Dispelling Disparities for African American Male Students: A Review of Three Successful Charter School Models

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Recent literature has recognized the racial disproportionalities that exist in school discipline policies, special education practices, and tracking programs and curriculum with regard to African American male student achievement. Although ample studies have provided suggestive measures for how policy and practice can reform this epidemic, there exists a gap in the literature with respect to the provision of specific, strategic models for academic success among this demographic. This research study provides a comprehensive review of the ways in which schools of choice can advance academic outcomes for students through charters, college preparation programs, and single gender models. We report three school models that have demonstrated success, followed by a discussion regarding undergirding program themes. Key recommendations for administrators and policy makers include reform strategies for discipline-related infractions, a reevaluation of the role of culture and its significance in the classroom, and the continual collaboration amongst school, home, and community.

Keywords: African American male student success, college-readiness programs, charter schools, tracking, single-gender schools

Recent reports regarding academic performance ratings and overall academic outcomes of urban African American males have surged for educational reform initiatives that not only challenge traditional structures of education but also mandate that policymakers, administrators, and educators craft new models to posit success (Fenning & Rose, 2007; Goodman & Hilton, 2010; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010; Sax, 2005). According to the US Department of Education, African American males constitute only 18% of the nation's total student population enrolled in public schools (NFES, 2011). However, this population remains ostracized for low achievement, behavioral problems, and overall lack of motivation towards educational goal attainment (Dillon, 2010; Goodman & Hilton, 2010; Hamilton, 1986).

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Approximately 33% of these African American male students have been suspended at least once and approximately 50% have been suspended twice or more throughout their schooling years (NFES, 2011). Instead of attempting to expound on reasons regarding why these students cannot or will not learn, the direction of this paper is to present how three educational models are advancing the academic and behavioral outcomes of African American male students.

In this paper, we will initially review empirical literature on racial disparities that exist in traditional public school models: (a) discipline policies, (b) special education, and (c) the impact of tracking. Then, we will discuss the factors that have contributed to the academic and behavioral success of African American male students by considering schools of choice, single-gender learning environments, and college preparation programs. Findings reveal that academic models are yielding success for African American males (i.e., YES Prep Public Schools, Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP), and Urban Prep Academy). Subsequently, we will present a brief discussion on the ways in which these programs are proving to be successful. Finally, we will discuss the implications for educational policy and advise alternatives for aligning the school curriculum.

Racial Disparities in Education

It is important to recognize the disproportionality that exists in current public school education structures that continue to believe that African American male students are incapable of learning. This section of the literature review will investigate the discipline policy, special education, and tracking and their impacts on African American male students. Each body of literature discussed contributes to the aims of this paper, but limitations and/or implications will be addressed.

Discipline Policy

For much of the last two decades, literature and educational news have consistently been discussing the issue of African American male students being products of zero tolerance school policies and mandates that contribute to low-achievement ratings, high school dropout ratings, and school-to-prison pipeline structures (Dillon, 2010; Goodman & Hilton, 2010; Hamilton, 1986). Based on the National Forum on Educational Statistics (NFES), Lewin (2012) reported that African American students are subject to harsher discipline policies with increased implementation of zero-tolerance policies in larger school districts. Other researchers have also consistently identified this trend over the past three decades and have attempted to explain the reasons for this continuing racial disparity.

Fenning and Rose (2007) conducted a study on the overrepresentation of African American males in exclusionary discipline. Their study concluded that students facing suspensions and expulsions resulting from disciplinary infractions primarily belonged to vulnerable populations, that is, they were children belonging to poor families and/or those who were facing academic difficulties. After reviewing literature regarding the overrepresentation of African American students in disciplinary statistics, Fenning and Rose (2007) also concluded that no support was extended to determine the social needs of African American students, and the manner in which income levels influence the social needs of a student's educational environment needed to be studied. Their revealed teacher's perceptions led to low classroom management control in general and a fear of African American males in particular were some

reasons for these students being referred to the principal's office more frequently and, in turn, being disciplined more frequently than other demographics (Fenning & Rose, 2007).

Fenning and Rose (2007) recommended that moderate revisions be made to discipline policies that encourage positive behavior support. In particular, they argued for administrators to provide culturally relevant professional development practices that would also review discipline policies that specifically address disenfranchised groups. These recommendations are essential for ensuring that educators and administrators are proactive regarding handling discipline procedures rather than reactive. Undoubtedly, proper training and procedural guidelines are crucial for bringing about such a shift. Additionally, the need to consider the discipline policies of districts that have similar ethnic populations, but have experienced less disproportionality should be investigated.

