



## **Promising Practices and Unfinished Business: Fostering Equity and Excellence for Black and Latino Males**

Rosann Tung, Vivian Dalila Carlo, Melissa Colón, Jaime L. Del Razo, John B. Diamond,  
Alethea Frazier Raynor, Daren Graves, Paul J. Kuttner, Helena Miranda, Andresse St. Rose

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# Promising Practices and Unfinished Business: Fostering Equity and Excellence for Black and Latino Males

Rosann Tung

Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

Vivian Dalila Carlo

Lesley University, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Melissa Colón

Tufts University, Medford, Massachusetts

Jaime L. Del Razo

Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

John B. Diamond

University of Wisconsin–Madison, Madison, Wisconsin

Alethea Frazier Raynor

Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island

Daren Graves

Simmons College, Boston, Massachusetts

Paul J. Kuttner

University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah

Helena Miranda

Center for Collaborative Education, Boston, Massachusetts

Andresse St. Rose

Center for Collaborative Education, Boston, Massachusetts

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- create learning environments that are collaborative, democratic, and equitable;
- build capacity within districts and schools to adopt new practices that promote collaborative, democratic, and equitable learning for students and educators; and
- catalyze systemic change at the school and district levels through district- and state-level policy and advocacy support.

**Production**

Lisa Giuffré, Senior Director of Operations, Center for Collaborative Education

Meena Mehta, TwoM's Design, [www.TwoMs.com](http://www.TwoMs.com)

Diane Fredrick, Editor

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Travis A. McCready, JD, Boston Foundation  
Pedro Noguera, PhD, New York University  
Alexandra Oliver Dávila, MPP, Sociedad Latina, Inc.  
Marie St. Fleur, JD, Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children  
Hon. Jeffrey Sánchez, MPA, Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
Elizabeth Smith, AM, MBA, The Hyams Foundation, Inc.  
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## Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Boston Public Schools Community,

In the city of Boston, we are often reminded that in the long and distinguished history of the Boston Public Schools, our district is regarded as a standard-bearer in urban public education.

Without question, the most consequential and critical issue we face as a nation today is the achievement gaps that exist in our schools for Black and Latino males. While great progress has been made in pockets in schools across America, persistent gaps remain in urban schools from Massachusetts to California. Boston won't wait for someone else to solve this issue for us.

In 2013, Boston Public Schools (BPS) embarked on an endeavor to fully understand the barriers to educational opportunity and attainment for Black and Latino male students by commissioning a two-part study that collectively represent the most comprehensive body of work to date in the country on this topic. The findings of the first report were important and found uneven suspension rates and limited access to critical inclusion settings, advanced work classes and exam schools. The report also offered recommendations for changing underlying practices that can improve outcomes for students. The report delineated recommendations that build on the strengths and values that Black and Latino male students bring to our schools and communities. It also acknowledged the work already underway in BPS to close the gaps, which includes expanded pre-kindergarten, increased inclusive opportunities, changes to our discipline policies that reduce suspensions, investments to diversify our educator pool, and successful re-engagement efforts that have led to an historic low in dropout rates for BPS students.

With that information now in hand we dove even deeper. *Promising Practices and Unfinished Business: Fostering Equity and Excellence for Black and Latino Males* is the second phase of the report former Superintendent Carol Johnson commissioned.

*Promising Practices* highlights effective practices that exist in the profiled schools and identifies opportunities to replicate them more widely. We have the tools – and I believe we are ready – to move from instances of best practices to a system of equity and opportunity for all of our students. Yet, we cannot do it alone. Our work is a collective effort and a continuous effort. It requires community support. It will span - and must withstand - leadership changes. I have been fortunate to carry the torch - to move from theory to practice many of the report's recommendations. I know that Dr. Tommy Chang will take to heart the urgency of this matter when he assumes the Superintendency later this year.

Our success lies in understanding who we are as a city, even as populations shift and change; acknowledging that our different experiences make us stronger; and digging deep to understand and incorporate practices that intentionally draw on cultural responsiveness and expand educational opportunities. Several partnerships made this work tangible, and we are grateful to the Barr Foundation, the Center for Collaborative Education and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University for the role each played in developing the study and recommendations.

On behalf of Mayor Martin J. Walsh, the Boston School Committee, our school leaders, teachers, staff, students and parents, thank you for this tremendous opportunity. Building on a solid history of firsts in education, let us strive to be first again, by leading innovative efforts and practices that foster equity and access for all of our students.

John McDonough

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "John A. McDonough".

