80 (SD=.836) for fifth graders. Ironically, African American fourth graders were the only group that agreed that completing homework was important to their peers, yet this same group indicated that they did not follow school rules. I conclude from these responses that fourth grade students recognize the importance of academics, but do not see the connection between their behavior and their academic performance.

When asked whether students help each other in class, with regard to academic help, agreement was strongest among African American students. As shown in the second section of Table 4.10, the mean score for Hispanic students was 2.69 (SD=1.031) the mean score for White students 2.91 (SD=.833), and the mean score for African American students 3.15 (SD=1.068). Perhaps more telling is an analysis by grade level. As the grade level increases, the level of agreement shows a consistent decline among

White students and an increase among Hispanic students, but African American students regardless of grade level agree that their peers support one another academically.

Ironically, once again the responses of African American fourth grade students indicate the highest level of agreement, reinforcing their focus on academics.

To further assess peer support for academics, and to compare responses to the previous question, students were asked whether they felt students in their class help each other solve problems (third section of Table 4.10). The responses differed. In hindsight I believe that some students may have interpreted this question to mean personal problems, as opposed to academic problems. I am not certain that third fourth, and fifth grade students have the resources to help each other solve personal problems.

African American students who do well in school are often ridiculed by their peers for acting White (fourth section of Table 4.10). To assess whether students at Franklin Elementary School feel this way, I asked students whether students make fun of students who do well in class. The results shown in Table 4.10 indicate that African American students, like their Hispanic peers, disagree with this statement at an even higher level than White students. African American students at Franklin do not feel they are ridiculed, by their peers, for doing well in school.

However, as shown in Table 4.11, African American students at Franklin perceive there are less routines, policies, and practices supporting academic achievement, in the form of peer pressure to do well in school or reinforcement for positive behavior, than their White or Hispanic peers.

Table 4.11
Supports for Academic Achievement

My Friends Follow School Rules

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.00	.816	3.00	.755	2.80	1.643
4 th Grade	1.75	1.258	2.60	.838	1.50	2.121
5 th Grade	3.20	.447	2.50	.654	2.66	.816
Overall	2.69	1.031	2.71	.767	2.53	1.330

My Friends In This School Try Hard To Get Good Grades

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.25	.957	3.58	.649	3.00	1.732
4 th Grade	3.25	.957	3.13	.625	3.00	1.414
5 th Grade	2.80	1.095	3.05	.673	3.50	.547
Overall	3.07	.954	3.27	.691	3.23	1.165

When asked whether they felt their peers followed school rules, African American students showed differences dependent upon grade level. The mean score for African American students in third grade was 3.0 (SD=.816), indicating agreement. However, by the fourth grade the mean score for African American students was 1.75 (SD=1.258), indicating a high level of disagreement. The mean score increased to 3.20 (SD=.447) for African American fifth grade students indicating they agreed. This speaks to some behavioral issues among fourth grade African American students. While these

numbers were consistent with those of third, fourth, and fifth grade Hispanic students, they differ from those of White students. Whereas the mean score for White third grade students was 3.0 (SD=.755), the same as African American students at the same grade level, fourth and fifth grade White students both show a level of disagreement with this question with mean scores of 2.60 (SD=.838) and 2.50 (SD=.654) respectively.

While third and fifth grade students on average disagree that completing homework is important, African American students at every grade level indicated that they and their peers try hard to get good grades. However, the total mean score for African American students was 3.07 (SD=.954), a slight bit lower than the mean scores for White students 3.27 (SD=.691) and Hispanic students 3.23 (SD=1.165).

Despite the many programs such as *Homework House* and *Kids Stop* and the school's emphasis on service learning and character education, the student survey responses indicate that African American students at Franklin Elementary School identify peer support as a strong reinforcement for academic achievement. Students help each other in class, help each other solve problems, and see the value in doing homework. Even more telling is the fact that African American students at Franklin do not experience negative peer pressure or ridicule for doing well in school. However this peer support does not extend to reinforcing positive behavior at school or communicating the importance of getting good grades.

Research Question 3: Other Factors That Support Academic Achievement

With regard to research question number three, the dependent variable was students' perceptions of other factors that support academic achievement for students at Franklin Elementary School reported by scores on the survey instrument regarding safety.

The main effect was race. Once again, the multivariate analysis reveals that highly significant differences were found. Table 4.12 illustrates the effect of race on students' perceptions of other factors that support academic student achievement at Franklin Elementary School. A 2 (race) x 3 (grade level) between-subjects MANOVA was performed on two dependent variables: perception of a community of practice. Pillai's Trace was used due to a small sample size. Multivariate tests revealed a significant main effect for race [Pillai's Trace=.142, $F(0.982)=24$, $p=.005$]. Franklin students' perceptions of the existence of other factors were significantly dependent on their race.

Table 4.12
Other Factors

	Value	F	Hypothesis Df	Error df	Significance	Partial Eta Squared
Pillai's Trace	.142	.982	24.000	640.000	.489	.036
Wilks' Lambda	.863	.986	24.000	548.918	.483	.036
Hotelling's Trace	.153	.990	24.000	622.000	.477	.037
Roy's Largest Root	.100	2.653 ^c	6.000	160.000	.018	.090

Table 4.13 shows the descriptive statistics for student responses to survey questions related to other factors. African American students had a mean overall score of 3.15 (SD=1.143), compared to a mean score of 2.42 (SD=1.538) for White students, and a mean score of 3.20 (SD=1.146) for Hispanic students. This suggests that African

American students at Franklin feel safer than their peers of other races, specifically as it relates to traveling to and from school and in the neighborhood outside of the school.

Table 4.13
Other Factors That Support Academic Achievement

I Feel Safe Traveling Between Home and School

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.40	.894	2.10	1.651	2.66	1.505
4 th Grade	2.50	1.732	2.19	1.673	3.66	.577
5 th Grade	3.50	.577	2.94	1.169	3.50	.836
Overall	3.15	1.143	2.42	1.538	3.20	1.146

I Feel Safe Outside The School

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.00	1.224	3.00	.858	3.00	.632
4 th Grade	3.00	1.414	3.34	.935	3.00	1.000
5 th Grade	3.25	.957	2.88	1.035	3.33	1.032
Overall	3.07	1.115	3.04	.952	3.13	.833

I Feel Safe In The Hallways and Bathrooms

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.00	1.000	2.74	.880	2.16	1.329
4 th Grade	2.25	.957	2.92	1.055	3.66	.577
5 th Grade	3.25	.500	2.91	1.079	2.83	1.169
Overall	2.84	.898	2.85	.993	2.73	1.222

I Feel Safe In My Classes

	African American		White		Hispanic	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
3 rd Grade	3.60	.547	3.15	.932	2.83	1.169
4 th Grade	3.25	.957	3.23	1.142	3.66	.577
5 th Grade	3.50	.577	3.36	.682	2.83	.983
Overall	3.46	.660	3.24	.910	3.00	1.000

Franklin has long been a neighborhood school with little to no bussing. Even with the influx of new students, due to the closing of neighboring schools, this continues to be the trend. Students were asked whether they felt safe traveling between home and school. The responses indicate that African American and Hispanic students overall feel safer walking to and from school than White students (Table 4.13, first section). Looking specifically at the responses of African American students, third and fifth graders strongly agree that they feel safe whereas fourth graders disagree. This raises the

question of whether student responses to behavior and following school rules are somehow related to this.

When asked whether they feel safe outside of the school, this relates to wait time to enter the building in the morning and recess, there was consistency among the groups.

Students were then asked questions related to their perceptions of safety within the school. Overall student responses indicate that students disagree with the statement ‘I feel safe in the hallways and bathrooms’. However, they feel safe in their classes.

There is some irony in these results as there is minimal travel for students at Franklin Elementary, as they remain with their homeroom classes with the exception of specials, lunch, and recess, at which time they are escorted by a homeroom teacher. Even bathroom breaks are taken as a class, with the exception of occasional emergencies. The one conclusion that can be drawn is that African American students feel safer attending Franklin Elementary than their Hispanic or White peers. It is unclear what, if any, impact that this has on student achievement. Other factor identified during parent and educator interviews provided more telling factors. I turn now to these.

Interview Data Analysis

The second form of data I collected was in the form of personal interviews. I spent two days at Franklin Elementary School interviewing parents and staff members. There were several reasons for conducting interviews. First, I wanted to understand why African American students at Franklin are performing so well academically, in relation to their peers of other races at Franklin, and their African American peers at other schools, from the perspective of their parents. I also wanted to build on the data from the educator and student surveys. In addition to being asked questions directly aligned to the survey,

respondents were given the opportunity to answer some open-ended questions which allowed me to really understand what is happening at this school. I summarize all my research participants in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14
Pseudonyms and Descriptions of Research Participants

Pseudonym	Position	Description
Mrs. Cobb	School Principal	In her third year as the principal of Franklin after serving as a principal in a neighboring school district for more than twenty years.
Diana	School-Wide Instructional Coach	Diana is in her second year at Franklin. Prior to her arrival at Franklin, she worked as a Kindergarten teacher at a neighboring elementary school. Diana currently works as the Instructional Coach for Grades K-5.
Sandy	Teacher, 5 th Grade Enrichment	Sandy has worked at Franklin for over ten years and has taught for over twenty years in various states.
Christina	Teacher, 5 th Grade	Although this is her first year at Franklin, Christina has been teaching for ten years. She is at Franklin after receiving an involuntary transfer when her previous school, Columbus Elementary, closed.
Sally	School Counselor	Sally has served in various roles (teacher; counselor) at Franklin since 1971. She currently serves as the School Counselor, although she is also somewhat of the unspoken leader among her colleagues.
Delbert	Teacher, 2 nd Grade Enrichment	Delbert has taught at Franklin for the last eight years, and has been in the district for approximately thirteen.
Joanne	Parent	Joanne is the mother of four children, three of who attended Franklin at the time of our

interview. Joanne's children were in 1st, 4th, and 5th grades. Her fourth child recently transferred to a nearby school due to special education accommodations.

Marquitta

Parent

Marquitta is the mother of two children, both of whom attend Franklin in the 1st and 3rd grades respectively

I conducted interviews with two parents of African American students at Franklin (see Table 4.14). The parents were both relatively new to the Franklin Elementary School community. At the time of our interview, their children were completing their first full school year at Franklin. Seven parents were initially invited to attend this group interview session, however on the morning of the session five did not show up. Subsequent efforts to interview additional parents were unsuccessful. The parents were asked a series of open-ended questions in order to ascertain whether a community of practice normalizing academic achievement exists at Franklin, identify support to reinforce academic achievement and identify other factors impacting academic achievement. The questions posed to the parents can be found in Appendix J.

I also conducted interviews with six Franklin educators, five staff members and the principal. The five teachers were selected by the principal. Per my request she selected subjects which represented a cross-section of the staff population with regard to position in the school, tenure at the school and in the profession, and race, as well as availability. As a result, I interviewed a diverse group of educators. Most were eager to participate and appeared comfortable being candid in their responses, based on the length of their answers and overall interviews. Diana, the Instructional Coach, remarked, "This

is good”, during her interview. Another teacher, Christina, shared, “I have been doing a lot of interviewing. I’m in my Master’s program, I’m finishing up, so I definitely understand and I’m glad to help”. Like the parent subjects, Franklin educators were asked a series of questions aligned to my three research questions (see Appendix J).

Community of Practice Normalizing Academic Achievement

In response to research question one, I found evidence of a community of practice, which normalizes academic achievement, not only for African American students, but for students of all races. There is sense of community at Franklin that is both organic, having evolved naturally, and deliberate, which Franklin stakeholders have facilitated. “We really emphasize that community focus and that we’re all here as a family. We hear that a lot in the building too, the Franklin family work together and everyone is here to help each other” shared Delbert, a 2nd grade enrichment teacher. This sense of community appears to have originally formed from being a neighborhood school. Sally, the school counselor who has worked at the school since 1971, stated, “There’s always been a tight knit group of kids moving thru and we’re a neighborhood school, except for the enrichment program. So there is a feeling that this is our place, our neighborhood, our school”. It was and in some cases still is not uncommon for multiple generations of the same family to attend Franklin. However as nearby schools close, and the Franklin community expands and becomes more diverse, staff have taken more deliberate actions to maintain the sense of community and to insure that high academic achievement is the norm. Following the 2010-2011 school year, the district made the decision to close a neighboring school, Columbus Elementary, due to small enrollment and financial constraints. The students who attended Columbus were transferred to

Franklin. While the schools were physically close, Franklin staff felt the two schools were very different with regard to their expectations for behavior and academic performance. Sally, the school counselor, explained:

For whatever reason some of the students that we got this year, because we got all the new Kindergartners, we got new kids because of boundaries, and we got new kids because they moved here. So it just happened that what were dealt this year would appear to be more challenging that what we'd had before.

But to maintain the high level of achievement, "We tell them, 'This is what we expect around here'".

A number of themes related to communities of practice normalizing academic achievement emerged across all interview subjects: High Expectations for All Students, No Opportunity for Students to Fail, Inclusion instead of Exclusion, and High Expectations for Teachers and Staff.

High Expectations for All Students

"Everybody is seen as somebody who is going to be part of our family and going to succeed here", said Sandy a 5th grade enrichment teacher. Her colleague Delbert concurred, "At Franklin we don't label kids. We treat them all as coming in with the same potential. We take them from where they're at and try to move them ahead". These statements were representative of how teachers that I spoke with describe the level of expectation for students at Franklin. Students, regardless of race are viewed as capable of attaining a high level of academic success and that message is communicated to students verbally and non-verbally. Both parents and educators I interviewed stated that students are told up front what is expected and that failure is not an option and that this applies to

all students. For example, Special Education students are held to the same standards as their Regular Education peers. As the principal Mrs. Cobb shared:

The Special Ed teachers work very collaboratively with the classroom teachers to get our Special Ed children up there. Just because they're Special Ed, doesn't mean that you can't do it. Now, do we need to do something a little differently, for those children? Exactly, because they aren't denoted Special Ed, just to be denoting Special Ed. There's a problem here and we need to deal with it.