Fenning and Rose (2007) adequately elaborated each of the suggested interventions required at the school and administrative levels; however, they failed to provide recommendations on ways to increase the social and emotional capital of students in these situations. Although their study discussed that the psychosocial needs of African American male students are not being met, they should have discussed how this deficit in the public school model could be addressed. Moreover, although their data collection methods were qualitative, more district-, state-, or national-level data would have enabled them to strengthen their claims for the period considered by them.

More recently, Lewis et al. (2010) conducted a study examining the male discipline patterns in an urban school district in the Midwest. Reviewing school discipline policies and the disciplinary practices among African American male students, findings revealed that Black students were overrepresented in exclusionary discipline and received harsher punishments than their White peers. This overrepresentation resulted in a higher number of missed school days, which immediately affected their learning opportunities and dropout ratings. Some of their foreseeable recommendations included (a) culturally relevant classroom management and training, (b) establishment of an advisory committee, (c) amendments to the zero-tolerance policies, (d) three-strike rule for non-violent offenses, and (d) referrals to counseling/therapy services. These recommendations yielded favorable results in combatting the disproportionate factors for African American male ratings in discipline. Of these, the implementation and establishment of a committee to review each occurrence with discretion, sensitivity, and awareness for the students' needs and previous behavioral patterns was the most noteworthy. In addition, other services such as mediation, counseling, and/or therapy were found to be effective in curbing disciplinary problems.

However, Lewis et al. (2010) also recommended that alternative means for education be used for students who display difficult behavioral dispositions. While allowing students to have access to instruction through online techniques or temporarily attending an alternative education institution, separation from the general population and isolation may become problematic. This strategy may counteract the primary purposes of attending a public school and may make difficult behaviors more consistent because students have become exposed to the consequence(s) and are accepting of them. Additionally, the recommendation by Lewis et al. (2010) to impose fines on parents and guardians would unfairly levy responsibility on the parents as opposed to the students and may result in conflicts at homes, increased financial burdens, and added stress on the relationship between school and home. This has been the case where parents have protested schools in opposition of discipline policies that placed responsibility on parents instead of more accountability from teachers and administrators.

US News recently released a story in which parents were fined $5 for students violating the discipline policy of chewing gum (Wood, 2012). Lastly, the push for a universal discipline policy in the district would be congruent to zero-tolerance policies, which are currently implemented district-wide. The problem with the adoption of universal discipline policies is that every student's actions are not generalizable to the population and, therefore, should not be treated within the same sanctions of another student's action(s).

Special Education

Last reported by the Center for Educational Statistics, African American students account for at least 11% of the Special Education population in US schools (US Department of Education, 2006). Jordan (2005) found that African American students were overrepresented in all of the 13 legally sanctioned disabilities warranted by public education. In fact, African American males predominated two of the three major categories of sanctioned disabilities: mental retardation and emotional disturbance (Jordan, 2005). These students, identified as disabled and restricted in special education environments, were more predominant in urban populations. Jordan (2005) also found that a large majority of the students who were categorized as needing special education services were referred by their teachers. Additionally, the placement of African American males in special education is tied to the assumption that cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and learning differences of these particular students are disregarded in terms of instructional and pedagogical approaches (Jordan, 2005). The findings of this study reveal that the overrepresentation of African Americans in special education is rooted in the deficit model of thinking that these students lack motivation, cannot become intellectuals, and are products of their home surroundings.

Jordan (2005) recommended that it is essential for educators to disable their own assumptions regarding race and social positions within a classroom context. Moreover, there is a need to implement culturally relevant instruction that not only implements the practicalities of an African American student's daily experience but also fosters a classroom centered on learning and making the concept of learning communal. Jordan (2005) emphasized cultural capital needs to focus on restoring and cultivating the academic attitudes of this demographic. Lastly, Jordan (2005) recommended that there should be a clear distinction between special education practice and implementation in public schools in relation to the student population. By recognizing that this is an integral component of a public school education, it should not be overly burdened with racial disproportionalities.

Tracking

The tracking of students into separate levels of study, often categorized by perceived student ability, has long been an issue that has influenced various underrepresented groups of students, including Black males (Mickelson & Velasco, 2006; Oakes & Saunders, 2008). According to Ansalone (2010), tracking is a form of student sorting into low-, average-, and high-ability classes, coursework, and programs of study. These programs place students on a prescribed trajectory, which is directly related to their educational outcomes, towards college, vocational technical careers, the workforce, or far graver outcomes such as dropping out of school. Lockwood (1996, p. 5) described the impact of such practices on students as follows: "People do remember sometimes with startling clarity how institutions such as schools rated

their abilities, valued their accomplishments, and sorted them for their futures." Opponents of tracking argue that as opposed to the educational experiences and opportunities of the students who are tracked into higher levels, which often provide these students with access to college and career preparation opportunities, lower ability tracking models are synonymous with an inferior education. Likewise, tracking separates students along racial, ethnic, and socio-economic lines (Ansalone, 2010; Buck, 2010; Burris & Garrity, 2008; Lucas & Gamoran, 2002; Mickelson & Velasco, 2006; Oakes & Saunders, 2008). Underrepresented groups such as African Americans and Hispanics have been and are continually disproportionate in lower tracked programs and courses.