Interim Superintendent  
Boston Public Schools

## **Abstract**

Boston Public Schools (BPS) commissioned companion studies as part of its efforts to address achievement gaps for Black and Latino males. The first study revealed the increasing diversity of Black and Latino males and stark opportunity gaps throughout the system that contribute in large part to wide attainment gaps for these students. We hypothesized that in schools doing comparatively better with Black or Latino males than their counterparts, educators would be strategically and comprehensively implementing evidence-based cultural, structural, and instructional practices tailored to meet their the needs and aspirations of these students. Through qualitative case studies of four schools, we identified several cross-cutting themes that provide the district and school leaders with some positive news about effective practices found in all good schools: strong school cultures, professional collaboration, differentiated instruction, and, in the elementary schools, family engagement. While we observed pockets of best practices specific to Black and Latino male education, we also brought to light unfinished business, in that none of the four case study schools had an intentional and comprehensive schoolwide approach to educating Black and Latino males. This lack of intentionality resulted in a paucity of evidence that the school administration and faculty as a whole: (a) know and value students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds; (b) adopt explicit and responsive approaches to race and gender; and (c) develop and implement a comprehensive approach to culturally responsive curriculum and instruction. We posit that lack of knowledge, intentionality, and coherence impedes further progress in educating Black and Latino males, and has implications for educators in schools, for staff members in community partner organizations, and for family members of BPS students.

## Introduction and Literature-Based Indicator Framework

### Historical Context for the Study

The historic *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 made segregated public schools unconstitutional and lamented the disparate opportunities and outcomes for Black students in the United States due to separate and unequal schools.<sup>1</sup> By ending the legality of school apartheid, the U.S. Supreme Court justices sought to remedy the long-lasting effect of school segregation on the psyches and achievement of Black children, who were (a) made to feel inferior to White children and (b) subjected to inferior learning opportunities that produced lower academic outcomes by and large. The *Brown* decision and the halting implementation of integration would have far-reaching effects not only on education, but also on criminal justice, economic outcomes, and U.S. society as a whole. United States citizens elected their first Black president, Barack Obama, in 2008, and in the year in which this study was conducted, celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision.

Despite considerable progress, several generations after *Brown v. Board of Education*, when some of the students who first integrated schools are now grandparents themselves, Blacks and other people of color continue to experience systemic racism and inequitable educational and life opportunities and outcomes. Many districts are resegregating their schools (Orfield, 2001), and affirmative action at colleges and universities has been under attack since the 1970s (Bollinger, 2014). In the summer of 2014, multiple incidents of police racial profiling and brutality brought renewed public attention to how our criminal justice system continues to discriminate against African Americans and other people of color (Bosman & Fitzsimmons,

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier, in 1946, a U.S. district court ruled in *Mendez v. Westminster* that separate schools for Mexican and Mexican American students was unconstitutional. The arguments in this case set the stage for *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

2014; Goldstein & Santora, 2014; E. Louis, 2014). At the same time, we also bore witness to the unaccompanied migrant-minor crisis, of which the vast majority were Latino immigrant boys. Images of young boys and girls in holding facilities that resembled prisons were etched into the minds of the public and raised questions as to whether these children would have received the same treatment had they come to the United States from a different region of the world. As a result of systemic racism in our education and justice systems, Black and Latino males continue to experience persistent poverty, lower levels of high school and postsecondary education attainment, higher unemployment, lower earnings, and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system (Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Fergus, 2012; Noguera, 2008).

Unfortunately, the broad and systemic nature of the opportunity gap for Black and Latino males is no different in Boston than nationally. For instance, one of the major findings of our comprehensive review of enrollment and educational outcomes in the Boston Public Schools was that at every stage of education, from elementary through middle and high school levels, Black and Latino males are excluded from access to more rigorous coursework, the elite exam schools, and high school course sequences leading to college readiness (Miranda et al., 2014). In addition, Black and Latino male students with special needs are excluded from inclusive regular education settings at disproportionate rates. As a result, and not surprisingly, Black and Latino males post lower attendance rates, higher suspension and dropout rates, lower subject-level proficiency rates, and lower four-year graduation rates than females and White and Asian males (Miranda et al., 2014). Another recent study that used census data to summarize the educational and economic vulnerability of Boston's Black and Latin@ youth, particularly male youth, found that almost half of Black and Latin@ youth are not being raised by their parents and have higher unemployment rates than Whites, and that 85% of poor youth are Black and Latin@ (Jennings,

2014). Finally, challenges facing Black and Latino males affect not only district schools, but also charter schools, which post disproportionately high rates of suspensions (The Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Economic Justice, 2014).

Taking one step to mobilize communities to address the opportunity gaps that lead to discipline disparities, criminal justice disparities, and the well-documented "school to prison pipeline," President Obama announced in February 2014 an initiative called My Brother's Keeper Community Challenge for cities to focus on the following goals (The White House, 2014):

- Ensuring all children enter school cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally ready
- Ensuring all children read at grade level by 3rd grade
- Ensuring all youth graduate from high school
- Ensuring all youth complete post-secondary education or training
- Ensuring all youth out of school are employed
- Ensuring all youth remain safe from violent crime

However, as multiple researchers and journalists have documented, the systemic barriers that prevent a disproportionate number of Black and Latino males from attaining these goals are formidable (Edley & Cuéllar, 2013).

The convergence of these two Boston-focused studies with My Brother's Keeper initiative in 2014 compelled the city's leaders to form two "tables" with overlapping membership but distinct roles:

1. Boston has signed onto the President's Community Challenge. Mayor Walsh's My Brother's Keeper initiative includes a task force of 40 members whose goal is to create an

economic and education opportunity map and establish a mentoring initiative designed to pair Black and Latino male youth with Black and Latino male adults (Irons, 2014, p. 20).