Joanne, a parent of three African American students at Franklin, recalled how at her son's previous school, he was repeatedly sent home from school for his behavior. Missing instruction inevitably led to a low level of academic performance. Since coming to Franklin, he has not been allowed to get out of doing his schoolwork by misbehaving. She explained:

They [Franklin teachers] try to find different ways here to teach the students. Like my son's focus was off just sitting here reading a paper, so it's like okay if your focus is off here reading this paper, let me give you this iPad, let me put an activity on this iPad for you. Then when it wasn't the iPad, it was the regular computer that they would give him. So they have different options, they try their best to whatever way possible to teach a kid or try to catch a kid or try to figure out better ways to teach the kids. Because you know most kids are just used to the papers and stuff like that, but some kids like my son are not able to focus on that for a long period of time. He may be on a paper for two minutes and be like "Forget it, I just can't do this". So, instead of them saying, " Well [student's name] here's something to color", they say "Well [student's name] let's try it this

way”. That’s one thing I like about them to they don’t just stop and say, “I can’t do it”. They give them [the students] other options.

Even the principal has taught Joanne’s son individually when he needs to be removed from the classroom setting, as she explained in another example:

Even if [my son] is struggling in a class, you know, they’ll call the principal and she’ll come up, she’ll bring him down here [to the principal’s office] and she’ll sit here and work with him. I have came in here many days when she’s called me, walked in the door, and she’s sitting here helping him with his work. So that helps out a lot too. The principal she is very hands on. She’s not only just a principal, here to monitor people or anything, she actually tries to help these kids. So I think that plays a big part as well.

Joanne’s son’s behaviors are not used as a reason that he cannot make the same academic progress as his classmates. As Joanne stated very simply, “These teachers hold these kids accountable”. No excuses are made for why students can’t be successful. Rather staff members utilize strategies to insure that they are successful. If there are issues where students are not achieving at the level that teachers and parents feel that they should, no matter who they are or what racial, economic, or educational demographic they are from, teachers work with them. These statements from the principal, teachers, and parents led me to identify the first theme of high expectations for students at Franklin Elementary.

It is important to note that while Franklin staff claim to have high expectations for all students, there appears to be some disconnect between what they communicate and their actual beliefs, particularly as it applies to African American students. While their

actions do not outwardly illustrate it, some Franklin teachers I spoke with appear to look at African American students and their families from a deficit perspective. For example, when asked whether African American parents are involved at Franklin, Delbert responded:

A lot of the African American parents that I have are not as educated and therefore are working minimum wage jobs or jobs that are factory jobs, and they're sometimes working the strange shifts where they're going in working when kids are getting home from school, so they can't help with homework. Or they're sleeping during the day because they work third shift, so they can't come and volunteer for field trips. So, there are a handful and especially with enrichment because it's a slightly different demographic where you might have a stay at home mom or you might have two parents, as opposed to a one-parent family.

Sally offered a similar response:

It's kind of that societal track record of being stuck in a rut either financially or the law. And as much as they want to be involved, they have so many numerous problems of their own, by the time it gets to helping their kids, they don't have time to help anymore.

When asked about community involvement, Sally shared some of the opportunities Franklin students have. In this statement, she expressed her own beliefs about the life experiences of minority students:

They enjoy seeing people that they wouldn't normally interact with. Or learning from people like the judges when they have Law Day and stuff like that. And

especially the minority kids because these are people that they don't normally hear about, unless it's in a bad way. So it's a positive way for them to interact with these people and understand what their role in the community is.

Fortunately these teachers beliefs about African Americans, students and their families, have not had a negative impact on the academic achievement of African American students thus far, however it could eventually have a negative impact as these beliefs make their way into the expectations that these teachers communicate to the students.

No Opportunity for Students to Fail

High expectations are not simply a cliché statement that students hear. Even if students are not self-motivated enough to put forth effort to meet expectations, there are practices in place at Franklin to insure students can be academically successful. The second theme that I found was at Franklin staff, administration and parents claim to collectively do not allow students to fail. Delbert shared:

If there are issues or [students] are not achieving as well as they should, no matter who they are or what demographic they're from, a lot of the teachers I work with in the building, I hear them [his colleagues] saying, 'Failure is not an option'. And vocalizing that ideal that you are smart, you just maybe need to try this again, we can work with you on that.

Delbert's colleague, Christina echoed this sentiment. She said:

Well for me as a classroom teacher I let them know right up front what I expect and that failure is not an option. I have a student right now, and he's not turning in any homework. Well I understand home life might be very difficult for you but this is valued

practice, so we're going to do it here at school. You're going to stay in with me at recess time. A lot of teachers do that here.

Students have no choice in completing their work. If homework is not completed at home then it is completed at school, on the student's time, shared Principal Cobb:

There are consequences for a child that doesn't have his homework. And when I say consequences, I don't mean it in the sense that they're penalized. They know they have to give up their recess. They know they have to stay after school. They know they have to come in early for homework help. So they know that homework means, if you want to do these things you've gotta get this done. So those expectations are spelled out and there's [sic] consequences. A lot of times children [at other schools] know if they don't get done they can say 'I didn't do it. I don't care. I'll just get an F'. But here, if you didn't do it, you give up your time. If you didn't do it at home, you do it here.

She concludes that, "These teachers are willing to give up their recess time, willing to give up part of their lunch time, their willing to give up whatever time it takes so that that child can master that skill".

If there are circumstances in which students do not master a skill, not due to lack of effort, but due to some other problem, the school has a process called SIT, which stands for Student Intervention Team. The SIT meetings include the classroom teacher, school psychologist, school counselor, the instructional coach, and the principal. "We have those meetings at least once or twice a month, to look at some of the concerns and let's see if we can give some resources for the teacher to deal with those concerns" explained Principal Cobb. While I did not have the opportunity to observe one of these meetings, the principal provided me with some insight of what typically happens during these meetings. The classroom teacher lists

the concerns and gives data to support the concerns, and the team provides resources, strategies, and suggestions to help the teacher help the student work thru those concerns and master the grade-level skills. The process is designed not to blame or label students, but to help them achieve grade level mastery of skills. Principal Cobb went on to say:

No excuses! No excuses whatsoever. And it's no excuses of themselves [teachers] either. And I think that's the key. Whether it's the student, they don't talk about the student. Its 'What must I do to get them there'? 'What must we do to find a way to get them there'? And that's where I think they hold themselves accountable. They bring these children to the SIT to talk about: Is there vision fine? Is the hearing fine? Is there any other things we should be aware of to meet the needs of the kids.

The team then allows the teacher time to implement the strategies before reconvening to discuss whether they were effective or whether the team needs to continue their work.

Listening to the parents and teachers share, I concluded that at Franklin there is a commitment to help students, and essentially help teachers to help students, experience success in the classroom as opposed to excluding students from the classroom and hence from opportunities to learn. The evidence I gathered suggests that teachers at Franklin don't blame students and their circumstances or use that as an excuse for not learning. They hold both their students and themselves accountable for achievement.

Inclusion Instead of Exclusion

In addition to the high expectations (theme one) and no opportunity for students to fail (theme two) another theme that emerged in my interviews with parents at educators was that Franklin Elementary School normalizes achievement for African American students by promoting inclusion instead of exclusion. Whether it was keeping

special education students in the regular education classroom, making sure that students with behavioral problems remained in school, or making sure accelerated academic programs include a fair representation of students from diverse racial groups, it appears that African American students here have a different experience than is characteristic of most public schools. For example, whereas much educational research reports disproportionate numbers of African American students in Special Education programs (as discussed in my introduction), which remove them from the regular education setting and thus cheat them from valuable learning opportunities, African American students at Franklin are largely a part of the regular education program.

Joanne discussed her son's need for special education services and the lengths that Franklin staff went to in order to keep him in regular programming:

My son that is now at [another school], he went here until about two and a half weeks ago. My son suffers from ADD, anxiety, and ODD, oppositional defiant disorder. And he has a very tough time focusing. He's not considered a learning disability, he has more of a behavior disability. So, he has a lot of problems focusing and stuff like that. So my son had not had an IEP in place yet. But this team here worked with my son so well, that it was able to help him.

When all was said and done, Joanne's son was evaluated and determined to be Emotionally Behaviorally Disturbed, but this was after a lengthy process in which all alternatives were explored and the student was not removed from the school or class for each behavioral infraction. He was provided with the same learning opportunities as his peers.

Following my interview with Joanne, I walked down to observe the self-contained classroom. I was surprised to find that out of fifteen total students, only three were African American. Having worked in public schools for thirteen years, I know that this is highly uncharacteristic. In my experience it is not unusual to have a self-contained Special Education classroom composed of all African American students, most often African American boys. This observation led me to conclude that either African American students at Franklin were not being over-identified for Special Education programs as Joanne alluded to or African American students identified as having Special Education needs are being supported in the regular classroom, where they receive the same instruction and learning opportunities as their peers.

The same could be said of student discipline. While African American students are typically suspended at an alarming rate, this does not happen at Franklin, reinforcing the theme of inclusion instead of exclusion. The principal is known for holding a philosophy that: If they're not in school, they're not learning. For example, as I was conducting my interview with Mrs. Cobb, an African American student who I'll call Tony was brought to her office. Tony was sent out of his second-grade classroom for being disruptive, defiant, and refusing to complete the assigned work. He was very loud and aggressive as he entered the office, eager to tell Principal Cobb his side of the story. After allowing Tony to explain the source of his anger, he did not want to leave Physical Education and return to his classroom to do work, she very calmly asked him to have a seat in a large armchair in her office. She told him to relax and "calm his body" and then they would speak. We continued our interview, as Tony sat in the chair. Approximately thirty minutes later when we finished the interview, Tony had fallen asleep. Mrs. Cobb

explained that as she suspected he was acting out because he was tired. Had she engaged him when he was agitated, his behavior may have escalated and he may have been required discipline. By allowing him some quiet time, Tony was able to calm down and return to class to learn. When I visited Tony's classroom the following day to check-in on him, Tony he was engaged in a reading lesson and reportedly having a good day. Hence, African American students remain in school, in class, and learning.

When I spoke with parents of African American students at Franklin, they credited this practice with their students' improved academic performance. Whereas in the past they'd be called to come pick their children up from school for disruptions or misbehavior, they now work together with the teachers to try different strategies to correct their children's behavior as needed, keeping them in the classroom and learning. Marquitta laughingly shared, "Yeah, he's never been suspended. I thought he should've been a couple times". She went on to discuss a concern with her son's teacher not being firm enough with him and how it was resolved between her, the teacher, and the principal, as a team. "The teacher that he has now is more of a gentle person, so he's taking that and running with it. She'll say, 'Sit down please' and he'll stand back up". The parent requested a meeting with Mrs. Cobb and made recommendations for how this teacher needed to handle her son:

I don't get called as often as I used to because he knows if you go to Mrs. Cobb's office, you're gonna go to Mrs. Cobb's office, if she's not there you wait or if she's walking around you'll be walking around with her. Or you'll be sitting, there's a desk right out here, doing all of your homework. You don't get to go out for recess. So he knows it's on it, so he knows he has to follow the rules. That's

the way it needs to be. I really like that aspect of it. It's like they listened to what I said.

While this had the potential to escalate to a student suspension, it did not because the teacher, administrator, and parent worked together to find solutions that would allow the student to remain in school.

Exclusionary Tendencies

Another aspect of this theme is that while in many ways Franklin is an inclusive environment for those who are a part of it, it could also be described as exclusive. For example, throughout the interviews many respondents referred to the “Columbus kids”, “those kids”, “that other school”, the “new kids”, and so on. Many staff members I spoke with and the principal (not parents”, did not appear to embrace the newcomers as members of their school community and did not display high expectations for them or a great level of support for the impact had on them. Rather they appeared to see them as a disruption. For example Christina, a current Franklin teacher who came from Columbus this year, shared:

We had a school close last year that we got a portion of their kids. And some of those kids were inner city and more needy and behaviorally more challenging.

And I've heard that a lot, “Oh there's those kids. Those Columbus kids”. There's the stigma that they're the Columbus kids. (But) They're here, they're ours.

It's as if the students who transferred from Columbus are not real Franklin students in the eyes of some of the teachers. The theme of inclusion appears to be selective, particularly as it appears to these outsiders.

The exclusion of outsiders is not limited to the students from Columbus. My interviews revealed some exclusion of teachers as well. There appears to be an increasing lack of community among the teachers at Franklin. These divisions are demonstrated in veteran versus new teachers and Franklin versus Columbus teachers. It appeared that some teachers not being embraced by their colleagues and are not included in the collaborative work culture. This division threatens to harm student achievement as teachers refuse to communicate, much less work together. One example of this is one of my interview subjects, Christina. While she has ten years of teaching experience, the closure of her former school, Columbus Elementary, and the subsequent forced transfer to Franklin has made her a double outsider both as a new teacher and a Columbus teacher. During our interview Christina stated:

As a new teacher in the building it's been very difficult to keep up on what Franklin does and knowing exactly what Franklin does because there wasn't really [pauses]. Even though I've been teaching for nearly ten years, there wasn't like a mentoring program or anything for me to come in to know what the programs were for the school. And communication is difficult. So therefore, it may have impacted student achievement, probably not in the most positive manner because I'm not sure of what things are done and how exactly they're done. It was difficult coming in. [At my former school] We did have some veteran teachers but we had that good mix and everyone helped and worked together. Here you definitely feel the divide a bit more.

Sadly she shared these views in May, after almost a full school year. Not only is this a concern for the sense of community at the school, but for the long-term

implications on academic achievement.

Diana, the Instructional Coach who came to Franklin from Columbus prior to the school's closing, works closely with teachers at all grade levels. In this position she is able to closely observe teacher practices, including collaboration. Diana expressed her frustration stating, "There are pockets of excellence at Franklin which could be much larger if teachers would collaborate and share what is working well. But everyone reverts to their own classrooms or divided cliques".