Oakes and Saunders (2008) noted that tracking is a century-old tradition in that high schools have offered college-bound and non-college bound workforce preparation to separate students. "These practices have carried a racial, ethnic, gender, and social class bias. They have been central to the educational stratification and inequality that reinforces and contributes to larger economic and social disparities" (Oakes & Saunders, 2008, p. 253). In the early years of the 20th century, vocational training emerged as a reasonable alternative for those students who were considered less capable and intelligent than their elite peers were. These programs provided separate curricula for working-class youth headed for industrial jobs and for advantaged students destined for college, leadership, and white-collar careers (Oaks & Saunders, 2008). Ansalone (2010) discussed the impact of tracking and evaluated whether tracking was a positive form of differentiation or a defective strategy. Findings indicated that tracking is a defective strategy that may create a restricted learning trajectory for students, which influences their academic competency in the end. Similarly, Lucas and Gamoran's (2002) findings demonstrated that tracking consistently plays a role in race-linked differences in achievement. They argued that race matters for placement into tracks and that track placement maintain race-linked differences in achievement. Additionally, Burris and Garrity (2008) contended that schools should challenge imposed structures that compel a dichotomy in curriculum access. Furthermore, they encourage schools to dismantle the tracking system and abandon what they deem as the sorting and selecting of students, and instead, suggest the implementation of a rigorous curriculum for all students. Their findings indicated that de-tracking reaped improvements in learning for all students.

Other researchers have focused on the effects of tracking on African American students in particular. Buck (2010) discussed the onslaught of tracking after desegregation as a means of shifting racial separation to the classrooms. This shift places many Black students into lower, vocational, or rudimentary tracks, and special education programs. Buck (2010) discussed the relationship between "acting white" and academic tracking. He indicated that Black students in higher tracked college preparatory programs experience ostracism from other Blacks and are labeled "acting white." Mickelson and Velasco (2006) found that the underrepresentation of Blacks in upper tracks and their overrepresentation in lower tracks perpetuates the race gap in academic achievement. They noted that Black students viewed upper-level coursework such as advanced placement (AP) courses as White territory and they often did not want to take the risk of being labeled acting white (Mickelson & Velasco, 2006).

Models of Success for African American Males

Although racial disparities between Black and White male students exist, urban educational reform initiatives aim to resolve and reduce these disparities. The following section of the

literature review will discuss three schooling practices that have heavily contributed to the success of African American males in education. The public charter school model has been focusing increasing attention on the success of African American males and, in some areas, charter schools have become the preferred choice for disadvantaged youth. College readiness and preparedness programs, which have been implemented as a main thrust of some schools, have resulted in an increase in the percentages of African American males being accepted in schools and those attending and completing post-secondary education. Lastly, a review of the impact of single-gender environments demonstrates the significance of individualized attention for male student learning.

Schools of Choice via Charters

The charter school model was originally designed to accelerate the school reform process by offering schools of choice. Under a "charter," schools were aligned to have specific academic goals for their students and be less regulated by school districts, but were required by law to operate as a free educational institution that would accept all applicants and be free of any biased teaching or religious practices (Larson, 2011). The first charter school was established in Minnesota in 1991, and today, there are over 5,000 charter schools across America, as reported in the *Condition of Education* (Aud et al., 2011). One principal characteristic of charter schools is their autonomy from public school districts, which is particularly important for curriculum development and school policy (Bettinger, 2005; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2011). Although this autonomy is unique to charter schools in public education, a major disadvantage for these schools is that each of them is accountable for student achievement. Typically, entire districts are collectively responsible for student test scores and achievement ratings. Most charter schools exist in low socioeconomic districts where the performance of traditional public schools is low (Aud et al., 2011). Additionally, some larger charter school systems such as the Knowledge is Power Program strategically attempt to create locales in disenfranchised neighborhoods or urban populations in which African American and/or Hispanic student performance ratings are continually low (KIPP, 2012).