2. Philanthropic leaders established the Black and Latino Collaborative, whose membership consists of representatives of businesses, foundations, and politicians. This group's purpose is to develop an alignment of strategies and investments to enhance Black and Latino success (Johnson, 2014).

Taken together, these multiple efforts aim to mobilize and align community resources and create greater public demand for enhanced equity and accountability of education, justice, and employment systems in order to foster improved opportunities and outcomes for Black and Latino males in Boston.

### **Study Rationale and Research Questions**

In order to complement and build upon the quantitative studies documenting the enrollment and disappointing educational outcomes for Black and Latino males (Jennings, 2014; Miranda et al., 2014), we sought to identify promising practices, documented both in national research and also in the Boston Public Schools, that might inform local practitioners and policy makers about how to leverage resources to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of Black and Latino males. Our study builds on the initial findings from the quantitative phase of this research project that examined the enrollment and outcomes for Black and Latino males.

The research question guiding this study was: *What are the salient practices, perspectives, and experiences of educators and youth in those schools that are doing comparatively well by Black and Latino males?* The goal of the study was to document in detail the practices that the school community members say contribute to educating Black and Latino male students, and to recommend programs, policies, and practices for Boston Public Schools. The case study findings,

described in detail in the following chapters, shed light not only on promising practices within the four schools, but also on clear opportunities for systemic improvement.

### **Literature Review for Black and Latino Male Education**

As a starting point for the case study design, data collection, and analysis, we conducted a literature review to identify evidence-based practices of what works in Black and Latino male education. We hypothesized these practices would be evident in Boston schools that were doing comparatively well for their Black or Latino males.

Given that our research questions examine the specific intersection among race/ethnicity, gender, and effective public K–12 schools, we searched for publications focused on all three variables. However, we found very few empirical studies that have explored what works for males of color in K–12 public schools (Chenoweth, 2009; Fergus, Noguera, & Martin, 2014; Villavicencio, Bhattacharya, & Guidry, 2013). Thus, our criteria for inclusion of an indicator in the framework were broad:

- include students of color and those who have been historically underserved or who are lagging in educational outcomes;
- focus at the school level;
- have theoretical, empirical, and/or peer-reviewed evidence;
- include asset-focused indicators/practices;
- be observable or measurable; and
- attend to the political, cultural, social, and historical dimensions of schools as well as the technical.

We also decided that many general indicators of effective schools were necessary to include. For example, high expectations, rigorous work, and meaningful family engagement are

not exclusive to ensuring success for Black and Latino males, but rather are hallmarks of effective schools for all students. Studying their implementation in schools doing well by Black and Latino males is equally as important. Thus, the framework makes a distinction between indicators specific for non-White, historically marginalized groups and those more generally referring to good schools. While the framework we constructed includes both indicators for high-quality schools and those specific to effective education of Black and Latino males, our literature review below focuses solely on the indicators specific to Black and Latino male education, as the qualities of generally effective schools have been reviewed extensively in prior studies (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; Tung et al., 2011).

Within these studies, we identified indicators of school practices and policies. We grouped the indicators into six categories that are commonly used in school design, both to develop school practices and policies and to evaluate school outcomes (Buttram, 2007; Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, 2007; Office of English Language Learners, 2010; Rennie Center, 2008; Shields & Miles, 2008; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; The Education Trust, 2005):

1. Mission and Vision
2. Curriculum and Instruction
3. School Culture and Climate
4. School Leadership and Organizational Policies
5. Family Engagement
6. Community Partnerships

A complete literature review was beyond the scope of this report. Rather, we describe the prominent indicators that were specific to Black and Latino males in each framework section and provide supporting literature for further study.

### ***Mission and Vision***

Multiple scholars agree that schools must have high expectations and a mission of academic achievement leading to college and career readiness and should be explicit about Black and Latino male achievement (COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Fergus et al., 2014; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Tatum, 2007; Tung et al., 2011). Staff members in these schools are clear about this shared mission and have ways to monitor and hold themselves accountable to outcomes. In high schools, this mission is accompanied by providing ways for Black and Latino males, many of whom are first-generation college goers, to develop “college knowledge,” or the understanding and experience of how college admissions and college life operate (Harper & Williams, 2014; Villavicencio et al., 2013).

### ***Curriculum and Instruction***

Two theories were prominent in the curriculum and instruction indicators: critical race theory (CRT) and critical pedagogy (CP).<sup>2</sup> Educators who take a CRT stance interrogate the role of race and racism in schooling practices and experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Leithwood, Seashore, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2004; Stovall, 2006), provide opportunities for Black and Latino male students to develop their own narratives that differ from the dominant culture’s narrative (Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lewis, Butler, Bonner, & Joubert, 2010), and make time for co-generative

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<sup>2</sup> We distinguish between two uses of theories: (a) some theories imply certain school and classroom practices; and (b) some theories provide a lens for researchers collecting and analyzing data. The same theory may be used both ways in one study. In this section, we describe the former where relevant. In the next chapter, we describe the latter.

dialogue, in which students and teachers construct learning together (Emdin, 2012; Stovall, 2006). Such classroom CRT approaches empower and reinforce their identities as students of color. Scholars who focus on the psychology/identity perspective show that students of color who develop a strong racial/ethnic identity do better academically and psychosocially (Altschul, Oyserman, & Bybee, 2006; Chavous et al., 2003). Critical race achievement ideology grew out of CRT and describes an approach in which students use CRT to adapt to racist environments and develop strong racial identities (D. Carter, 2008).