Despite these issues, African American students at Franklin appear to benefit from more inclusive practices that are commonly found in urban public schools. African American students do not appear to be overrepresented in Special Education programs and do not appear subject to disciplinary consequences that remove them from the learning environment. But while they are included as members of the school community, there is a sense that some students are not seen as full members as reflected in the attitudes and comments of some teachers. It's as if it is inclusive to a point. The teachers did not believe this group of African American students [Columbus kids] was capable of achieving at the same level as the original Roosevelt students.

This presents a potential limitation of Perry's theory, with regard to communities of practice normalizing academic achievement. She does not examine what happens when schools normalize achievement for some but not all African American students.

While the African American population of the school increased between the 2010-2011 school year and the 2011-2012 school year, largely due to the closure of Columbus Elementary School, African American student performance on the WKCE increased. While data for 3rd and 4th grade students was not available, due to small

numbers within the African American subgroup, the number of 5th African American students performing at the proficient or advanced level in Reading and Mathematics increased exceeding that of White students. As illustrated in Table 4.15 below, eighty-seven percent (87.5%) of African American students scored proficient or advanced on the 2011 Mathematics Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE), compared with eighty-four (83.9%) for White students.

Table 4.15
Comparison of SY 2011 5th Grade Mathematics WKCE Scores (by race)

Race	Minimal	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Black	12.5%	0.0%	50.0%	37.5%
White	6.5%	8.7%	23.9%	60.0%

The results were similar in Reading. As shown in Table 4.16, eighty-seven percent (87.5%) of 5th Grade African American students scored proficient or advanced on the WKCE compared with eighty-two percent (82.6%) of White students.

Table 4.16
Comparison of SY 2011 5th Grade Reading WKCE Scores (by race)

Race	Minimal	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
Black	12.5%	0.0%	37.5%	50.0%
White	4.3%	13.0%	32.6%	50.0%

This also represents an approximately thirteen percent (13%) increase in 5th grade African American scores from the November 2010 test to the November 2011 (see Table 4.17).

Table 4.17
Comparison of 5th Grade African American Reading WKCE Scores (by year)

Test Year	Minimal	Basic	Proficient	Advanced
2010	0.0%	28.6%	42.9%	28.6%
2011	12.5%	0.0%	37.5%	50.0%

High Expectations for Teachers and Staff

The fourth theme that emerged for the interviews was a high level of accountability placed on Franklin teachers and staff. The school principal she stated, “Teachers here have been taught that they are here to educate all children”. However, reviewing survey data and school documents, I could find no evidence of the training or professional development that this implied. Subsequent interviews with the teachers, gave me a better understanding of the level of accountability. High expectations for achievement are not solely the responsibility of Franklin students. “Teachers know what is expected of them. They know that high expectations, meeting AYP on the WKCE is part of the requirement” said Principal Cobb. As a veteran teacher at Franklin, Delbert shared that teachers are not only held to high expectations for academic achievement, but for conduct as well:

Even in the teacher position sometimes, we have very negative teachers and then the leadership will get on their case and say, ‘We’re trying to model for them positive behavior. We’re modeling put-ups, not put-downs’.

This is not to say that teachers at Franklin do not encounter struggles. However they are provided with support to overcome these struggles. As school staff members are held to high expectations, they are provided with tools to deliver. Sandy shared some of the training and support that Principal Cobb provides to the teachers:

She's working with the teachers and parents of the students who need some special services. So that's another way. She does provide us with some handouts, magazine articles, and definitely especially since we became Title One [at the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year] there's been some funds for us to go to workshops to bring back information. If she's got the funds and there's something that she thinks would be worthwhile for staff members to go. We're going in the enrichment program we're going to an *International Baccalaureate* model in the next couple of years, we're transitioning to that. So she has sent us to two schools where we could observe.

Of these trainings, the most relevant to the achievement of African American students at Franklin, are the diversity and cultural training opportunities being provided at the school and district level. Due to the closing of schools and the increasing diversity at others, Diana said, "Our superintendent sees a need to address equity and diversity in this district". One step toward addressing this is a three-year cultural competency-training project to provide teachers with a better understanding of how to serve the diverse students in their classrooms. While some teachers like Sandy do not feel this training is needed, "I don't think it's been a problem. A lot of our teachers live in Racine or Kenosha. So, they're used to diversity in the community and have done their student teaching right here in the schools", others feel differently. Christina, a 5th grade teacher

in her first year at the school, spoke of a cultural disconnect between the teachers and students at Franklin. I asked whether she felt teachers at Franklin are having a hard time adjusting to the increasing racial diversity among the student body. She responded:

There's a very difficult time because you have that whole mindset of 'everyone's the middle class or just like me'. When there's the cultural differences and understanding the priorities, because what we have as priorities may not be what our parents [referring the parents of Franklin students] have as priorities.

Principal Cobb echoed this sentiment:

I think that's been hard. Academically I don't think it's hard because they know the content, they know how to teach. Behaviorally, I think it's been hard. Being able to deal with students that are not the so-called norm or students, and deal with it effectively.

To this end, Diana shared that teachers at Franklin will be participating in a project called the *Delta Academy* during the 2012-2013 school year. “ (*Our superintendent*) brought in really an expert in this field whose name is Dr. Sonia James-Wilson, and Dr. James-Wilson runs a group called the Delta Academy. And this is open to all schools”. This project will allow teachers to really explore their own racial beliefs and how these beliefs may impact their practices. “Our task is to create a plan, based on our school data and based on school culture, is to create a plan that addresses equity and diversity. We are in the very beginning stages. We've identified our need”, said Diana.

All schools offer some form of professional development to their staff. However, the professional development at Franklin aims to be less obligatory and more meaningful. Franklin has changed from the once very White middle-class neighborhood school to one

that is more economically and racially diverse. Thus the professional development offered to teachers provides them with resources and training to work effectively with the diverse student population, which Franklin serves, and as highlighted by Diana to reflect on their own beliefs and how this impacts their practice.

My interviews at Franklin revealed four themes related to communities of practice for all students. With few exceptions, namely the new students, my interviews revealed evidence of high expectations for all students, no opportunities for students to fail, inclusion instead of exclusion, particularly for African American students, and high expectations for teachers and staff.

Supports to Reinforce Academic Achievement

With regards to research question two, my interviews revealed a great deal of support to reinforce academic achievement at Franklin. There are programs, which specifically support academic achievement and those that promote character and service, which staff members feel will also promote high academic achievement.

On the academic side, students are able to participate in after school programs such as *Homework Help* and *Chat and Chew*. The *Homework Help* program is designed to make sure that students get their homework completed each night, have a good understanding of their academic subjects, and get the help they need when they do not. Staffed by Franklin teachers, students get help in a familiar setting with familiar individuals. This program also allows students to participate in constructive activities while many parents and guardians finish their workday. Extending the academic focus to the home, Franklin offers what they call monthly *Chat N Chew* programs. The teachers I interviewed explained that *Chat N Chew* programs take the form of Math Nights or

Reading Nights. Teachers and other staff talk to parents about ways to help their children with schoolwork at home. Sally said:

I work with some kids after school too. And some of the parents say they can't do it. They cannot do the math, and therefore they can't help them. And so the math process is different than what they had learned and therefore some of the parents are [saying], "I can't help them".

Delbert offered a different perspective saying:

Because a lot of them [parents] are not as educated as they would be in a school setting, so we're kind of training them to work with their kids. [They] don't know the curriculum and the way that we're teaching things. So that's definitely something we try to do here too".

Educators that I interviewed stressed that the high level of academic achievement seen among African American students, and all students at Franklin, is a product of not only talking academics to children, but also talking about what are good character qualities that needed to be considered a good student. To this end, the school has something, which they call *Core Values*. The *Core Values* at Franklin are: Citizenship, Compassion, Courage, Hope, Integrity, Responsibility, Respect, Self-Discipline, and Work Ethic. Each of these values represent characteristics that Franklin staff aim to teach their students and see reflected in their conduct. I discussed the *Core Values* program with Principal Cobb:

One thing we do here that I think is really good, is we have core values. Every month we have a different core value, and we talk about that core value and we emphasize that core value, and we spotlight students who are demonstrating those

core values. Throughout the month of whatever that core value is. I think that is a key that we're not only talking academics to children, but we're also talking about what are good character qualities that are needed to define what makes up a good student here.

When students misbehave or don't complete schoolwork, staff members at Franklin are not quick to be punitive. Rather they encourage reflection among students often asking them, "Tell me what core value you are demonstrating"? This emphasis on character extends outside of the classroom and into the community as well. In addition to school-based supports to reinforce academic achievement, there is evidence of community-based supports, as well.

When I asked interview subjects about the role which the community plays in supporting academic achievement at Franklin, I was initially confused by Sally's response, "I would reverse that and say how is the school involved in the community"? Sally, as well as other staff members I interviewed, was speaking of Franklin's service learning program. I was confused by this response, because I'd envision community members coming into the school and performing a service for the students or community organizations providing funding to the school. However, educators at Franklin felt that having students complete service for the community was far more valuable in building their character and thus enhancing them as students. Sally is reportedly the community coordinator according to teachers I spoke with. She confirms she is the person who makes the connection to the community. "It was a goal here, and I'd say I've got at least records of, that every child would participate in something connected with the, I would say, making a difference or connecting with the community", she said. Each month she

arranges a service project for the students at Franklin. These projects range from singing at local nursing homes to collecting items for and making baskets for families at the local women's shelter. Sally shared:

Tomorrow the kids are going to go to the assisted living sites and they are going to sing for them. There are care bags out there that we are going to put together for the children's hospital. We have had some kids just recently, last Saturday, they walked in the Food Drive.

Staff members I interviewed stated that they aim to teach the children the value in doing things for others. "Authentic learning is embedded in what we can do to help the community", said Sally. While I admire these actions and would agree that they build character, I could find no evidence of how they promote academic achievement.

My interviews with parents in particular provided the greatest wealth of information about supports, which reinforce academic achievement specifically for African American students. These interviews also helped illustrate the disconnect between what Franklin staff and African American families view as community-based supports. We spoke at length about the local Boys and Girls Club and the way in which it expressly promotes academic achievement with a mixture of fun and academic activities. During the week, the Boys and Girls club reinforces academics being taught at school via the *Kids Stop* program. This program, held at Franklin Elementary School after school everyday, allows students to get help with their homework. Joanne, one of the parents I interviewed, described *Kids Stop*. "The kids are able to go and do their homework and they have different activities that they do with them. Like a few weeks ago was skating, they had skating with them. They also have people in there to help the

kids with their homework, and stuff like that”. Students bring in their assignments and get help from local college students working as teachers in the program. Marquitta, the other parent I interviewed, expressed appreciation for the academic help her children receive:

Both of my children, my 3rd grader and my 1st grader go to Kid’s Stop. For one, it’s very fun, it’s very structured. It’s run by the Boys and Girls Club...I like that they have the outside time, they have the homework time, I think it’s called Power Hour. I think it’s right away after school or an hour after, they do it all together. A few of them group together with a couple of kids and they get the homework done. So, it helps for me because they go to Kid’s Stop until 5:30, so they usually don’t come home with homework because Kid’s Stop will make sure they get it taken care of. And I like the activities. When the kids get out early, like 11:30 [referring to Early Release] *Kid’s Stop* will run all day until 5:30.

They also noted that the majority of the college students working in the program are African American, thus providing role models for their kids, as most of the Franklin students who participate in *Kids Stop* are African American. Joanne shared her observation, “Also what I noticed about the Boys and Girls club, you will find more African American students at the Boys and Girls club than anything”. The parents also felt it was beneficial for their children to have the opportunity to interact with their African American peers. Marquitta said, “And being in a school where there is not a higher African American population, it’s nice for them to be able to hang out with other African American kids. My daughter told me the other day, “You know there’s only one other Black girl in my class”? (*Laughing*). But you know, going to Boys and Girls club

they do get to be around more of them that they, you more of them that they... I don't know how to say it. I'm not saying be around there own kind". While there is growing diversity at Franklin, it is not uncommon for African American students to be spread out in classes where there are only one or two others, particularly in the non-enrichment classes. Parents also told me that the program extends to the weekends. Marquitta described the weekend program:

What I really like about that is, the people who are doing *Kids Stop* work at the Boys and Girls club on the weekend. So [the students are] seeing the same teachers. You know they're [the Boys and Girls Club staff] knowing what they [the students] did during the week, 'Like hey did you get that homework done. Okay, well let's take care of it right now. Like, 'Did you get that project done,? You know that's due on Monday'. Then they have the computer labs there. Like, 'You know you didn't finish your spelling test. Let's go online and finish your spelling [practice] test, so you can be prepared for the test'. It extends you know. It's not just during the school hours.

Parents can drop their children off to the local Boys and Girls Club, located close to the school, on Saturdays from 7 am until 3:30 pm. During this time, they can continue to help with academics or participate in a variety of enrichment activities ranging from singing, dance, and art, to karate and video game tournaments. The Boys and Girls Club connects with Franklin students to support them academically, provide them with a secure place to go, expose them to African American college students, and appeal to their non-academic interests. They also make a point of communicating with parents to make sure students are performing well in school, and hold them accountable when/ if they are

not. With all of the services and benefits that this program provides to the students at Franklin Elementary School, especially the African American students, I was surprised to find how disconnected school staff and administration seem from it. Mrs. Cobb shared her feelings:

School just doesn't stop at 3:10, it goes until 5:30 when the parents pick them up. But sometimes that's good and sometimes that's bad because the kids will come tell me, 'Mrs. Cobb so and so did this', and I tell them, 'Honey, you have to tell your Boys and Girls Club person because it's no longer my problem'.

When asking about supports and community programs, not one Franklin educator I interviewed mentioned the program, even though it is housed at their school five days per week. When I asked about the program, there was not one teacher who could tell me any details about it or the ways in which it serves the students. The principal said, "it's like a before and after school care". I directly asked the principal to tell me about the school's partnership with the Boys and Girl's club, and she responded, "We don't have a partnership with anyone". This suggested to me that the school staff does not see the program benefiting their African American students in the same way that parents do. It is unfortunate as this could really be a support that could really be promoted and enlarged to help maintain the level of high academic achievement among African American students at Franklin.