A controversial topic associated with charter schools is that of systematic segregation. In a North Carolina study, Bifulco and Ladd (2006) found that charter school models increased the levels of racial and economic segregation amongst students who transferred to charter schools. Additionally, the results of their study implied that African American and Hispanic families send their children to the charter school models because of the overall demographic of students; in other words, parents choose to enroll students into racially separate charter schools rather than integrating them into public school models. Ogbu (1989) shared that segregated schools lead to oppositional and defiant cultures and increased negative behavioral norms. However, Tatum (1997) indicated that segregated schooling could also yield advantages. He discussed that racial segregation can be seen as a developmental process and positive coping strategy to providing members with shared and lived experiences that promote mutual understanding.

College Preparation Programs

College preparation programs are another example of successful models. These programs serve to place all participating students on a track towards college and to support and prepare them along the way. There has long been a strong relationship among family income,

pre-college academic access, and achievement, resulting in most low income students being unable to even meet the admissions requirements of their state universities owing to an educational model that has historically underprepared them (McPherson & Shapiro, 2006; Toldson & Lewis, 2012). According to Hoffman, Vargas, and Santos (2008), only 65% of the low-income students complete high school as compared to 91% of middle/upper income students. Furthermore, 22% of low-income students who graduate from high school are academically prepared for college; however, the proportion of such students belonging to the middle/upper income groups is 54%. Research has shown incongruence between K-12 and higher education, and there is no accountability for the students who fall through the cracks of the two systems (Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006; Conley, 2008; Hunt & Carroll, 2006). College readiness and college preparedness is measured more in terms of academic preparedness to handle college course work, rather than in the gaining of admission to a college or university (Conley, 2008). Swail and Perna (2002) also emphasized that persisting achievement gaps may be a result of traditional programs' narrow focus on increasing college enrollment, with insufficient attention being given to ensuring that students are academically, socially, and psychologically prepared to succeed in college.

In light of these discouraging statistics and findings, hopeful and inspiring work is being undertaken with respect to college preparation models that aim to prepare underrepresented students including African American males for college and beyond. College preparation programs often fill the gap between K-12 and higher education. According to Swail (2005), the goals of college prep programs are to: (a) increase college enrollment rates by promoting college attendance, college awareness, and college exposure, (b) build participants' self-esteem and provide role models and mentorship, and (c) improve the academic skills and preparation of students. All these stated goals further support the ways in which such programs can positively influence the educational outcomes of African American males in catapulting them onto a path of higher education attainment and success. According to Swail (2005), 57% of the college preparation programs are based at colleges or universities, 16% at high schools, and 13% within the community. This review will focus on three such programs: federal and college supported bridge programs, dual enrollment programs, and early college programs.

Bridge Programs. Bridge programs serve as a figurative and literal bridge between high school and college. There are two main types of bridge programs that are supporting the efforts to prepare underrepresented students including African American males for college: The Federal TRIO Bridge program and individual college supported bridge programs. According to Swail (2005), the federal government spends over $1 Billion annually on the federal TRIO programs, including Upward Bound, Talent Search, and GEAR Up. Upward Bound is the most visible and highest funded of the three programs, providing fundamental support for the majority of the low-income/first-generation students towards college entrance and success (Anderson & Larson, 2009; Swail, 2005; US Department of Education, 2004).

College sponsored-bridge programs have been established by institutions to support the transition of their incoming students from high school to college. These bridge programs, often held for several weeks in the summer before the fall semester, attempt to support students with academic and social transitions through exposure to college curriculum and an opportunity to network and establish relationships to support their college journey. Such programs target underrepresented and first-generation college students as well.

Dual Enrollment Programs. Dual enrollment programs have been recognized as a strategy for increasing the college-going rates of high school students. Dual enrollment

programs enable students to be dually enrolled in college courses, while receiving both high school and college credit. Hoffman et al. (2008) discussed the ways in which dual enrollment programs and early college schools serve as an "on ramp" to college for underrepresented and underprepared students. These programs make college more accessible for all students. According to Hunt and Carroll (2006), dual enrollment is unlike traditional AP programs in that all students have access to coursework.

Early College Schools. Early college schools are designed to enable students that are underrepresented in post-secondary education (low-income students, students of color, and first generation college students) to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an associate degree or up to two years of credit toward a bachelor's degree tuition free (Hoffman et al. 2008). Born (2006), also discussed early college schools and presented the ways in which two early college schools offer support for their students. Based on his findings, he concluded that schools with a high focus on academic achievement send valuable messages to students. Students internalize these messages and begin ascribing importance to themselves and to their schools and futures.