Critical pedagogy (CP), which grew out of Freire's and Shor's teachings, posits that the purpose of education is to empower, pose problems, and lead to reflection and action (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1992). Critical pedagogy is the use of instructional techniques such as having students reflect on a current inequitable practice (such as the standards and testing movement) to produce a performance or service that showcases their understanding of its harmful effects on students like them (Duncan-Andrade, 2008). Critical pedagogy interrogates the "hidden curriculum" that is the outcome of an inherently racist education system (Giroux, 2001; McLaren, 2014). It challenges the dominant narrative and enhances student learning and liberation (Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Shor, 1992).

Another indicator is grounded in work defining critical multicultural education by Banks (1993, 1999) and Nieto and Bode (2012). Critical multicultural education in a sociopolitical context can lead to understanding and empathy and address prejudices associated with race, power, culture, and language. Educators who incorporate multicultural education into their practice value students from different groups (racial, ethnic, gender, class, learning styles, language, sexual orientation, etc.) and believe that this respect for students' diverse experiences will lead to more equitable outcomes. Many other researchers have found that students who see

themselves in the curriculum will be more engaged in learning. Thus, curriculum and instruction should be culturally responsive, teach an antibias stance, and stress the benefits of diversity.

Finally, many scholars have recognized that in order to implement culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, given the predominantly White, middle-class teaching force in our urban public schools, we must provide preservice and in-service professional development to assist teachers in developing and using culturally responsive curriculum, in building the skills required in culturally responsive pedagogy, and in incorporating culturally responsive behavior management.

### ***School Culture and Climate***

Trumbull and Pacheco (2005) define school culture as behaviors, beliefs, customs, values, and ways of knowing that are transmitted from teachers, staff members, and students in a school to students each year. School climate refers to the “mood” or “attitude” of the school, which can change more readily than school culture (Gruenert, 2008). They are related concepts and are often used interchangeably by both scholars and practitioners. Our literature review uncovered many specific school-based practices that result in a school culture and climate that is supportive of Black and Latino males in particular.

First, the faculty and staff members reflect the student body in gender, language, race, and ethnicity (Tung et al., 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). In addition, faculty members explore their own identities in order to practice more culturally responsive curriculum and instruction (Lewis et al., 2010; Villavicencio et al., 2013). Correspondingly, students are encouraged to develop their own identities (Fergus et al., 2014; Stovall, 2006) and are valued at school for those identities (Fergus et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2004; Stovall, 2006; Tung et al., 2011; Valenzuela, 1999). This identity development may happen inside and outside the classroom.

Another indicator of strong school culture is the collaborative and warm nature of relationships among adults, between adults and students, and among students. Adults have a culture of professional collaboration. Through their interactions and work, together focused on teaching and learning, they share collective responsibility for Black and Latino male student success (Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Pang, 2005; Tatum, 2007; Tung et al., 2011). In addition, a school with a strong positive culture carries hallmarks of respect, caring, warmth, and accountability in the relationships among students and between students and teachers (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Chenoweth, 2009; Coleman, 1990; Collins, 2011; Comer, 2001; De los Reyes, Nieto, & Diez, 2008; Halx & Ortiz, 2011; Harper & Williams, 2014; Noguera, 2003; Pang, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). These relationships are reciprocal, in that teachers sometimes initiate connections with youth that are not related to academic learning. Relationships among students are also caring, trusting, and supportive, building Black and Latino male social capital (Valenzuela, 1999).

### ***School Leadership and Organizational Policies***

The schoolwide use of data-based inquiry, including disaggregation of findings by race and gender in order to inform instruction, was a practice widely discussed in the literature focused on Black and Latino males (Chenoweth, 2009; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2010). Such disaggregation can uncover information about disproportionality and risk for Black and Latino males. Another structural feature of schools focused on Black and Latino male success is the creation of single-gender classes, clubs, and opportunities for males of color in particular (COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011). Finally, Milner (2012) focused on evidence-based progressive discipline

strategies such as restorative justice, culturally responsive behavior management, and counseling rather than punitive approaches.

### ***Family Engagement***

Family engagement in students' education can occur both at home and at school. Two scholars who focus on historically underserved populations directly address family engagement at home. Their research suggests that families' communicating high expectations, limiting unstructured time, and emphasizing home language and culture may lead to better outcomes for Black and Latino males (Harper & Williams, 2014; Nieto, 2004). In terms of the home-school connection, family members should feel respected and welcome to be leaders in schools (Pollard & Ajiro-tutu, 2000), and able to advocate for cultural responsiveness in curriculum and instruction (Valenzuela, 1999). Schools should provide multiple opportunities for families of diverse cultures and backgrounds to stay engaged and informed (COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hong, 2011; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Sebring, Allensworth, Bryk, Easton, & Luppescu, 2006). Finally, and related to having staff members who reflect the student body, schools that have Black and Latino male staff members who can relate to the lived experiences of Black and Latino male students and communicate with families in a nonjudgmental way should have positive and strong relationships with families (Tung et al., 2011).