Other Factors Contributing to African American Student Success

While Perry's (2010) theory focuses primary on the community of practice normalizing academic achievement for African American students (addressed in research question one) and systems of supports to promote achievement (addressed in research

question two), I also explored whether other factors contributing to the success of African American students at Franklin Elementary School. My interviews with parents and educators revealed two: principal qualities and the school's enrichment program. I explore each in turn.

Principal Qualities

Parents and teachers alike credit the school principal, Mrs. Cobb, with the success of African American students at Franklin. Respondents highlighted two qualities: Mrs. Cobb's ability to build rapport, relationships, and positively influence her staff and students and Mrs. Cobb's race.

It is not her knowledge of data analysis or her abilities as an instructional leader, which as often how good leadership is defined (as discussed in my literature review), but rather her approach and rapport with students, parents, and her staff at Franklin. Teachers I interviewed expressed that the support they receive from the principal helps them to best serve their students. Christina shared, "she's definitely involved in what's happening with kids in our classrooms". Diana echoed this support saying:

She is visible, so teachers know that she is there for them so that they can be there for the students. She makes teachers comfortable with data and holding dialogues with them regarding their individual classroom data. She coaches teachers who are struggling.

The parents who I interviewed repeatedly stated feeling that they have an open line of communication with Mrs. Cobb. Joanne shared, "It's easy to reach Mrs. Cobb (principal), you don't have to make an appointment". Their relationship is one that is not one-sided or characterized by reactive communications related to student discipline.

They feel that they can voice their concerns about the school, school staff, or their children's education. Further they indicated that it is not uncommon for them to hear from Mrs. Cobb via phone or email regarding positive things that their children have done. Marquitta gave the following example:

[At the previous school] a lot of the communication with the principal only occurred if they were in trouble. Like Mrs. Cobb I talk to her all the time. Like '[student's name] is doing good this week. I've only had him in one time'. Little things just letting me know the positives. When I get a call from Mrs. Cobb, I don't instantly think something is wrong. Because we communicate.

The word most commonly used to describe their feeling about the principal was respect, and that respect was not simply limited to them but to their children as well. The parents expressed that their children respect and respond to Mrs. Cobb in a way that is different from previous principals they have had. As Marquitta, one of the parents, stated, "They want to please her". According to Marquitta and Joanne (the other parent participant) one reason for this may be her race. Joanne shared:

To me a lot of Black kids have problems communicating with people. You may see a lot of Caucasian kids, Hispanics, Asians, whatever just able to talk to anybody. But, I've found that there are a lot of African American kids, students, whatever that have a problem communicating. Just by the fact that they know that their principal is Black, my kids have said it before, by the fact that they know she's Black to me they look up to her like grandma. You know, and we have to give her the utmost respect. You know, I think that's how my kids look up to her. And that plays a big part with them. Because she's a Black principal,

she's an older lady, and she's as sweet as pie but she means what she says. And they know that. So I think that plays a big part.

Marquitta followed:

I think with my kids too, because of that cultural aspect. My mother is their only grandparent. They don't have great-grandparents, grandfathers, because they've all passed away. So, when Ms. Cobb talks to them they look at her like *Madea* (*referring to a commonly used African American term for a mother figure*), that means something to them. It's just the way they were raised. She reminds me of my great aunt. My great aunt my hit me. So, I'm just going to listen to what she has to say cause I don't know. So, they have that respect for her and they do feel comfortable that they can talk to her because she might understand something a little better. They've had Black teachers before but never a Black principal. I think the comfort level is a lot better having a Black principal, at least for my kids.

When I spoke with Mrs. Cobb about the lack of diversity at Franklin, I expressly asked whether she felt that being an African American principal has had any impact on African American student achievement at Franklin. She vehemently denied stating, "Absolutely none". She expressed that she does not feel that her race plays a role, positive or negative, and stated that her standards for and message about achievement was the same for all students regardless of their race. However Principal Cobb did concede:

Now one thing you will see with me now, I as a principal, I will make a concerted effort to let them [African American students] know that you can be just like I am with an education. So, I do try to tell them when I get a chance to talk to them or

I meet them in the hall I greet them and definitely let them know that I am here for them. And you do what is expected of you in that classroom, because I am here for you.

But Franklin parents and educators I spoke with felt differently. Sandy recalled:

When Mrs. Cobb first came to our school I noticed that a couple of my students [who were African American] who maybe weren't so excited about school now had somebody who was seemed to be interested in them on a very personal level and they wanted to succeed because of her. It just seemed like it was a quick relationship between Mrs. Cobb and those students. It was fun to see.

This sentiment was echoed by several of this teacher's colleagues. Most expressed concern that the teaching population at Franklin was not reflective of the student population and expressed their opinion that having a diverse staff is helpful for students and their learning. Christina said:

Whenever you can have your teacher population match your student population, it's always helpful. Typically, what do we have? We have white females as teachers. We don't have men, we don't have men of different colors, we don't have women of different colors. It's difficult. So I think anytime you can have that mixture I think it's helpful for kids and for their learning.

When asked whether her felt the lack of diversity among the staff impacts African American student achievement Delbert shared:

I think that it does impact their achievement because I think in any school the more presence you have of your cultural role models or racial role models, it does make a difference. Because those (*African American*) kids see a positive aspect

of who they can be and what to strive for, and sometimes they don't have that with their parental component. So you know when they're here at school they don't see a lot of presence of either an African American male or female, sometimes they're more likely to be disrespectful or I guess they don't respond to them in the same manner that they would to maybe somebody that they feel a kinship to.

The parents I spoke with agreed. Both parents expressed that their children performed better academically at Franklin than they had at their previous schools, because they now had an African American principal. The parents expressed that their children "respect her", "can relate to her", "feel comfortable with her", and "identify with her as if she is a family member". Most telling was the statement from Marquitta, "They work hard because they do not want to disappoint her". So while Mrs. Cobb may feel that race doesn't matter, it does in the eyes of African American students at Franklin, their parents, and their teachers.

Enrichment Program

The second factor was the enrichment program. As a teacher in this area, Sandy feels "having the enrichment program here in the building sets higher standards". She explained the program to me:

The enrichment program is designed for students who need a faster pace of learning, who have a different learning style, and in many cases have been identified as gifted. And they were identified using various types of identifiers, most prominent for this particular group of students they were surveyed using a test called the Naglieri. It's a reasoning skills test, and they took that toward the

end of first grade. The test, teacher recommendation, and some parent input. I would add that now there is more of an academic test that is given to some of the students before they are selected. It's called the SAGES, Skills Assessment for Gifted Elementary Students. But this particular group is the last group that came thru without that. So they're invited to participate at the end of 1st Grade and so many of them have been in the program from 2nd grade on. Some of the students have joined since then, when there have been openings. Some of them have been identified later, many times at a parent request.

Deliberate actions are taken to insure that African American students are given the opportunity to participate in this program. Race is carefully looked at when students are selected. Sandy shared that in her thirteen years in the program there has been an informal policy that "recommends that the top three to five percent of every ethnic identification and gender is looked at to make sure that the diversity is equitable". It is up to the school to implement this policy. Now it is up to the parents whether or not they elect to have their children participate in the program, but it appears that parents of African American students at Franklin see the value in it and make sure to get their children enrolled. Of the twenty-three students in the Third Grade Enrichment class, five (21.7%) are African American. Of the seventeen students in the Fourth Grade Enrichment class, four (23.5%) are African American. Of the twenty-nine African American students in the Fifth Grade Enrichment class, two (6.8%) are African American. These enrollment numbers are much higher than the 3-5% recommended by the policy Sandy described. Based on the overall African American student population of 10% [approximately forty students}, this means approximately 25% of Franklin's African

American student population is enrolled in the enrichment program. I also learned that this program draws students from all over the district. For example, of the seventeen students in the Second Grade Enrichment class, only one belongs to the Franklin School attendance zone. Thus this program draws some of the most academically talented African American students in the city to Franklin. Delbert shared this story:

Last year, I had one African American student who took the bus here by himself everyday because he and mom got on the bus because they didn't have a car. She got off at one bus stop and went to work and he went the other way and came here. And every night he caught the bus after the after school program and went home at six o'clock by himself. And he was seven years old.

It is important to note, while this program provides African American students at Franklin with additional learning opportunities it also creates an unintentional division between African American students in regular classes and those in the Enrichment Program. There are some teachers at Franklin who feel that minority achievement data at Franklin is skewed due to the enrichment program. For example, when I met Sally, the school counselor, and shared that the purpose of my research was to ascertain why African American students at Franklin were doing so well in comparison to their peers of other races, she asked, "Did you take the population of the entire school or did you take the enrichment versus the regular"? Later in the interview I asked Sally, "Having been here for twenty-five plus years, to what do you attribute the success of the African American students here at Franklin"? Sally responded, "If you look at our minority population and our minority population that is enrichment, the data has been manipulated a little bit". She went on to say, "You're gonna have to look at the population of

enrichment and special ed, and see how many are there and how many are in the regular ed population. Because the profile may be different”. I would disagree.

Walking the halls of Franklin Elementary School, looking into classrooms, initially unaware of differences between the programs, I consistently saw African American students who were engaged in learning. While African American students are represented in the enrichment program as noted earlier, African American enrichment students only account for 25% of the African American student population at Franklin. However, in speaking with educators at Franklin it is clear that there are some who draw distinctions between African Americans students based on which program they are in. Without any data to support, they draw conclusions about what this says about their ability, and thus allows these beliefs to impact their practice in how they teach and deal with the students. One could assume that this may eventually lead to African American students in the general education program receiving less than they need or deserve.

Overall, my interview data affirms the factors, which Perry (2010) finds as contributing to the success of African American students: Communities of Practice Normalizing High Academic Achievement and a System of Supports to Reinforce Academic Achievement. The data also revealed other factors not mentioned by Perry, including principal qualities and the enrichment program, which are having a positive impact of the academic achievement of African American students at Franklin.

Document Analysis

The final form of data which I analyzed was documents including the school improvement plan (termed SMARTGoals), school newsletters, school website, and school calendar. The purpose of this analysis was to build on the survey and

interview data and to explore what is actually happening at Franklin to promote African American student achievement. In this section I report documentation data I found that lends support for a community of practice, which normalized achievement and a system of supports to reinforce academic achievement and what it means to be an achiever (see Table 4.15). I also report other factors that emerged which may also be contributing to the high level of academic success of African American students in this school. I also describe inconsistencies between what teachers reported (in interviews) and what I found in the documents.

Table 4.18
Document Analysis

Document	Research Question One: Community of Practice Normalizing Academic Achievement	Research Question Two: System of Supports to Reinforce Academic Achievement	Research Question Three: Other Factors Contributing to High Levels of Academic Achievement
School Website	Vision Statement is presented. Mission Statement is presented.	Evidence of relationships with local businesses and community organizations is shown.	Vision and mission, displayed on the emphasize the importance of teachers not only knowing best practices but employing them in their classrooms Evidence of maximizing learning opportunities for all students: employing flexible grouping and support opportunities.

School Improvement Plan (SIP)	<p>Instructional Strategies are presented including: classroom walk-thrus, professional development, & collaborative planning time for teachers.</p> <p>Reading & Math Goals are presented (note: these don't encompass all students).</p>	<p>Evidence of engaging parents and community members.</p> <p>Evidence of community partnerships.</p> <p>Evidence of high trust and relationships</p>	<p>Evidence of instructional strategies: employing technology in classroom instruction.</p>
School Newsletter	<p>Evidence of Staff Collaboration Time/ Days</p>	<p>Evidence of clubs, groups, & enrichment activities for students</p> <p>Evidence of partnerships with businesses and organizations</p> <p>Evidence of programs and assemblies acknowledging diverse cultures</p> <p>Evidence of parent involvement.</p>	<p>Evidence of maximizing instructional time: reminders to parents about attendance and tardiness.</p>
School Calendar	<p>Evidence of Community partnerships promoting achievement</p>	<p>Frequency of enrichment activities is shown.</p>	

Evidence of Staff
Collaboration Time/
Days

Evidence of
programs and
assemblies
acknowledging
diverse cultures
Evidence of parental
Involvement

Community of Practice Normalizing Achievement

Regarding my first research question, I found a great deal of evidence to support the existence of a community of practice normalizing achievement at Franklin Elementary School. From the mission/ visions statements, to the school-wide achievement goals, to the planning of school-wide events it is evident that Franklin is a community, which embraces the all-means-all mantra. Like the theme found in my interview data, it is largely a community based on inclusivity, rather than exclusivity. All children are seen as capable of achieving and are expected to achieve. For example, the Franklin website is unlike most schools in the district. While many schools only have district-sponsored websites which feature photos of the school, contact information, and limited school specific information, the Franklin website very much belongs to the school community. When you click on the webpage, you find more than just general information, you find what the school is all about and more importantly the value placed on community. The School Vision and Mission, found under the ‘About’ tab, make numerous references to the community, educating all students, collaboration, and unity. The following excerpts taken directly from the Franklin Elementary website provide examples:

- “The mission of Franklin Elementary School, a uniquely diverse learning community that values optimal student achievement, is to empower all students to become successful community members and lifelong learners by using educational best practices and resources to ensure various opportunities to contribute, participate and learn within a safe, nurturing environment”.
- “Imagine a school... In which all children achieve at high levels regardless of their backgrounds... (A school) that recognizes all children as talented”.
- “Franklin Elementary School will demonstrate a unity of purpose... we will provide an optimal learning experience for every student”.

The website also defines for us who this community includes. The “community” at Franklin Elementary is not limited to school personnel. The community extends to students and the parents themselves. “All members of the school community develop a vision of their ideal school, collaborate to achieve that vision, and make major decisions about learning, instructional strategies, and school organization...The parents will recognize how important they are in their child’s education by being involved with the school. They will work as a partner with the teachers and administrators to share the responsibility of setting high expectation’s for all children by communicating and supporting academic and behavioral goals. Parents will instill an attitude of respect for education”.