Single-Gender Learning Environments

The topic of single gender schooling as an alternative for males who have below average or average success rates has been seen as a benefit by many (Hamilton, 1986; Hanson, 1959; Levine, 1964; Sax, 2005; Sexton, 1969). When males are centered in single-gender environments, gender differences that are associated with learning disappear and a deeper understanding and appreciation for the learning environment emerges (Sax, 2005). In 2006, the US Department of Education released information regarding single gender education in public schools under the provisions of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) that legalized attempts to sanction single gender schools by offering coeducational public schools and single gender classrooms for a particular subjects (US Department of Education, 2006). Under these premises, funding was allotted for establishing the required additional infrastructure such that it would still be 'geographically accommodating' to all students. These regulations also grant incentives for school districts to offer single gender schools instead of single gender classes in coeducational schools.

In 2006, the US Department of Education conducted an evaluation regarding the early implementation of public single gender schools and found that more parents and students are in favor of single gender schooling because they find it beneficial for their children. Additionally, on the elementary and middle school levels, observers of this study found more positive academic and behavioral interactions between teachers and students in this environment. There was also a noticeable decrease in distractions in learning and disciplinary problems. Furthermore, the teachers believed that both sexes benefited equally from single gender education because it enabled a greater sensitivity to sex differences in learning and maturation (US Department of Education, 2006). Chadwell (2012) discovered that single gender classes demonstrated major academic advantages in learning environments for public K-12 settings. Besides finding data to support physical interactions of males, South Carolina students expressed increased engagement levels in core subject areas as a direct result of being in a single gendered environment. Achievement levels by percentages, when compared to co-educational schools increased; on average, scores for mathematics increased by 13% and those for reading and

language arts increased by 11%. The schools also reported fewer discipline referrals than co-educational schools (Chadwell, 2012).

Findings

YES Prep Public Schools: A Nationally Recognized Charter School Model

Recently, YES (Youth Engaged in Service) Prep Public Schools received the 2012 Broad Foundation Prize for Public Charter Schools (YES Prep, 2012). The system schools, primarily located in lower-income neighborhoods in Houston, Texas, currently serve over 5,400 students in grades 6–12. Established in 1995, the charter school system aggressively attempts to prepare students from disadvantaged communities to continue to attend college. In fact, the mission of YES Prep is to increase the number of low-income Houstonians who graduate after four years of college prepared to compete in the global marketplace and committed to improving disadvantaged communities (YES Prep, 2012). Besides the rigorous academic program, YES Prep offers a wide array of services to sustain and support students. These services include campus health services, academic and behavioral support, crisis intervention, counseling, and parent outreach services. Additionally, YES Prep's educational model facilitates field experience opportunities in which students can intern at local businesses, non-profit organizations, and colleges/universities during the summer months. Besides support services, the program allows for one counselor every thirty students to enable students to receive personalized college counseling and support during college years and assistance with college applications, meeting scholarship requirements, and in college readiness workshops. Each of the ten campuses host no more than 825 students with the aim to capitalize on small classroom environments, with a rigorous college preparation curriculum that includes advanced placement, International Baccalaureate, and dual enrollment courses. As one of the program tenets, students must also demonstrate service-learning opportunities through community service events that are a part of the curriculum requirements.

According to their website, 95% of the student population is Hispanic or African American, 80% of the students enrolled are considered economically disadvantaged, and most students who enter the YES Prep system were not meeting grade-level standards in Math and/or Reading subject areas (YES Prep, 2012). The major goal of the organization is to create a sustainable educational model that will undergird student achievement for these historically low achieving demographic of students. As illustrated in their annual report, YES Prep students are outperforming their district and state counterparts on standardized assessments in the subject areas of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and social studies (YES Prep, 2012). YES Prep also closely monitors the dropout and graduation rates of their students in comparison with the overall rates of the district. In 2011, the average dropout rates for the district and state were 16% and 9% respectively, whereas that for YES Prep was just 1%, thereby demonstrating that the educational reform undertaken by YES Prep during the past few years is positively influencing student achievement. Moreover, the proportion of students who graduate from YES Prep is greater than that of the district (70%) and state (81%): 90% of their students finish with high school diplomas and are ready to enter college. As illustrated, YES Prep has made significant strides in creating an atmosphere of learning, fostering increased achievement ratings among its students as a direct result of interventions, support, and college-preparedness mechanisms that have been put in place for traditionally marginalized students to excel.

Table 1
Demographics of the YES Prep Public Schools

Category	2011
Number of schools	10
Number of students	5,713
Grade levels served	6–12
Low-income	85.7%
IEP	7.3%
LEP	27%
At Risk	35.5%
Racial Background	
African American	13.3%
Hispanic/Latino	84.2%
White	.8%
Asian	1.6%
Native American	.2%

Note. IEP = students that receive special education services; LEP = Limited English Proficiency
Adapted from "YES Prep Public Schools 2011 Annual Report," by YES Prep Public Schools, 2012, p. 4.

Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP): National Model with Local Roots

The Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) began in 1994 and has demonstrated success in creating a college preparatory charter school model for over 32,000 students from underserved communities. KIPP is a public, open-enrollment program that accepts applicants regardless of prior educational background, behavior, or socioeconomic status. Thus far, 109 KIPP schools have been established nationwide that serve more than 85% of the students who are eligible for the federal free or reduced lunch program (KIPP, 2012). Each campus caters to the student demographics of the specific critical areas of the region and is, therefore, diverse. There are some schools that comprise a 100% Black student population, some schools are single-gendered, and some schools multi-leveled (primary, secondary, or both). Over 95% of their student population is African American, or Latino. According to their website, more than 95% of the KIPP middle school students have graduated from high school and more than 85% of the KIPP high school graduates have entered college institutions (KIPP, 2012).

Several factors that contribute to the success of this charter school model. First, the school aims to foster a strong collaboration among parents, students, and teachers to obtain desired learning outcomes. This collaboration is evident in the additional academic support interventions of afterschool tutorials, weekend enrichment sessions, parent-teacher conferencing days, and skill-building interventions such as college-readiness workshops, career exploration days, and annual college excursions. A second factor in KIPP's charter model is the manner in which KIPP educators are cultivated and trained to teach vulnerable populations; 35% of the faculty is trained in the KIPP Leadership Programs (new school leaders, teacher leaders, family leaders, and principal preparation models). As noted in their annual report, 35% of the KIPP teachers were those who were recruited for or formerly associated with the Teach for America Program, and as of the last school year, 77% of their teaching faculty returned to teach at KIPP

for another year (KIPP, 2012). Of the approximate 2,000 KIPP educators, only 7% of their faculty transition into leadership positions and/or are transferred to teach at other KIPP locations. A third component to the model is that of the academic excellence of KIPP as compared to the district- and state-level student populations. KIPP enables students to spend more time in academic learning environments with an extended school day, week, and year as compared to public school districts and state mandates. Moreover, character development models, which include, but are not limited to skills of self-control, optimistic attitudes, gratitude, and self-motivation are integrated into their curricula. Because it pertains to measuring their impact on student success, KIPP has reported early findings that as of 2010, 38% of the 8th grade KIPP students who completed the program ten or more years ago have graduated from college and 19% are working towards completing their college degree.

Table 2
Demographics of the Knowledge is Power Program (*KIPP)*

Category	2011
Number of schools	109
Number of students	33,000
Grade levels served	K-12
Low-income	87%
IEP	9%
LEP	14%
At Risk	N/A
Racial Background	
African American	59%
Hispanic/Latino	36%
White	2%
Asian	N/A
Native American	N/A

Note. IEP = students that receive special education services; LEP = Limited English Proficiency Adapted from "KIPP 2011 Report Card and Individual School Results," by KIPP, Inc., 2012, pp. 14–15.

Urban Prep Academy: A Fusion of Single-Gender, College Prep, and Charter Models

Urban Prep Academies in Chicago, IL is a prime example of the fusion of single-gendered, college preparatory, and charter school models. Urban Prep is a network of three high schools that predominately serve African American males. In fact, Urban Prep Englewood is the first all-boys public charter school in the country. Collectively, the schools serve 925 young men, and when all three schools are fully grown out, they will serve 1,500 students. Moreover, 84% of the students who enter Urban Prep belong to low-income households, 15% receive special education services (IEP), and 85% of their students are below grade level readers (Urban Prep, 2012). According to Urban Prep's (2012) website, "The schools are a direct response to the urgent need to reverse abysmal graduation and college completion rates among boys in urban centers." Urban Prep is committed to its mission to "provide a comprehensive, high quality college preparatory education to young men that result in our graduates succeeding in college"

(Urban Prep, 2012). Urban Prep's commitment goes beyond their rigorous academic program. Their motto, "We Believe," transcends throughout everything that they do. This motto offers hope to their young male students to escape negative expectations and stereotypes in a supportive environment wherein all stakeholders embrace this vision of their success (Urban Prep, 2012). Urban Prep also nurtures a positive and inspiring culture, emphasizing mentorship and dedicated time with leaders, as well as a comprehensive college-counseling program, which offers students an individualized and supportive college process. According to their website, they have a very robust and supportive alumni support program.

With a dropout rate of only 11.6%, Urban Prep has a fairly strong outcome with respect to ensuring that students finish high school, whereas the dropout rates for Black males at the district and state levels stand at a staggering 60% and 50%, respectively (Urban Prep, 2012, Schott Foundation, 2010). Although only 44% of the Black males in the district and 47% of the Black males at both the state and national levels graduate from high school, Urban Prep has practically doubled the percentage of Black males that graduate from their high school with 83% of their students receiving their diplomas. At this rate, Urban Prep Academy's graduation rate is 10% higher than the district's overall graduation rate of 73% for all student populations.