### ***Community Partnerships***

Schools that foster partnerships with individuals and organizations in the community will be able to leverage those partnerships into multiple types of resources for Black and Latino male students, including out-of-school-time programming and mentorships, and in-school volunteers to support academic and enrichment learning opportunities (COSEBOC, 2014; Feldman et al.,

2012; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Noguera, 2003; Tung et al., 2011; Villavicencio et al., 2013).

### **Indicator Framework for Black and Latino Male Equity and Excellence**

Using the studies reviewed above, we created an Indicator Framework for Black and Latino Male Equity and Excellence to summarize what others have identified as best practices, as well as to guide research design, data collection, and data analysis (see Table 1). The research team consulted the Indicator Framework at multiple points during the study: (1) in team building and developing a common language; (2) in writing interview and observation protocols for data collection; (3) in drafting a preliminary coding scheme for analysis; (4) in analysis of individual case studies; and (5) in cross-case analysis. Most indicators have an evidence base specifically focused on best practices for marginalized youth and also may have an evidence base as effective for all students, although some indicators have an evidence base only from the effective schools literature with a more general focus on all students.

Table 1

#### *Indicator Framework for Black and Latino Male Equity and Excellence*

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>References</b>
<b>Mission and Vision</b>	
The school has a college-readiness mission and provides opportunities for Black and Latino male students to learn about and experience how college works (high schools).	Harper & Williams, 2014; Villavicencio et al., 2013
The school has a mission of high expectations for student learning outcomes for all students (using measurable and monitored objectives), with explicit attention to Black and Latino males.	COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Fergus et al., 2014; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Tatum, 2007; Tung et al., 2011

Indicators	References
<b>Curriculum and Instruction</b>	
Curriculum and instruction include analysis using the lens of critical race theory (CRT); the school takes on an antiracist stance.	Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004; Stovall, 2006
CRT: Curriculum includes opportunity for Black and Latino male students to develop counternarratives to the dominant narrative.	Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lewis et al., 2010
CRT: Curriculum allows for co-generative dialogue.	Emdin, 2012; Stovall, 2006
Teachers use critical pedagogy (CP) in their lessons.	Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Freire, 1970; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Shor, 1992
CP: Curriculum empowers students and allows for social action, decision making, and “subversive activity.”	Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012
CP: The metaphor for education is that of problem posing, not banking.	Freire, 1970
CP: The focus of teaching and learning is “empowering education”: participatory, affective, situated, problem-posing, multicultural, dialogic, desocializing, and democratic; constructivist. Content learning builds on students’ background knowledge; instruction goes beyond academic discourse to reflection and action.	Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Shor, 1992
Curriculum and instruction is culturally responsive to Black and Latino males; curriculum is multicultural and stresses diversity; critical multicultural education challenges structural racism and other -isms.	Banks, 1993, 1999; COSEBOC, 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Fergus et al., 2014; Gay & Hanley, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Lewis et al., 2010; May, 1999; Milner, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter & Grant, 1987, 2006; Tatum, 2007; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005
Teachers and leaders receive professional development on culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy.	COSEBOC, 2014; De los Reyes et al., 2008; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Fergus et al., 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1998; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Lewis et al., 2010; Villavicencio et al., 2013