Like the school website, the school newsletters and calendars reinforce this idea of community. Whether monthly faculty meetings, PTO meetings, opportunities for parents to volunteer at the school, school-wide spirit activities for students, or family and faculty mixers called “Chat N Chew” sessions (described in the previous section), there

opportunity to all stakeholders to participate in and demonstrate ownership in the school is both consistent and evident.

While the website, newsletters, and calendar define the communities membership and purpose, laying the foundation for part one of Perry's theory, the school improvement plan which provides specifics of the community of practice, in terms of the level of academic expectations for members. This plan, termed SMARTGOALS at Franklin, includes a school-wide reading goal, as well as grade-level specific math goals:

- Reading Goal: By the end of the 2011-2012 school year, 85% of the students will meet the KUSD grade level reading expectations as indicated by the Founta + Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System.
- Math Goal (K-1): 90% of the students in grades K-1 will score 85% or above on number sense.
- Math Goal (2-5): 90% of the students in grade 2-5 will score 85% or above on their grade level basic math facts.

While these goals demonstrate a high-level of expectation for student achievement, they do not support Perry's theory and are in direct contradiction to what the teachers I interviewed stated. Perry stated that in order for African American students to be successful, they must be members in a community of practice which normalizes achievement for all students. Teachers I spoke to at Franklin specifically discussed the high expectations they held for all of their students. These high expectations are further implied in the vision and mission statements. Yet, the SMARTGoals imply an acceptance of failure for ten percent of students in Math and fifteen percent in Reading. If academic achievement for all students is the goal then I question why aren't the goals

written to reflect proficiency of 100% percent of students? This is consistent with the impression I got from my teacher interviews, that achievement is normalized for some but not all students. And while the general message is that all students can achieve, there are inconsistencies between what is asserted and what is actually practiced and/or believed by the Franklin staff.

System of Supports to Reinforce Academic Achievement

Regarding my second research question, the documents yielded showed a system of supports, which reinforce academic achievement and teach children what it means to be an achiever. The survey data and follow-up interviews alluded to this, however the documents provided the most clarity. As the school vision states on the Franklin Elementary School website, “Our school will provide a respectful, challenging, positive, and supportive environment”. In my analysis, five themes emerged regarding this system of supports: communication, environment, resources for academic achievement, recognition of student achievements, and recognition of culture. These themes were prevalent in the school website, SMARTGoals, monthly newsletter, and monthly calendars.

Communication

Both parents and educators at Franklin stressed the importance of two-way communication. A review of documents confirms this. Not only is the importance of communication for the purpose of promoting academic achievement evident in the vision and mission, posted on the school website, the means of communication is also there. The name and contact information of the principal and every staff member is clearly

posted on the school website. In addition, the name and contact information of every PTO officer is also posted, promoting communication between parents.

Environment

The second major theme that emerged in support of Perry's theory was the importance of the environment. Survey data revealed that students at Franklin not only felt safe traveling to and from school, but felt that they were safe within the school building itself, allowing them to focus on learning. Parents also mentioned that they had no safety concerns at the school. Consistent with survey data and information shared throughout the interviews with parents and educators at Franklin, the documents revealed an emphasis on maintaining a safe and supportive environment in which students could focus on academics. Evidence of this can be found on the in the school's mission and vision statements posted on the website. The mission statement specifically refers to educating students in a " safe, orderly environment". The vision statement includes a similar statement emphasizing that students will be educated in, "A warm, caring, safe, and orderly environment will foster a learning atmosphere that is conducive to success". By eliminating concerns regarding safety and creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning, academic achievement is being reinforced. One way in which this is being accomplished is minimizing behavioral infractions and celebrating positive behaviors and student achievements.

Recognition of Student Achievement

In my interviews with educators at Franklin and looking at the data generated from their survey, it was initially my impression that while the "Franklin kids" were well behaved, newcomers to the school or "Columbus kids" as I frequently heard them

referred, had a tendency to be disruptive, become involved in disciplinary problems, and threaten overall safety at the school. However, a review of the documents says something different. There was a great deal of evidence that the students at Franklin Elementary School display positive behavior and the school community goes to great lengths to recognize this positive behavior and student achievements. For example, the Smart Goals included two related to school climate. The first goal states, “by the end of the 2011-2012 school year, 100% of students will demonstrate understanding of the Code of Conduct as indicated through participation in positive activities available school wide”. They measure this understanding by the number of students receiving Star Student awards, Core Value Certificates, decrease of office referrals by five percent, and reduction of recess infractions by five percent. I found this goal in direct contradiction to what the teachers said and displayed by their body language in terms of their expectations for newcomers to the school. Yet, unlike their academic goals in which they only expected ninety percent (Math) and eighty-five percent (Reading) of the students to accomplish, the staff, who all had a role in writing the Smart Goals seemed confident that all students at Franklin were capable of meeting the behavioral expectations needed to achieve in the classroom and provided numerous opportunities to recognize this accomplishment. The second Smart Goal related to school climate states, “100% of the students will be recognized and or be involved in the numerous positive activities throughout the school year”. These activities and awards include the Star Student Board, Core Values Certificates, Gold Cards for good behavior, and Attendance Awards. By providing this reinforcement and recognition, Franklin staff are reinforcing positive

behavior and teaching students what being an achiever looks like, indirectly supporting academic achievement.

Resources

My review of documents also reveal there are many programs at Franklin which directly provide resources and support for academic achievement. The Franklin web site states that one of their goals is to, “builds on their strengths through enrichment strategies”. Perhaps the largest support at the school is the *Kids Stop* program. This program, which takes place everyday after school and on Saturday mornings is operated in partnership with the Boys and Girls Club. A racially diverse group of area college students serve as staff, and as one parent reported “mentors” to students in the program. In her theory Perry discusses the need to teach student what it means to be an achiever and the behaviors associated with being an achiever. That is exactly what this program does. According to the school website, *Kids Stop* teaches Character and Leadership Development, Education and Career Development, Health and Life Skills, The Arts and Sports, and Fitness and Recreation. It is essentially a place for students to go and learn valuable life skills and behaviors. While open to all students, parents in my interviews indicated that African-American students are the majority of those that attend this program. They felt that the students gravitated to this program as it gave them a chance to learn other skills and develop other interest other than the academic. For example, one mother stated that her son learned to play chess in *Kids Stop*. Another reason given for the popularity of the program, amongst African American students, is the presence of young role models who look like them.

However, as described in the previous section I noted a disconnect between this program and the school. For example, while the program is held at and marketed by the school, I did not see any evidence of their being direct contact between the teachers of the students and the workers at *Kids Stop*. This relationship could have been valuable in reinforcing what was occurring in the classroom. School personnel seemed to want to separate themselves from this program, missing out on a potentially valuable opportunity for students, particularly African American students.

For those students struggling with or needing support in academics, there is another program called *Homework House*. According to the school newsletter, this program provides support to students who need additional time and assistance in completing their homework. Again, this program was open to all students at Franklin Elementary.

While *Kids Stop* and *Homework House* are the largest, there are many other programs supporting academic achievement. The school library webpage features a variety of academic enrichment websites which parents and students can access from home to practice what students are learning in school or for reinforcement outside of the school year. The school counselor conducts classroom guidance lessons with all students regarding setting goals for academic success and discussing core values. Six Flags partners with Franklin, as it does with many public, elementary schools, for its *Read To Succeed* program. This program encourages students to read, by rewarding them with one free admission to Six Flags by reading a specified number of books.

Ironically, despite the abundance of supportive programs they were not evident in my conversation with the educators I interviewed or in the survey results or comments.

However, the parents I interviewed raved about these supports and the ways in which they helped them and their children. I can't explain this discrepancy with any certainty, but could speculate that either these programs have been in place for so long that teachers take them for granted or they overlook them as many are not within the school day or directly linked to their classroom.

Other Factors

While many of the documents support Perry's Theory of African American Student Achievement, in regards to communities of practice normalizing achievement and providing students with supports to reinforce academic achievement and teach behaviors characteristic of achievers, some documentation pointed to other factors that could be having an impact on African American student achievement at Franklin. These other factors include: high quality instruction, maximized opportunities for learning, teachers abilities to take risks and experiment to benefit student learning, integration of technology for instruction, and professional development for teachers. For example the vision and mission, displayed on the school webpage, emphasize the importance of teachers not only knowing best practices but employing them in their classrooms. The website also stresses the importance of maximizing student learning opportunities. In the classroom, this is done by allowing flexible grouping and progress for students so those that need more support are able to get that, while those that need more of a challenge are able to get that. Maximizing learning opportunities also refers to making sure students are in class to receive the instruction. Numerous reminders are posted to parents in the newsletter regarding absences, tardiness, and scheduling appointments outside of the school day. The general sentiment seems to be that if students are not in school, they are

not learning. Interestingly, while one of the values is to maximize opportunities for learning, during their interviews teachers indicated that there is a lot of lost instructional time due to recess, programs, spontaneous assemblies, field trips, etc. Teachers at Franklin are also allowed to maximize student learning opportunities by trying new and unconventional things which they feel may benefit their students. “When members of a school community decide that what they are presently doing is not effective (either for themselves or for the children or both), they change. In changing, we have to take some risks and try some experiments, but they are informed risks or informed experiments. All parties are encouraged to be entrepreneurial in their efforts. While some new programs may fail, the ones that succeed are the keys to lasting school improvement”. Student engagement is also important. The Smart Goals include a goal for increasing the amount of technology in the building and hence in the classrooms to allow for increased student engagement and differentiation. And finally the documents stress the importance of professional development. The school calendar shows that teachers have professional development on a monthly basis. As mentioned earlier, a great deal of this professional development is focused on training teachers to deal with the increasing diversity among Franklin’s student population, a factor which can only be assumed will benefit African American children.

Summary

Franklin Elementary School provides evidence for Perry’s (2010) Theory of African American Student Achievement. Communities of practice normalizing academic achievement for African American students do appear to exist, despite some limitations and contradictions. And though the school puts more value and emphasis on some

programs and relationships than others, there is evidence of numerous supports to reinforce academic achievement and what it means to be an achiever. This study also yielded additional factors which Perry does not discuss in her theory, but which I feel merit acknowledgement, race of the principal and enrichment programs, which recognize and nurture academically talented African American students. Finally, this study provides another way to look at Perry's theory. Perry asserts that there are certain things that need to be added to improve the educational experience and achievement of students of color. In her study of Hispanic American students Valenzuela (1999) also concludes that education needs to be more additive. However, my study of Franklin provides evidence that it may be more important that schools do not subtract from the education that students receive. At Franklin, it was not about the deliberate actions being taken on behalf of African American students. Rather it was about not withholding opportunities to learn, not subjecting students to substandard learning opportunities, and not imposing the perception of inferiority onto any group of students.

Chapter Five

The goal of this study was to contribute to a better understanding of what makes a successful school for African American children. We need to know more about schooling that positively affects African Americans. Theresa Perry's (2010) *Theory of Practice for African American School Achievement* provided the framework for my study. Perry states that schools need to have two characteristics for African American students to be successful. First African American students must be members of a community of practice, which normalizes achievement. Second, schools must offer a broad range of supports that allow students to learn, to practice, and to receive reinforcement with regard to the behaviors and practices that are necessary for one to be an achiever. Guided by Perry's framework I examined three research questions:

1. In what ways do African American students at Franklin Elementary School belong to communities of practice that normalize academic achievement?
2. What routines, policies, and practices occur within Franklin Elementary School support academic achievement?
3. What factors (if any) beyond Perry's framework emerge as central to academic achievement of African American students at Franklin Elementary School?

Three forms of data were collected for this study: survey, interview, and documentation. The primary method of study was a survey of teachers and selected students at Franklin. The goal of the survey was to determine whether there is evidence of a community of practice normalizing achievement, what supports, if any, exist to support student achievement, and what other factors exist to support student achievement.

I aimed to not only determine whether these factors were present at the school, but to what degree they existed. Further I was particularly interested in analyzing differences in perceptions between educators and students, as well as difference within each of these groups. My second form of data was interviews with the principal, selected staff members, and parents of African American students at Franklin Elementary School. In addition to helping me assess the degree of congruence between what teachers and students reported in the survey, the interview data served to help me identify other factors not included in Perry's (2010) theory that contribute to the success of African American students at Franklin. Further, the parent interviews allowed me to assess their perceptions of why their children are performing so well academically at Franklin. My final form of data was documentation. These documents included the school website, the school improvement plan, school newsletters, the school calendar, and state data. Like the interview data, I used the analysis of documents to determine whether what teachers and students reported is congruent with what is actually happening at the school. I also used this data to gain further insight into the existence of a community of practice normalizing achievement, the existence of supports reinforcing academic achievement, and the identification of other factors central to the academic achievement of African American students at Franklin.

Utilizing all three forms of data I was able to conclude that there was evidence at Franklin to support Perry's (2010) *Theory of Practice for African American Student Achievement*. There were also other factors, which emerged as contributing to the success of African American students at Franklin Elementary School. In this final chapter I will discuss the findings reported in Chapter Four in light of the literature

reviewed in Chapter Two. I then discuss implications of this research for practitioners in other urban, public schools, for leadership preparation, and for future research.

Community of Practice Normalizing Academic Achievement

With regard to research question one, recall that I listed four themes in Chapter Four. Three of the four categories I listed align with the literature.

High Expectations

The first theme I found when analyzing interview data was high expectations. This case study of Franklin Elementary School affirms what Perry (2010) says about the need for a community of practice normalizing achievement for all students. More importantly, it helps define what a community of practice, within a school setting actually is. Franklin was a community of practice characterized by long-standing tradition, norms for behavior, high expectations, and behaviors, practices and procedures to meet a common goal: high academic achievement for all students. My findings at Franklin are consistent with the literature. Students need to be provided with high expectations, reinforcement for these expectations, and the opportunity to be included.