Urban Prep's post-secondary outcomes considerably outweigh those of all student populations in general and of the district, state, and nation for Black males in particular. In 2011, 94% of the graduates at Urban Prep Academy enrolled in a four-year college or university. Within the district, only 33% of Black males and 40% of all student populations matriculate to college. Nationally, only 37% of Black males that have graduated from high school enroll in college (Schott Foundation, 2011). In terms of college persistence, 83% of the Urban Prep Academy graduates return to college after their first year, whereas nationally, only 35% of Black males return after first year. In terms of college prep curriculum, 100% of Urban Prep Academy students are exposed to AP coursework, whereas only .25% of black males in the district and .24% of black males nationally are exposed to AP coursework (Illinois State Board of Education, 2012a, 2012b; Schott Foundation, 2010; Urban Prep, 2012).

Table 3
Demographics of the Urban Prep Academies

Category	2011
Number of schools	3
Number of students	879
Grade levels served	9–12
Low-income	86.3%
IEP	18.3%
LEP	0
At Risk	N/A
Racial Background	
African American	98%
Mixed-Race	2%
Hispanic/Latino	0
White	0
Asian	0
Native American	0

Discussion

The presentation of these three existing school models as successful examples of educational structures that posit the experiences of African American males and other underrepresented populations at the forefront of the educational process warrants discussion. These schools purposefully operate under the auspices that all of their students can learn and will be successful in college and beyond. Their missions and the programs and practices that support their missions are geared toward providing their students with multiple levels of support in a college-going culture and atmosphere. Across all three schools, we found several common threads and themes. These common themes exist even though they all serve students in different grades, that is, YES Prep serves students in grades 6–12, KIPP serves students in grades P–12 grades, and Urban Prep serves students in grades 9–12. We found the following commonalities among the three schools: (1) all three schools have a rigorous college prep academic program, which can be accessed by all students; (2) all three schools have a dedicated mission coupled with programs and practices that prepare and support their students to get admission in colleges and complete their college education; (3) all three schools strive to provide social-emotional support through robust student support services; and (4) all three schools are dedicated to breaking generational cycles of poverty by encouraging their students to become model citizens and community leaders that give back to society.

It is important to note the common theme of a rigorous college prep academic program that is accessible to all students. These schools do not only provide their students with a curriculum that will set them on the trajectory towards college, but very often, students enter these schools significantly below their grade level. Therefore, the academic program and curriculum of these schools are focused on filling the academic gaps that are often left as the remnant of traditional school settings. This focus on academic rigor and preparation supports the literature that it is imperative that students are academically prepared to succeed in college coursework and academic readiness is a pillar of success (Conley, 2008). It is also critical to note that the curriculum of these schools can be accessed by everyone. These models debunk the notions of tracking; they support the need for the exposure of all students to higher-level curriculum and demonstrate its positive outcome (Burris & Garrity, 2008).

It is important to discuss the next finding that all three schools have dedicated missions, programs, and practices that prepare and support their students to get admission into colleges and complete their college education. This finding extends beyond the academic program, which is critical, to individualized college counseling and support that their students receive through the college admissions process, college matriculation and persistence, and their progress until college graduation. These college prep programs are a model of success because their support to their students extends from getting admission into colleges to enabling them to complete college education, because each school has a comprehensive alumni program. As indicated in the existing literature, there exists a disconnect between K-12 and higher education that creates a gap in students' education for which nobody claims accountability (Callan et al., 2006; Conley, 2008; Hunt & Carroll, 2006). These schools are holding themselves accountable to close this gap and support their students throughout their college lives.

Moreover, all three schools strive to provide social-emotional support to their students through robust student support services. This holistic approach to their students' education strongly indicates that these schools understand the populations in which they serve and the needs that are often unique to low-income underrepresented students, including Black males. These schools provide student support services such as social work services, counseling, and parental support. These findings support the literature that encourages schools to consider alternative disciplinary policies, incorporate culturally relevant practices, and offer students emotional support through counseling and care (Lewis et al., 2010). Anderson and Larson (2009) argue that without this focus, college preparatory programs often focus heavily on making up ground in academics and disregard other valuable experiences for students. They advocate, "creating integrated social and educational policies that embrace the needs of children as human beings rather than as students only" (p. 110). These three schools are in fact focusing on their students as human beings.