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>References</b>
Teachers and leaders receive professional development on culturally responsive classroom management.	Lewis et al., 2010
Curriculum emphasizes character development.	COSEBOC, 2014
Assessments show what students know and can do (authentic); involve presentations, projects.	Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1998
Classes include heterogeneous cooperative group work that encourages differentiation, communication, and building self-confidence.	Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Tung et al., 2011
Instructional program shows coherence guided by a common framework.	Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001; Tushman & O'Reilly, 2002
Rigorous curriculum is focused on academic literacy, mastery, and efficacy.	COSEBOC, 2014; Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Sebring et al., 2006; Villavicencio et al., 2013
Teachers differentiate instruction based on learning needs and learning styles.	Duncan-Andrade, 2008; T. Hall, 2002; Southwest Educational Development Laboratory [SEDL], 1995; Tomlinson, 1999; Williams, 2012
<b>School Culture and Climate</b>	
School faculty's gender, racial, and ethnic makeup resembles the student body's gender, racial, and ethnic makeup.	Tung et al., 2011; Valenzuela, 1999
School addresses Black and Latino male students' sociocultural <i>and</i> academic identities; discussions about race and gender are public and explicit.	Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Pollock, 2004; Tatum, 2007
Students are encouraged to develop a gender, racial, cultural, and linguistic identity.	Fergus et al., 2014; Stovall, 2006
Students' cultures and life experiences are valued as assets; students' home cultures are reflected in the school; school staff members focus on building students' social capital.	Fergus et al., 2014; Leithwood et al., 2004; Stovall, 2006; Tung et al., 2011; Valenzuela, 1999
School emphasizes collective/communal identity and responsibility for student success; responsibility for Black and Latino male achievement is distributed schoolwide, not just among teachers in certain roles.	Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Pang, 2005; Tatum, 2007; Tung et al., 2011
Teachers and leaders participate in professional development to examine their own gender and racial identities and become more culturally responsive.	Lewis et al., 2010; Villavicencio et al., 2013
School culture focuses on resilience and persistence.	Fergus & Noguera, 2010; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>References</b>
Teachers and students have strong, caring, accountable, and reciprocal relationships with each other; relationships originate with revealing the self rather than with academic knowledge and skills; teachers initiate connection with youth.	Alva & Padilla, 1995; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Chenoweth, 2009; Coleman, 1990; Collins, 2011; Comer, 2001; De los Reyes et al., 2008; Halx & Ortiz, 2011; Harper & Williams, 2014; Noguera, 2003; Pang, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999
Relationships among students and student groups are supportive, trusting, networked; they add social capital.	Valenzuela, 1999
School has adequate number of guidance counselors who are aware of many college options, scholarship opportunities.	Harper & Williams, 2014
School creates ample opportunities for student voice, engagement, and leadership development.	COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Sebring et al., 2006; Villavicencio et al., 2013
School uses an early warning system for identification of students who are off track, and academic intervention systems for them are in place.	Feldman et al., 2012; Fergus & Noguera, 2010
School provides a safe and orderly environment for all students, including for Black and Latino males; being open beyond the school day provides students a safe haven.	Harper & Williams, 2014; Tung et al., 2011
<b>School Leadership and Organizational Policies</b>	
Teachers and administrators use data-driven instruction, including disaggregation of outcomes by race and gender that includes discipline and test score data; calculation of relative risk.	Chenoweth, 2009; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2010
The school has a representative discipline advisory committee with a culturally synchronous perspective.	Lewis et al., 2010
Discipline policies and practices emphasize justice/fairness.	Lewis et al., 2010
School/district uses a universal three-strikes policy for discipline consequences (rather than zero tolerance).	Lewis et al., 2010
Students repeatedly referred for disciplinary infractions are prioritized for counseling/therapy.	Lewis et al., 2010
Schools and/or classrooms employ gender-based practices, such as single-gender classes or boys' groups	COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011
School enacts rites of passage and rituals into manhood.	Fergus & Noguera, 2010; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011
High schools invest the greatest amount of resources in the 9th grade.	Villavicencio et al., 2013

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>References</b>
Leaders see their role as influencing staff members' motivation, knowledge, affect, or practice to enable or resist change.	Spillane, 2006; Spillane & Coldren, 2011
Leaders take a distributed perspective on leadership and management, highlighting distributive leadership structures, routines, context, and interactions.	Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Spillane & Coldren, 2011; Tatum, 2007
School size is small enough for personalization of teaching and learning and forming of relationships. Class sizes range from 15 to 20 students.	V. E. Lee & Loeb, 2000; Leithwood et al., 2004
Teachers have time during the school day to collaborate to improve knowledge of content, knowledge of students, and instruction; professional learning communities; professional collaborative communities.	Chenoweth, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004; Sebring et al., 2006; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008
The school has adequate staffing to create reasonable class sizes and student supports to address academic and social-emotional needs.	COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011
The school follows a clear, equitable special education referral policy and tracks the proportionality of its SPED referrals.	
All students have equitable access to rigorous courses and high-level classes (no academic or cultural tracking).	De los Reyes et al., 2008; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999
Instead of grade retention, the school uses alternative policies such as summer school and tutoring to support off-track students.	Leithwood et al., 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2012
<b>Family Engagement</b>	
Family members feel "at home" and welcome in the school.	Pollard & Ajirotutu, 2000
Family members have high expectations for their Black and Latino male students.	Harper & Williams, 2014
Family members strictly limit unstructured time outside of the home.	Harper & Williams, 2014
Families support continued use of native language and reliance on family's cultural values.	Nieto, 2004
School has Black and Latino male personnel who are nonjudgmental and available to speak with parents of Black and Latino male students and to learn about family experiences.	Tung et al., 2011
School offers parenting workshops or peer-support networks led by parents of successful Black and Latino male students.	Oakland Unified School District [OUSD], 2011
Home-school relationship involves collaborating to demand culturally responsive curricula.	Valenzuela, 1999

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>References</b>
School offers a variety of ways for families to be engaged and informed, since family’s culture may influence comfort with school.	COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hong, 2011; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Sebring et al., 2006
Leadership gives families a role in making decisions about the school.	Leithwood et al., 2004
<b>Community Partnerships</b>	
The school actively engages community partners as resources for Black and Latino male students, for example, to provide out-of-school-time programs that offer enrichment and academic reinforcement; communities add social capital for school success.	COSEBOC, 2014; Feldman et al., 2012; Fergus & Noguera, 2010; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Noguera, 2003; Tung et al., 2011; Villavicencio et al., 2013
Community-based organizations offer mentoring, role models, tutoring for students in the school.	J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Noguera, 2003

## Case Study Theoretical Lenses and Methods

### Theories Underlying Case Study Data Collection and Analysis

The previous chapter shared an abbreviated literature review of practices and conditions that others have posited and, in some cases, have shown to be associated with Black and Latino male success, or with the success of historically underserved groups. Those studies informed the Indicator Framework, which guided the research process.