This means that all students hear and buy into the message that they are seen as a member of the group and that the expectation of being a member means performing at a high level. This means that all students, regardless of any of the previously mentioned characteristics, are provided with the tools and opportunities to achieve at a high level. My study of Franklin is reminiscent of Patterson et. al (2008) study of Douglass, an early all-Black School. High expectations went beyond verbal rhetoric from teachers and were demonstrated in their actions. As one Douglass alumni recalled, “There was no such thing as ‘I don’t care’, ‘I don’t want to know’, No. They didn’t play that. You learned”

(p. 315). This almost echoes a quote from Principal Cobb, “A lot of times children [at other schools] know if they don’t get done they can say ‘I didn’t do it. I don’t care. I’ll just get an F’. But here, if you didn’t do it you give up your time”.

Fullan (2001) stated that schools structured to achieve success with all students first need to change their beliefs, specifically teacher beliefs that all students are capable of achieving. Low expectations of students by teachers, whether communicated directly or indirectly, counter the first part of Perry’s framework related to membership in a community of practice, which normalizes achievement. What happened at Franklin is happening throughout urban, public school systems. Money is tight, forcing school closings. Schools that previously looked one way, with regard to student demographics, suddenly look different. It is how teachers respond to these changes that impact student achievement. At Franklin African American students who are new to the school, Columbus kids as they were called, clearly aren’t expected to achieve. While classroom and school practices did not reflect it, the interview data suggest that the teachers did not believe this particular group of African American students was capable of achieving. Ironically as shown in the previous chapter, the students performed beyond their teachers’ expectations. So while Fullan asserts that low expectations of students by teachers will negatively impact student achievement, African American students at Franklin continued to well despite their teachers’ beliefs.

Inclusion Instead of Exclusion

My findings led me to conclude that one way in which Franklin Elementary School normalizes achievement for African American students is by promoting inclusion instead of exclusion, the second theme. Borman & Dowling (2010) found that teachers

often use academic tracking and other forms of exclusion to keep African American students from being able to fully participate and have access to the same academic opportunities. My findings counter Borman & Dowling (2010) assertion. African American students at Franklin are included and made to feel a part of the school. Unlike other public schools in which they may be separated from their peers either through special programs or disciplinary actions, both of which limit their full access to education, African American students at Franklin are fully included. They are not disproportionately represented in Special Education. In fact every effort is made to keep them out of Special Education. By generating and implementing interventions to support students Franklin educators ensure they are successful in the regular education program. The same could be said for student discipline. Although disciplinary infractions are not the norm at Franklin, my own observation and parent reporting led me to conclude, when they do occur the focus appears to be keeping the student in school so they are able to learn. Whether making sure that students with behavioral problems remained in school, keeping special education students in the regular education classroom, or insuring programs such as the enrichment program for academically talented students, include a fair representation of students from diverse racial groups. Contrary to what is found in the literature, Borman & Dowling (2010), African American students here have a different experience than is characteristic of most public schools. They are included as members of the school community and not as burdens, problems, or special entities.

High Expectations for Teachers and Staff

The third theme I found when analyzing the interview data was high expectations for teachers and staff, The normalizing of academic achievement does not just apply to

students, but to teachers and staff as well. I learned from listening to the principal, the parents, and the teachers themselves that educators at Franklin are held accountable for achievement of their students, and the increasing racial diversity of the student population is not allowed to be used as an excuse. Teachers at Franklin are provided with support and training to allow them to best support their students, and this expectation comes all the way from the superintendent. Teachers at Franklin, and throughout the district are participating in a three-year cultural competency project. In addition, teachers and staff at Franklin will be participating in a school-based cultural diversity training project. This project will not only provide the educators with information related to best practices, but will give them an opportunity to examine their own beliefs. And while some educators at the school expressed that they don't see the need for such programs, this is consistent with the recommendation by Douglas, Lewis, Douglas, Scott, & Garrison-Wade (2008) that teachers acknowledge their own views about race as they may influence the way they interact with and teach African American students. Using a student's race as an excuse for low achievement test scores is not an option at Franklin. The teachers are expected to adapt and are given the tools to do so. Teachers are held accountable for helping students meet the expectation of high academic achievement.

System of Supports

The second factor discussed by Perry (2010) as a characteristic of schools that are successful in educating African American children is having access to a broad range of supports to learn, to practice, and to receive reinforce with regard to the behaviors and practices that are necessary for high levels of academic achievement. While her theory focuses primarily of providing a counter-narrative for African American students, to keep them from subscribing to societal stereotypes, and African American role models,

Franklin exhibits other ways in which schools can provide support to African American students. Examples of these supports presented in the literature include: access to financial support, extended day programming, parental involvement, and community involvement. I saw evidence of each of these at Franklin.

Financial Resources

While the amount of spending at predominately African American schools tends to fall far behind that of predominately White schools, this limiting the amount of supports available to promote student achievements (Condrón & Roscigno, 2003), this has not been the case at Franklin. As the school's African American population has increased, so have the financial resources. The school recently gained access to a great deal of financial support, as they became a school-wide Title One School during the 2011-2012 school year. These additional funds were used to fund various teacher training programs, including a professional development program for Franklin teachers on cultural diversity. This is consistent with the literature as Condrón & Roscigno (2003) found greater financial resources used for staff development have the potential to positively impact instruction and hence student achievement.

Extended Day Program

In their study of what goes on in schools that are effective in working with African American students, Pressley and colleagues (2004) found that school extends far beyond the traditional hours and the traditional calendar. This is consistent with what I found at Franklin. The school employed two extended day programs: *Homework House* and *Kids Stop*. These programs provided students the opportunity to practice what they learned during the school day, receive academic support if needed, and participate in

constructive academic activities. Such programs could be implemented at other schools to allow students the opportunity to get the academic assistance that some may need.

Homework House, staffed by Franklin educators was a program, which allowed students to get extra academic support, including help with daily homework after school. *Kids Stop* was a program run by the Boys and Girls Club, but housed at Franklin. Like the *Homework House* program, *Kids Stop* provided students with homework help and academic support, however this program also allowed students the opportunity to participate in enrichment opportunities.

Parent Involvement

One final school-based support discussed in the literature was parental involvement. Mandara (2006) stated that schools that are successful with African American students solicit the presence and participation of parents and make parents a collaborative partner in the education of their children. Educators at Franklin Elementary School employed the support of parents, having perhaps the greatest amount of parent involvement that I have seen in a public school. Other urban, public schools could and should follow this example. How many times as educators have our colleagues or we used a lack of parent involvement or low levels of parental education as an excuse for students' failure? Franklin staff did the opposite. They reached out to parents and included them in the process. Franklin Elementary provided support from parents in the form of monthly *Chat and Chew* programs. These evening programs provide the opportunity for teachers to work with parents of their students on strategies to help their children with schoolwork at home. Taking the form of Math Nights or Reading Nights, teachers work with parents on topics their children are learning in class. This has proved

beneficial, as teachers I spoke with report that many parents want to help their children with homework, they just don't know how. By meeting with parents monthly to not only inform them of the academic content, but to teach them how to work with and support their children at home, the increased the likelihood of high levels of academic achievement. Students no longer had the ability to come into school and say they didn't know how to do the work or no one at home could teach them how to do the work, because the school provided an opportunity for families to learn and work together on academics. Educators could not place blame on parents. And most importantly there was not a disconnect between home school which is often seen in urban, public school and between educators and parents.

Character Building and Community Involvement

Another form of support I found which is not explicitly discussed in the literature, is character building community involvement. African American students at Franklin benefited from a great deal of community involvement. The school stresses the tie between character and academics. Franklin staff takes deliberate steps to teach children the qualities of good character and reinforce these qualities via the *Core Values* program and thru school-led service learning. Every month school staff stress a particular character trait termed 'Core Values'. Students who demonstrate these core values are spotlighted in the school. Students who demonstrate inappropriate conduct are asked to think about what core value they are exhibiting and given the opportunity to reflect and change their behavior. As stated in the interview data, Principal Cobb shared, "I think that is a key that we're not only talking academics to children, but we're also talking

about what are good character qualities that are needed to define what makes up a good student here”.

To this end, the school stresses the importance of giving back to the community thru service learning. Educators at Franklin felt that having the students complete service for the community was far more valuable in building their character and thus enhancing them as students. Each month the school counselor arranges a service project for the students at Franklin. These projects range from singing at local nursing homes to collecting items for and making baskets for families at the local women’s shelter. There is a great deal of emphasis placed on the importance of teaching students to make a difference in the community. While educators at the school spoke extensively about the service-learning component, I could not find any evidence of how this tied to the academic achievement of African American students.

However the community support that appears to have the greatest implications for African American students attending urban, public schools is ironically the one that Franklin took the least advantage of. African American families at Franklin reported a close affiliation with the Boys and Girls Club. This relationship formed as a result of the *Kids Stop* after school program held at the school. The positives that this program brought to the school are immeasurable. As reported by parents I spoke with, the primary participants in the program are African American students. African American college students, who also serve as positive role models to the elementary students, run the program, which extends beyond the school to the weekends and vacations. Participants have the opportunity to receive academic support in the form of homework help and tutoring, as well as enrichment opportunities. This was clearly a huge support, not only to

the African American students that were being served, but to the school as they reinforced the importance of academics and provided academic support to the students. Ironically, the school appeared to want no connection with the program. The staff members I spoke with made no mention of it, and the principal flat out discounted it even saying, “That’s not my problem”, in reference to student concerns regarding the program. This raises important implications about the power of community and school connections. The Boys and Girls Club program appears to be reminiscent of the relationship between all-Black schools and the Black churches, as discussed in the literature (Patterson 2008). Whereas the Black church functioned as a major institution within the community, reinforcing the importance of education and providing academic support, the Boys and Girls Club serves the same function within the African American subgroup of the Franklin Elementary community.

Other Factors

Two factors emerged that were beyond Perry’s (2010) framework and were not discussed in the literature. The first factor was qualities of the school principal, including race of the principal and the importance of the ability to build rapport and relationships. The second factor was the importance of including of academically talented African American students in enrichment programs.

Perry’s theory (2010) does not address race of the principal. However, my study of Franklin Elementary School raises the question of whether race does in fact matter. Previous research such as Evans (2007) concludes that it is not the race of the principal that matters as much as the principal’s awareness of race. I would disagree. My findings show, having an African American principal positively impacts the academic

performance of African American students. While the White and Hispanic students at Franklin were also achieving at high levels, I found that African American students were more engaged and comfortable in a school with African American leadership. I would conclude that not only do they feel that they have someone to look up to, but they have someone who has their back. Someone who they can speak freely with, someone who wants to see them do well, someone who is there for them. As teachers at Franklin reported, students who previously exhibited no interest in school suddenly became engaged when Mrs. Cobb, the African American principal, arrived at the school. In my interview with Mrs. Cobb, she discounted the value of her race, stating that she treats all children the same. I agree with that statement in part. The test data would suggest she is effective for all students at Franklin. Regardless of race, they are all doing well. However, while verbally she provided the socially appropriate responses in regard to her race, denying an allegiance to one race over another, Mrs. Cobb also shows otherwise. In stating that she wants them [African American students] to see her and know that she is there for them and to know that they can be someone just like she is, communicates Perry's counter-narrative.

While the presence of an African American principal appears to have positively impacted African American students, it also seems to draw more African American parent participation. Parents who admittedly had poor relationships with their children's previous schools characterized their relationships with Mrs. Cobb as good. Referring to her as an "auntie" or grandmother figure, they felt the lines of communication were open, they and their children were treated with respect, and she was someone who truly had

their children's best interests at heart, something they did not feel with [White] administrators at other schools.

Mrs. Cobb's ability to form relationships and build rapport was also seen as more valuable to African American student achievement, than the qualities typically attributed to good school leaders such as: emphasis on instructional practices, use of data, and strict discipline. In their study of what goes on in schools that are effective in working with African American students, Pressley, Raphael, Gallagher, & DiBella (2004) credited accountability. They found that the principal closely monitored student progress and held each student accountable. This principal was also a strict disciplinarian who enforced behavioral expectations and implemented consequences up to and including the exclusion or removal of disruptive students. My findings suggest that in working with African American students, it may be more important for school leaders to use their heart over their head. While educators I spoke with acknowledge that Mrs. Cobb is aware of the school's achievement data and discusses it with them, this is not her strength. As Diana, the Instructional coach shared, "she [Mrs. Cobb] is not throwing data up on the screen". Rather she is passionate about kids and passionate about teachers, something that these educators find "contagious". Her passion motivates them as teachers, which positively impacts Franklin students.

A second factor that emerged, that was not discussed by Perry (2010) or in the literature was promoting African American student achievement at Franklin was the enrichment program. Designed as a program for students in need of a faster pace, who have a different style of learning, or who have been identified as gifted, teachers feel it sets a higher standard for the school. Unlike many programs, which cater to the

educational needs and abilities of academically talented students, efforts are made to insure the inclusion of African Americans. The informal school district policy states that top three to five percent of African American students who qualify are admitted; yet the representation is much closer to fifteen percent at Franklin Elementary. As a result, academically talented African American students enroll in the school increasing the overall academic performance of African Americans at the school. This also meets the individual needs of these students by offering them additional learning opportunities in order to promote a high level of academic achievement.

Implications

When I began this study, my primary goal was to test Perry's (2010) *Theory of African American Student Achievement* in hopes of providing suggestions for urban, public schools serving African American students. Such suggestions, I hoped, would help narrow and reduce the increasing discussion of the racial gap in academic achievement. I believe my research has provided me with the insight to make such recommendations.

Implications for Practitioners and Schools Serving African Americans

My findings at Franklin not only confirm Perry's assertion that schools that are successful with African American students must create communities of practice which normalize academic achievement, they provide implications for other schools serving African American children. Academic achievement must be the expectation for all students, rather than some rarity or unusual accomplishment. However, as seen at Franklin, deliberate actions must be taken on the part of educators to create such communities and this must go beyond rhetoric regarding high expectations. This is not to

say that verbally communicating high expectations to students is not important, but it is not enough. For practitioners having high expectations has to go beyond words. How many teachers would say they have low expectations for their students? It would be fair to speculate that very few if any would. But it is the actions that communicate the level of expectation the teacher has for the students. Franklin provides an excellent model for a school going beyond verbally communicating high expectations, but rather requiring a high level of academic achievement for all students. It is the responsibility of the school to insure that failure cannot be seen as an option, excuses, particularly those of racial or cultural differences, cannot be accepted. Schools must make efforts, as Franklin staff did, insure that students were capable of meeting such expectations, putting practices in place that did not allow students the opportunity to fail. Whether this means putting practices in place that do not allow students to skip out on homework, providing mandatory before and after school programming for students who need extra academic support, or finding ways to keep include students who would traditionally be excluded from the learning environment. Schools must also hold themselves accountable for adapting to the educational needs of students, even when the needs or the students abruptly change, and maintaining the same high academic standards.