Lastly, all three schools are dedicated to breaking generational cycles of poverty and failure by encouraging their students to be model citizens and community leaders. As indicated in their stated missions and goals, all three schools aim to make their students the next generation of leaders. Ingrained in their programs are opportunities for their students to serve their surrounding communities to encourage this type of servant leadership in the future. These schools also recognize that their work will extend beyond the generation of students that they currently serve because their programs and practices in sending their students to college literally change the negative statistics, dropout rates, and low percentages of underrepresented students in college.

The findings regarding these schools represent that there is no one size fits all prescription for educating African American males and underrepresented low-income students in general. Each school has its own unique mission, programs, practices, etc.; however, their goals are the same in that they take all possible action to serve the children in their schools. The abovementioned threads of commonality serve as models of success and challenge traditional schooling environments.

Limitations

This study has a few limitations. First, there are only a few schools that are considered to be single-gender, public charter institutions. Therefore, there is a need to expand the scope for identifying successful models for Black students by using the following characteristics: (1) public charter schools that are independent of their school districts, (2) schools that target low-income families with majority African-American student population, (3) single-gender models for secondary education, and (4) college preparedness programs as a main tenet in the academic model. Given these criteria, there were even fewer schools that reported data through their websites or within district reports to serve as a premise for comparing their success. Furthermore, organizations such as the National Association for Single-Sex Schools and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools do not harness the much-needed data that correlates schools to their respective district or state entities. Further research in this area could yield findings that would be beneficial in showing how these differentiated learning models are advancing academic outcomes for African American male students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are posed to educational administrators and policy makers to further support the development of single-gender public charter schools. Although every district or state cannot employ this particular school model, some lessons that can be derived from this type of educational environment, which can advance the academic outcomes of African American males in all settings. First, there is a critical need to re-evaluate assumptions about race and cultural significance in the classroom. Jordan (2005) elaborates on how racial stereotypes impede learning outcomes and contribute to a deficit model approach to teaching. Teacher perceptions regarding urban students can either foster or limit a student's ability, access, and overall motivation to learning. Moreover, the value of social and cultural capital should be restored and maintained as a main pillar in instruction and curriculum development.

Second, there is a direct need to re-think universal policies in terms of discipline and classroom practices. A "one-size-fits-all" model can be detrimental to a schooling environment that comprises students who have different values, customs, and perceptions. Lewis et al. (2010) suggest the creation of a governing board for reviewing disciplinary infractions on individuals in a case-by-case manner. This practice should yield a personal, yet objective and consensual way to decide upon consequences when dealing with student behavioral issues. Furthermore, there is a need to create alternative disciplinary interventions that do not create dissonance among the school and student, but increase educational resources around the student so that they can continue to be in an environment that fosters learning.

Additionally, the same methods regarding individualized approaches to discipline should be applied for creating culturally relevant curricula. The culturally relevant urban educator should investigate the social and cultural value systems of his/her class demographic and then shape curriculum and instruction to meet those needs. A curriculum that is centered on these cultural/social values and practices will foster an environment that decreases reliance on highly structured classroom management styles. Instead, students will see the value in learning and inherently want to continue learning under such structure. As extant research has concluded, although considerable differentiation does not exist in a single-gender model in terms of curriculum, greater investment is involved in the instruction of such curriculum.

Another tenet from the successful school models previously illustrated was that of the collaborative partnership among students, teachers, parents, and administrators. This concept is synonymous to the familiar phrase "it takes a village to raise a child." These models have seen the importance of listening to the imploring voices of students and parents voices regarding the ways in which the schools are run. Additionally, there is greater accountability for providing support and services to students and parents in the public charter model. Parents serve as partners for cultivating the success of the schools and this is proven by the amount of time and service that the parents provide to schools.

Conclusion

There is an increasing need to place the educational experiences and outcomes of African American males at the forefront of discussion, policy, and practice. Our review of the literature regarding racial disparities that exist in traditional public school models, including discipline policies, special education, and harmful effects of tracking, provides implications in ways in

which African American male student success is credited through the encouraging work being done by charter schools, college preparatory programs, and single-gender learning models. These interventions support the need for more research, increased policy development, and further dissemination of best practices focused on African American male outcomes. The three models examined in this paper, YES Prep Public Schools, KIPP, and Urban Prep Academies, serve as examples of school systems that are intentionally focusing on the academic achievement and overall success of underrepresented populations, including Black males. Although these schools serve as models, they by no means serve as the cure or a one-size-fits-all solution. Each system is striving after continuous progress and improvement, which in and of itself serves as a model for others. YES Prep serves as a nationally recognized model of success, KIPP serves as a national model with deep roots in the individual communities that they serve, and Urban Prep serves as the model for a single-gender college preparatory charter school that is solely dedicated to improving the outcomes of African American males. Collectively, these three school systems are dispelling the disparities for African American males.

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