In this chapter, we describe several theories about education and society that were most prominent in *how* the research team conducted and discussed data collection and analysis. Rather than providing evidence for being instrumental in Black and Latino male success, these theories describe the researchers' approaches to and lenses for the site visits and analyses. We briefly discuss six theories here; they are also explained and used in individual case studies to different extents and in different ways.

Since a different team of researchers conducted each case study, theoretical lenses play out in different ways in the following four chapters. In this section, we briefly highlight the theories that were most prominent. We acknowledge that such treatment of a vast literature is inadequate, and simply share these descriptions to frame the case study findings against a backdrop of the best thinking on what works optimizing education for Black and Latino males.

#### *Critical Race Theory*

The primary theory serving as the foundation for the framework and analysis is critical race theory (CRT), which emerged from legal studies in the mid-1990s as a way for scholars and practitioners to approach eliminating oppression and dehumanization in education (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Solorzano identified five tenets of CRT in education (1997, 1998):

- the centrality of race and racism in the United States;

- the challenge to dominant ideology;
- the commitment to social justice;
- the centrality of experiential knowledge; and
- the utilization of interdisciplinary approaches.

Multiple scholars have used CRT to critically analyze the different ways that race is entangled within the current sociological structures, discourses, and schooling of people of color (Bell, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, 2013; Haney-López, 2006, 2007; Matsuda, Lawrence, Delgado, & Crenshaw, 1993; Solorzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2006). For example, when researchers acknowledge that institutionalized racism is an integral part of systems, they observe and hear the micro- and macro-aggressions that take place daily in our educational, health care, criminal justice, and other systems. They disaggregate data to understand in what ways students of different racial and ethnic backgrounds are represented in opportunities and outcomes. With a critical race theory lens, researchers also look for curriculum and instruction that builds on all students' lived experiences.

### ***Critical Pedagogy***

Freire (1970) explicated the need for a problem-posing versus a banking concept of education to enable the empowerment of marginalized people. In problem-posing education, students tackle topics of importance to them, and teachers learn with their students to increase critical consciousness and empowerment (Shor, 1992). Scholars have employed the theoretical lens of critical pedagogy to describe how schools can be either places of replicating the status quo or places of true liberation and hope (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1970, 2005; Grande, 2004; McLaren, 1995, 2014; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007). Implementing critical pedagogy as a lens

permitted us to look for how teaching and learning can both challenge the dominant narrative and transform individuals in our case study schools.

### ***Critical Multicultural Education***

Scholars like Nieto and Bode, Sleeter and Grant, and Banks have developed a number of typologies that delineate different approaches to or facets of multicultural education (Banks, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter & Grant, 1987, 2006). Although they divide the concept along different lines, these scholars make it clear that the term “multicultural” covers a wide spectrum of educational practices. At one end are approaches that call on schools to integrate content relating to people of color, or to differentiate instruction for diverse students, but that do not demand any fundamental change in the dominant structure or philosophy of schooling. At the other end are more critical or transformational approaches to multicultural education that take seriously questions of structural inequality, antiracism, social change, and the systemic transformation of schools. These latter approaches, according to scholars, hold much more promise for truly addressing the fundamental inequities in our education system.

Multicultural education has been criticized for its focus on positive images of marginalized people and its celebration of holidays and festivals from various cultures—essentially being more of an “add-on” to the curriculum rather than an integral approach to all teaching and learning. However, *critical* multicultural education, related to critical pedagogy or equity pedagogy, has emerged as a response to this critique. This theoretical lens focuses on empowerment to address inequities, to name and change power dynamics, and to dismantle systemic racism and other -isms (Banks, 1999; Gay & Hanley, 1999; May, 1999; Sleeter & Grant, 1987, 2006).

### *Asset-Based Theories*

Many scholars seek to change the dominant paradigm and narrative, which cast the achievement of Black and Latino males as challenges and place the onus of closing the achievement gap on the students rather than on the system. Rejecting this deficit lens, these scholars emphasize the historical, cultural, and linguistic value that Black and Latino male students bring to enrich their schools and communities. Our case studies drew especially on the three asset-based theories described below.

#### *Culturally relevant pedagogy*

Culturally relevant pedagogy is an approach to teaching that acknowledges the diversity in classrooms, which has increased dramatically in the last half-century. It is “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (Gay, 2010, p. 31). Given the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic divide between teachers and their students, teachers increasingly need to develop the skills, knowledge, and dispositions to be culturally responsive to and to nurture relationships with their students that empower them to develop not only academically but also sociopolitically (Gay, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1999).

#### *Funds of knowledge*

A theoretical lens related to culturally responsive pedagogy is funds of knowledge, a lens that values the extensive knowledge and social networks that students carry with them from their home cultures and language, and personal and employment histories (Flores-González, 2005; Moll, Soto-Santiago, & Schwartz, 2013). Integrating that lens into interviews and observations, as well as into classroom instruction, enriches the school through the resources of language, content knowledge, and increased student engagement.