A community of practice normalizing academic achievement goes beyond communicating high expectations, to allowing students the opportunity to be full participants in the learning environment. While we often see academic tracking or other forms of exclusion from the learning environment used as a way of keeping African Americans from being able to fully participate and have access to the same academic opportunities, this was largely not the case at Franklin. African American students at

Franklin were not excluded from learning opportunities. I found no evidence of disproportionality in Special Education placement or with regard to disciplinary data. The implication for other schools is that African American students will perform better in environments in which they are allowed to receive the same educational opportunities as their peers of other races. This does not mean denying services to students in need or not administering consequences to students who misbehave. What it means is that school must exhaust all steps to maintain students in the regular education setting, with support as needed. This means working with students and teaching them appropriate behaviors. This means looking beyond the student or the behaviors to the root of the disciplinary incident. Essentially this means providing African American students with full access to the same educational opportunities being provided to their peers of other races. And in cases, in which the needs of the student require more than their peers of other races, providing that support

As Perry (2010) stressed the importance of creating community within schools, it is also important to reach out to the community, which African American children are coming from and include them as partners in educating our children. Yet at Franklin I found evidence of a disconnect between the schools and community programs, which has to change. Schools need to work to form truly meaningful and mutual relationships with community agencies, programs, and centers serving African American students. These include the Boys and Girls Club, YMCA, Minority Pre-College programs, and organizations such as 100 Black Men. Further, efforts need to be made to involve such organizations in providing academic support to kids. Staff at Franklin had a major advantage as the Boys and Girls Club was in their school everyday. For other schools

efforts will have to be made to form such relationships. One suggestion of how to accomplish this is to communicate with parents and students about programs in their area, which their children participate in. As shown in my study, parents are often very aware of opportunities and services in their area. Further, they know the pros and cons of such programs and ability to serve as the bridge between the program and the school. The parents value the presence of resources and their kids potentially spend a great deal of time there.

As my study illustrated, Franklin Elementary really missed an opportunity to form a partnership, which would support the academic achievement of African American students. While the *Kids Stop* program could have served as a far more powerful support if there was more interaction and communication with Franklin staff. Instead they were left to rely on student's to tell them what they were working on in school, whether they had done their homework, or if they needed academic assistance. The resistance of the school to partner with this program did not allow them to maximize the support that this program could have offered. Schools need to develop and guide relationships with the community partners in order to support academic achievement, instead of seeing them as burdensome.

Implications for School Systems Serving African Americans

My findings also have implications for urban public school systems, in regard to school leadership. While school leadership cannot and should not be chosen solely based on race, it should be taken into consideration and efforts should be made to insure that school leaders match the demographics and needs of the school. If having an African American principal promotes a higher level of engagement and greater academic

achievement among African American students then why would this not be a consideration? If having an African American principal fosters more active and positive relationships with parents, then why would this not be a consideration? To meet the needs of the increasingly diverse student populations seen not only at Franklin, but throughout urban school public school systems, efforts must be made not only to recruit more African American leaders, but to encourage African American teachers to seek leadership roles within the system, in order to serve in schools with high or increasing African American student populations. Schools could also benefit from some form of succession planning to insure that as principals leave due to promotion, resignation, or retirement, other minority educators are prepared to assume their roles. This could be accomplished by identifying minority teacher leaders and providing them with incentives and support to pursue leadership certification.

A final factor worth of consideration, based on my research, is the need for school systems to recognize, identify, and nurture academically talented African American students. My research at Franklin raised this point. Throughout my interviews with educators references were made to students in the enrichment program. When I asked one staff member why she felt African American students at Franklin has such high levels of student achievement, she said, “Well I think it’s probably because of the enrichment kids”. This raises an important issue regarding the inclusion of African American students in programs and classes, which will support their academic talents. Efforts should be made to support them and identify more. As an educator, I have often heard it said that African American students either do not qualify for advanced classes or programs or African American students are not interested in such program, as it separates

them from their friends. As a member of the African American community, I have often heard it said that information about opportunities, such as the enrichment program, is withheld from African American families. Franklin Elementary School demonstrates that neither of these assumptions has to be the case. Not only do they have an informal policy that guarantees the inclusion of African American students, but also they make efforts to recruit them. While the policy suggests that a minimum of two or three percent of the enrichment program should be African American, the actual enrollment is closer to fifteen percent.

The implication here is that urban, public schools interested in raising African American student achievement, particularly those with enrichment, magnet, and specialty programs, must find ways to identify African American students who qualify for admission, provide them and their families with the necessary information to enroll, and give the students the support necessary to for them to be successful and to retain them. This could also apply to schools, which may not have enrichment, magnet, or specialty programs per say, but offer advanced classes. African American students must be informed about and encouraged to enroll in higher-level classes, and given the necessary support to be successful in them.

Implications for Leadership Preparation

I believe this study also has implications for leadership preparation programs. While school systems need to make efforts to ensure that they are employing a racially diverse corps of principals and other school leaders, colleges and universities have the responsibility of preparing a diverse corps of school leaders. Efforts need to be made to recruit African American educators into leadership degree and certification programs,

preparing them to assume leadership roles and to function as teacher leaders in their current positions.

Colleges and universities which offer leadership degree and certification programs also have the responsibility of training school leaders, regardless of their racial orientation, to be aware of their own beliefs about race and to provide them with the knowledge and skills necessary to work with diverse populations of students, parents, and staff. The reality is that the majority of educators and school leaders are not African American, so we need to focus on educating school leaders of all races. Cultural sensitivity training needs to be an essential component of any leadership preparation program. Leadership Preparation programs also need to educate potential school leaders on the importance of creating inclusive environments, which communicate and demonstrate high expectations for all students regardless of race. This study has demonstrated that uniform expectations allow all students to thrive academically. Finally, it is also important that school leaders are educated on the importance of connecting with parents and community agencies which serve the students in their school. These relationships will help establish a sense of community within in the school and lend credibility to the leader and his/ her intentions.

Implications For Future Research

The results of this study may have implications for future research. This section will detail suggestions for future research on the topic of Successful Schools for African American children.

In studying what makes a school successful for African American children or why African American children are successful at certain schools versus others, the one voice

that is not often heard is that of the students themselves. In my review of the literature and my own experience as a researcher, it is hard to gain access to the students to obtain their views. I believe it would be beneficial for researchers to incorporate the voices of African American students to get their perspective. The factors that the academically high achieving African American students attribute to their success could be very different from those identified by Perry (2010), staff members at their schools or even the students' own parents. In fact, it is possible that the students' academic achievement could have little to do with what is happening at the school and more to do with their own intrinsic motivation. This would be interesting to explore and could also provide more depth to the other factors that I discussed.

Researchers studying Successful Schools for African American children may also yield richer results by conducting longitudinal studies. I believe a study looking at the same school over a period of years, will allow the researcher to gain a truer picture of what factors contribute to the success of the African American students there and whether these factors can withstand changes in racial demographics, staffing, and the many others seen at Franklin as the school evolved and changed.

Finally, research on Successful Schools for African American Schools would further benefit from the study of several schools. By looking at multiple schools in which African American students seem to be achieving as well or better than their peers of other races, researchers will be able to not only identify multiple factors contributing to this success but weigh the impact of each factor. Ideally, by looking at multiple schools, researchers will be able to develop a model for Successful Schools as opposed to providing short-term solutions that may work from some but not all schools.

Summary

This study contributes to a better understanding of what makes a successful school for African American children. The findings affirm and provide a greater understanding of Theresa Perry's (2010) *Theory of Practice for African American School Achievement*. Based on the study of Franklin Elementary School, I would argue that schools that are successful with African American students include them as members of a school community in which being a member means being an achiever. In these schools, educators hold high expectations for all students, communicate these expectations to the students and view them as capable of a high level of achievement, regardless of race. I would also argue that African American students must be provided with the supports necessary to understand what it means to be an achiever and to become one themselves. These supports should include a combination of school based supports such as financial resources, extended day programs, and a partnership with parents that bridges the goal of high academic achievement between the home and school. Schools must also seek, welcome, and take full advantage of community organizations in providing academic support for African American students. I would argue that schools that are successful with African American students must find leaders with the ability to relate to African American students. While these leaders may or may not be African American themselves, they must be able to build rapport and form relationships with African American students and their families, and demonstrate that they have their best interests at heart. Finally, I would argue that schools that are successful in educating African American students provide opportunities for African American children to participate in

enriching, rigorous, and advance programs, which provide them with extended learning opportunities.

It is my hope that this study will provide guidance to schools and practitioners serving African American students, so that our conversation may finally shift from closing the racial gap in academic achievement to the way in which we have closed the racial gap in academic achievement.

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Appendix A

IRB Consent



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April 17, 2012

Ms. Staci Kimmons
 Educational Policy and Leadership

Dear Ms. Kimmons:

Your protocol number HR-2375, titled, "*Successful Schools for African American Children*" was expedited on April 16, 2012, by a member of the Marquette University Institutional Review Board. The IRB also determined that the survey component of your protocol falls into the exempt category.

Your IRB approved informed consent forms are enclosed with this letter. Use the stamped copies of these forms when recruiting research participants. Each research participant should receive a copy of the stamped consent form for their records.

Subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when conducting your research. This study is currently approved for 370 subjects.

If you need to increase the number of subjects, add research personnel, or make any other changes to your protocol you must submit an IRB Protocol Amendment Form, which can be found on the Office of Research Compliance web site: <http://www.marquette.edu/researchcompliance/research/irbforms.shtml>. All changes must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before being initiated, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the human subjects. Any public advertising of this project requires prior IRB approval. If there are any adverse events, please notify the Marquette University IRB immediately.

Your approval is valid until April 15, 2013. Prior to this date, you will be contacted regarding continuing IRB review.

A Protocol Completion/Termination Report must be submitted once this research project is complete. The form should be submitted in a timely fashion, and must be received no later than the protocol expiration date.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Sean W. Horkheimer, J.D.
 Research Compliance Coordinator

cc: Dr. Christopher Okunseri, IRB Chair
 Dr. Martin Scanlan, EPDL
 Mr. Carl Wainscott, Graduate School

Enclosures (4)
 AA/r

Appendix B

Educator Interview Consent

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Successful Schools for African American Children
Staci L. Kimmons
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. Whether or not you choose to participate will have no impact on your employment with Roosevelt Elementary School.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to examine the factors influencing the academic achievement of African-American students in an elementary school setting. You will be one of approximately 70 participants in this research study.

PROCEDURES: You will be interviewed on up to four occasions. You will be asked questions about the routines, policies, and practices at Roosevelt Elementary School that contribute to academic achievement by African-American students. These interviews will be audio-recorded for accuracy. The audio-tapes will later be destroyed after transcription. For confidentiality purposes your name will not be recorded.

DURATION: Your participation will consist of up to four one-hour interviews.

RISKS: The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal and no more than you would encounter in everyday life. Risks include boredom and fatigue with the interview process and breach of confidentiality. You may choose to end the interview at any time and skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. All research materials will be kept confidential and research results will not identify any participants by name.

BENEFITS: This research will not directly benefit participants. Society will indirectly benefit by this research identifying factors that may be replicated to increase the level of achievement of African-American students at all levels in urban, public schools.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All your data will be assigned an arbitrary code number rather than using your name or other information that could identify you as an individual. When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files three years after the completion of the study.

Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION: Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Participants may choose to withdraw at any time. If you would like to withdraw, please let the researcher know by contacting her. If you choose to withdraw any data you have provided will not be used in the research.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Staci Kimmons at (404) 660-6979 or staci.kimmons@marquette.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Participant's Signature

Participant's Name

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix C

Parent Interview Consent

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
AGREEMENT OF CONSENT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Successful Schools for African American Children
Staci L. Kimmons
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

You have been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to participate. Whether or not you choose to participate will have no impact on your relationship with Roosevelt Elementary School.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to examine the factors influencing the academic achievement of African-American students in an elementary school setting. You will be one of approximately 70 participants in this research study.

PROCEDURES: You will be asked to participate in a focus group interview on up to two occasions. You will be asked questions about the routines, policies, and practices at Roosevelt Elementary School that contribute to academic achievement by African-American students. These focus groups will be audio-recorded for accuracy. The audio-tapes will later be destroyed after transcription. For confidentiality purposes your name will not be recorded.

DURATION: Your participation will consist of up to two one-hour focus group interviews.

RISKS: The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal and no more than you would encounter in everyday life. Risks include boredom and fatigue with the interview process and breach of confidentiality. You may choose to end the interview at any time and skip any questions that you do not feel comfortable answering. All research materials will be kept confidential and research results will not identify any participants by name. However, the researcher cannot ensure against breach of confidentiality by other participants in the focus group. Participants are asked to respect the privacy of other participants.

BENEFITS: This research will not directly benefit participants. Society will indirectly benefit by this research identifying factors that may be replicated to increase the level of achievement of African-American students at all levels in urban, public schools.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information you reveal in this study will be kept confidential. All your data will be assigned an arbitrary code number rather than using

your name or other information that could identify you as an individual. When the results of the study are published, you will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files three years after the completion of the study.

Your research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION: Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Participants may choose to withdraw at any time. If you would like to withdraw, please let the researcher know by contacting her. If you choose to withdraw any data you have provided will not be used in the research.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Staci Kimmons at (404) 660-6979 or staci.kimmons@marquette.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS CONSENT FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Participant's Signature

Participant's Name

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix D

Parent Permission

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
PARENT PERMISSION FORM
Successful Schools for African-American Children
Staci Kimmons
Educational Leadership & Policy Studies

Your child has been invited to participate in this research study. Before you agree to allow your child to participate, it is important that you read and understand the following information. Participation is completely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to give permission for your child to participate. Whether or not you choose to allow your child to participate will have no impact on their relationship with Roosevelt Elementary School.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research study is to examine the factors influencing the academic achievement of African-American students in an elementary school setting. Your child will be one of approximately 70 participants in this research study.

PROCEDURES: Your child will be asked to participate in focus group interviews on up to two occasions. Your child will be asked questions about the routines, policies, and practices at Roosevelt Elementary School that contribute to academic achievement by African-American students. These interviews will be audio-recorded for accuracy. The audio-tapes will later be destroyed after transcription. For confidentiality purposes your name will not be recorded.

DURATION: Your child's participation will consist of up to two one-hour focus group interviews.

RISKS: The risks associated with participation in this study are minimal and no more than your child would encounter in everyday life. Risks include boredom and fatigue with the interview process and breach of confidentiality. Your child may choose to end the interview at any time and skip any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering. All research materials will be kept confidential and research results will not identify any participants by name.

BENEFITS: This research will not directly benefit participants. Society will indirectly benefit by this research identifying factors that may be replicated to increase the level of achievement of African-American students at all levels in urban, public schools.

CONFIDENTIALITY: All information your child reveals in this study will be kept confidential. All your child's data will be assigned an arbitrary code number rather than using your child's name or other information that could identify your child as an

individual. When the results of the study are published, your child will not be identified by name. The data will be destroyed by shredding paper documents and deleting electronic files three years after the completion of the study. In focus groups the researcher cannot ensure that all participants will protect confidentiality. However, the researcher will ask all participants to respect one another's privacy. Your child's research records may be inspected by the Marquette University Institutional Review Board or its designees, (insert study sponsor if sponsored by a funding agency, and the FDA for research regulated by the FDA) and (as allowable by law) state and federal agencies.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF PARTICIPATION: Your child's participation in this study is completely voluntary and your child may withdraw from the study and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled. Your child may choose to withdraw at any time. If they wish to do so they can simply notify the researcher. Any data collected from your child will not be used in the research study.

CONTACT INFORMATION: If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Staci Kimmons at (404) 660-6979 or staci.kimmons@marquette.edu. If you have questions or concerns about your child's rights as a research participant, you can contact Marquette University's Office of Research Compliance at (414) 288-7570.

I HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO READ THIS PARENT PERMISSION FORM, ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND AM PREPARED TO GIVE MY PERMISSION FOR MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS PROJECT.

Parent's Signature(s)

Parent's Name(s)

Child's Name

Researcher's Signature

Date

Appendix E

Child Assent

MARQUETTE UNIVERSITY
ASSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS
Successful Schools for African-American Children

Investigator(s): Staci Kimmons

We are doing a research study. A research study is a special way to find out about something. We want to find out what kinds of practices at your school lead to academic achievement.

You can be in this study if you want to. If you want to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in up to two focus groups. Focus groups are like interviews where all of the participants are asked questions and provide their answers and opinions.

We want to tell you about some things that might happen to you if you are in this study. There are minimal risks like those you would encounter in everyday life such as boredom. You may also not feel like answering the questions. You can choose to skip questions you don't feel like answering.

If you decide to be in this study, some good things might happen to you. There is no direct benefit to you for being in the study. We might also find out things that will help other children some day by figuring out ways to make their schools better.

When we are done with the study, we will write a report about what we found out. We won't use your name in the report. All the information you provide will be kept private. No one except the research team will know that you are in the study unless you and your parents decide to tell them. The only time that we would break this rule would be if you tell us information that we think your parents need to know to be able to keep you or other people safe. For example, if you have been having serious thoughts about hurting yourself in some way, we would inform your parents.

Even if your parent/guardian agrees to your participation in this study, it is still your decision whether or not to be in the study. You do not have to be in this study if you don't want to. You can say "no" and nothing bad will happen. If you say "yes" now, but you want to stop later, that's okay too. If something about the study bothers you, you can stop being in the study. All you have to do is tell the researcher you want to stop. If there is anything you don't like about being in the study, you should tell us and if we can, we will try to change it for you.

If you have any questions about the study, you can ask the researcher. We will try to explain everything that is being done and why. Please ask us about anything you want to know.

If you want to be in this study, please sign and print your name.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.
(write your name here)

Sign your name here

(Date)

Investigator signature

(Date)

Appendix F

Educator Survey Questions

(Please select one of the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, N/A)

In what ways do African American students at Roosevelt Elementary School belong to a community of practice normalizing high academic achievement?

High Expectations

<i>Focus on Student Learning</i>
When making important decisions, the school always focuses on what's best for student learning.
The school has well defined learning expectations for all students.
The school sets high standards for academic performance.
<i>Collective Responsibility</i>
Teachers in this school set high standards for themselves.
Teachers in this school feel responsible that all students learn.

High Quality Instruction

Instructional Leadership
The principal at this school carefully tracks student academic progress.
The principal at this school understands how children learn.
The principal at this school presses teachers to implement what they have learned in professional development.
The principal at this school communicates a clear vision for our school.
The principal at this school sets high standards for student learning.
The principal at this school sets high standards for teaching.
The principal at this school makes clear to the staff his or her expectations for meeting instructional goals.
<i>Collaboration</i>
Teachers design instructional programs together.
Teachers at this school make a conscious effort to coordinate their teaching with instruction at other grade levels.
The principal, teachers and staff collaborate to make this school run effectively.
The school day is organized to maximize instructional time.
<i>SIP Implementation</i>
The SIP has led to changes in my teaching practices.
Our SIP is based on systematic analysis of student performance data.
The SIP is improving student learning at this school.

What routines, policies, and practices occur within Roosevelt to support academic achievement?

Parental/ Community Involvement

<i>Teacher Outreach to Parents</i>
Teachers work closely with parents to meet students' needs.
Parents have confidence in the expertise of teachers.
Parents are invited to visit classrooms to observe the instructional program.
We work at communicating to parents about the support needed to advance the school mission.
Staff at this school work hard to build trusting relationships with parents.
We encourage feedback from parents and the community.
Teachers really try to understand parents' problems and concerns.
Parents are greeted warmly when they call or visit.
<i>Parent Involvement in the School</i>
Parents in this school volunteer to help in the classroom.
Parents in this school help raise funds for the school.
Parents in this school attended school-wide special events.
Parents in the school attended parent/ teacher conferences.

What factors (if any) beyond Perry's framework emerge as central to academic achievement at Roosevelt?

Relationships & Trust

Teacher-Parent Trust
I receive a great deal of support from parents for the work I do.
Parents respect teachers in this school.
Teachers respect parents in this school.
My students' parents do their best to help their children learn.
My students' parents support my teaching efforts.
Teachers at this school feel good about parents' support for their work.
Teachers at this school really care about this local community.
Teachers and parents think of each other as partners in educating children.
Staff at this school work hard to build trusting relationships with parents.
Talking with parents helps me understand my students better.
To what extent do teachers in this school respect parents and members of the local community?
To what extent do teachers in this school respect students' parents?
To what extent do you feel respected by the parents of your students?
Teacher-Principal Trust
The administration and teaching staff collaborate toward making the school run effectively.
<i>Inclusive Leadership</i>
The principal at this school is strongly committed to shared decision making.
The principal at this school works to create a sense of community in this school.
The principal at this school promotes parental and community involvement in the school.
<i>Teacher Reports of Conflict</i>
The relationship between the school and community is good.
The school seems like a big family. Everyone is close and cordial.

School Climate

Student Safety & Discipline
Teachers in this school help maintain discipline in the entire school, not just in their classroom.
Teachers have influence over setting standards for student behavior.
This school really works at developing students' social skills.
Teachers in this school feel responsible for helping students develop self-control.

Staff Commitment

<i>School Commitment</i>
I wouldn't want to work at any other school.
I would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child.
I usually look forward to each working day at this school.
I feel loyal to this school

Appendix G

Student Survey Questions

(Please select one of the following: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree, N/A)

In what ways do African American students at Roosevelt Elementary School belong to a community of practice normalizing high academic achievement?

High Expectations
Press Toward Academic Achievement
My teacher encourages me to do extra work when I don't understand something.
My teacher expects me to do my best all of the time.
My teacher expects me to complete my homework every night.
My teacher thinks that it is very important that I do well.
Classroom Personalism
Your teachers believe you can do well in school.
Teachers really care about students.
Believes I can do well in school.

High Quality Instruction

Classroom Personalism
The teacher notices if I have trouble learning something.
Helps me catch up if I am behind.
Is willing to give extra help on schoolwork if I need it.

What routines, policies, and practices occur within Roosevelt to support academic achievement?

Peer Support

Peer Support for Academic Work
My friends in this school follow school rules.
My friends in this school think doing homework is important.
My friends in this school try hard to get good grades.
My friends in this school feel it is important to pay attention in class.
Classroom Behavior
Students help each other in class.
Students make fun of students who do well in class.
Most students in this class treat each other with respect.
Most students in this class work together to solve problems.

What factors (if any) beyond Perry's framework emerge as central to academic achievement at Roosevelt?

School Climate

Safety
How safe do you feel outside around the school?
How safe do you feel traveling between home and school?
How safe do you feel in the hallways and bathrooms?
How safe do you feel in your classes?

Appendix H

Educator Interview Letter

May 1, 2012

Roosevelt Faculty and Staff,

As you are probably aware, attendance and standardized test data indicate that Roosevelt Elementary School has shown success in educating its increasingly diverse student population and eliminating racial gaps in academic achievement. As an educator/administrator at Roosevelt Elementary you are invited to participate in a research study, which will attempt to identify characteristics of schools that are successful in educating African American students. The purpose of this research study is to examine the factors influencing the academic achievement of African-American students in an elementary school setting. The goal of this project is to provide a model for successful school reform and long-term solutions to the racial gap in academic achievement.

The study consists of a short, online survey and personal interviews with selected staff members. All staff will receive the link to the online survey within the next week. You may complete the survey anytime between May 7th-May 11th. Your participation is voluntary and confidential. While the findings of this study may be published in research journals or presented at educational meetings, the identities of the participants and individual responses will remain confidential. Selected teachers will be invited to meet with me on Wednesday, May 23rd for a follow-up interview.

If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Staci Kimmons at (404) 660-6979 or staci.kimmons@marquette.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Staci Kimmons
Doctoral Student
Marquette University

Appendix I

Student Interview Letter

May 1, 2012

Roosevelt Elementary 3rd, 4th, & 5th Grade Teachers,

As you are probably aware, attendance and standardized test data indicate that Roosevelt Elementary School has shown success in educating its increasingly diverse student population and eliminating racial gaps in academic achievement. As an educator/administrator at Roosevelt Elementary you have been invited to participate in a research study, which will attempt to identify characteristics of schools that are successful in educating African American students. The purpose of this research study is to examine the factors influencing the academic achievement of African-American students in an elementary school setting. The goal of this project is to provide a model for successful school reform and long-term solutions to the racial gap in academic achievement. Your students will also be invited to participate.

The study consists of a short, online survey and personal interviews with selected students and parents. All 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade teachers will receive a link to the online survey on May 7th. You are asked to have your students complete the survey anytime between May 7th-May 11th. Their participation is voluntary and confidential. While the findings of this study may be published in research journals or presented at educational meetings, the identities of the participants and individual responses will remain confidential. Selected students and parents will receive an invitation to meet with me on Thursday, May 24th to conduct a follow-up interview.

If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact Staci Kimmons at (404) 660-6979 or staci.kimmons@marquette.edu.

Thank you for your consideration,

Staci Kimmons
Doctoral Student
Marquette University

Appendix J

Interview Questions

1. Based on the demographic information submitted in the educator survey, there are no African American teachers at Roosevelt. Do you think this impacts African American student achievement here? If so how?
2. I noticed that the majority of the staff here are new to the school. Has the transition of staff impacted student achievement here at Roosevelt? If so, how? How has the new staff dealt with the growing racial diversity at Roosevelt?
3. One hundred percent of the respondents indicated that the staff has high expectations for academic performance and well defined learning expectations for all students. Where does this come from? How is this demonstrated? Evidence?
4. Ninety-five percent of respondents agree that the principal carefully tracks academic progress, has high standards for student learning, and has high standards for teaching. In what ways does she track academic progress (i.e. reviewing report cards, MAP scores, SST)? How has she demonstrated high standards for teaching and learning? Are there difference standards/ expectations for different students (i.e. African American students)?
5. Who is involved with designing your school's smart goals (SIP)?
6. There doesn't appear to be a great deal of emphasis on collaboration (i.e. only fifty percent of respondents agree that there is grade-level, vertical, or whole school collaboration). Why? How does this impact student achievement?
7. Seventy-five percent of respondents agree and twenty-five percent of respondents disagree that the school day is organized to maximize instructional time. Why do you think people responded the way they did?
8. There is consensus among respondents that parents/ teachers have positive relationships, communicate with one another, and work together to improve the school. How has Roosevelt cultivated these relationships? What could other schools do to replicate the parent/ teacher relationships present at Roosevelt? Do you find the parents of African American students are involved in the school? Why or why no? Evidence.
9. Approximately twenty-six percent of the respondents disagreed with the statement, 'My students parents do their best to help their children learn'. Do you feel the parents put forth effort to help their children with learning outside of the school? Why or why no?

10. One hundred percent of respondents believe the relationship between the school and the community is good. In what ways is the community involved in promoting student achievement at Roosevelt Elementary? Do you have community partners? If so, what is their contribution to the school?
11. Only fifty-eight percent of respondents agree that they would not want to work in any other school. There are concerns regarding:
- Forced transfers
 - Division between new & veteran teachers
 - Challenging student body
 - Growing class sizes
- What impact, if any, do you feel these concerns have on student achievement?
12. To what do you attribute the high level of academic success that African American students are experiencing at Roosevelt?
13. In what ways do you/ your staff acknowledge the role of culture/ the growing diversity here at Roosevelt Elementary?