### *Community cultural wealth*

Community cultural wealth theory grew out of CRT, which addresses the deficit mindset of the dominant culture. The dominant culture defines wealth as an individual's accumulation of assets and resources, which is usually measured in monetary amounts. Community cultural wealth takes into account the myriad other assets and resources that people accumulate and that help them to become educated, to succeed, and to survive oppression. The associated knowledge, skills, and connections include aspirational, familial, social, navigational, cultural, linguistic, and resistance capital. Using this theoretical framework rather than the traditional view of cultural capital, individuals and communities of color possess community cultural wealth, which facilitates their success in school and beyond (Yosso, 2005). Such an asset-based approach to teaching and learning instills pride in community, which empowers students rather than oppresses them.

### *Caring and Education*

Valenzuela published a seminal study that built upon Noddings's theory of caring in education (Noddings, 1984; Valenzuela, 1999). *Subtractive Schooling* describes the role that assimilation into the dominant culture and the lack of authentic caring played in the achievement of Latin@ students in one large comprehensive Texas high school. This theory posits that authentic, caring, and reciprocal relationships between teachers and students leads to *educación*, including education about moral, social, and personal responsibility rather than just academics. The most successful teachers were the ones who did not see students' culture and language as deficits to be corrected or subtracted; rather, they viewed them as assets upon which to build. Pang, Rivera, and Mora (1999) also describe a framework in which caring-centered education is

essentially education for social justice, because it takes into account the students' culture and integrates a sense of community and responsibility on the part of both teachers and students.

### ***Masculinity***

Many scholars and journalists have documented and explained the gender gap, in which males have fallen behind females in education (P. L. Carter, 2005, p. 2; G. Lopez, 2003). Gender gaps must be addressed in the context of race, class, and geographic location. Black and Latino males and low-income males face wider gaps with females than do middle- and upper-class White males (Morris, 2012). Several theories attempt to explain the gender gap, including biological differences between males and females, gender socialization (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2007), "doing gender," and hegemonic masculinity (Morris, 2012). Doing gender and hegemonic masculinity are gender theories that take into account differences in experiences and power among different males, including by race and ethnicity. They treat gender not as static, but as social and relationship based. Everyday interactions, situations, and contexts show that the development of masculinity differs depending on the actors, expectations, and agency of the individuals involved. Therefore, some males face more challenges or act in certain ways in school and the workplace. Since schools are a context in which there are clear definitions and expectations of masculinity, we can expect to see patterns in how males act and interact.

All of these theories play out empirically. Researchers have suggested that cognitive skills, noncognitive skills, socialization, behavior, parental expectations, teacher expectations, and teachers' gender all may contribute to gender disparities in achievement and attainment (Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008; Cornwell, Mustard, & Van Parys, 2013; DiPrete & Buchmann, 2006; Jacob, 2002). For example, in some schools there may be a peer culture that

encourages either a casual or detached attitude toward school for boys, one that encourages resistance to school among boys, or one that views academic achievement as feminine.

The six theories informing our framework, data collection, and analysis are clearly overlapping and related to one another. For example, CRT informed the development of community cultural wealth theory. Caring in education and the field of multicultural education share similar etymologies. Our hope is that this chapter informs the reader of the theoretical lenses that the case study researchers employed to inform their interpretations of the data, a process described in the next section.

**Abbreviated Methods**

We undertook a cross-disciplinary, mixed-methods approach to reveal promising practices in four schools identified through regression analysis as doing comparatively well for either Black males or Latino males.

Table 2

*Schools Identified Through Multiple Regression Analysis for Case Study*

<b>School Pseudonym</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Grades</b>
Tallmadge	Black males and Latino males	PK–5
Fairview K–8	Black males	PK–8
Bruin HS	Latino males	9–12
Hilltop HS	Black males	9–12

The research team consisted of teams of two researchers per school, with at least one researcher who was Black or Latin@ (in most cases both were either Black or Latin@). This team met every two weeks during the study to collaboratively share individual understanding of

theoretical perspectives, parse definitions of key terms, prepare protocols for site visits, discuss the range of data collection in each school, decide on an initial coding scheme, share emerging new codes and themes, and exchange articles and coding methods. The team also communicated via a listserv and shared literature with each other through a common web-based bibliographic tool, Zotero. Individual school research pairs met separately and regularly to discuss their theoretical perspectives and analysis of findings.

Case studies were the chosen method for capturing each school's story of success with Black and Latino males (Yin, 2009). Case studies allowed us not only to portray each school's uniqueness, but also to analyze themes across schools. Using our Indicator Framework, we developed interview and observation protocols that probed for practices that benefit Black and Latino males. A team of researchers visited each school for two days in spring 2014 to conduct interviews and focus groups with administrators, teachers, other staff members, parents, and in some cases, youth and community leaders. We also conducted observations both in classrooms and in other spaces, such as hallways, cafeterias, and during meetings. Data collection also included school documentation such as meeting notes and written policies, photos, and other school artifacts.

The qualitative data was analyzed using the qualitative coding software Dedoose. Each school research team identified emerging themes and shared them with the larger group for discussion and comparison across sites. We compared practices found in each school to the Indicator Framework for Black and Latino Male Equity and Excellence to check for replication, which strengthened the framework. For the purposes of expanding the theoretical and literature-based framework, we also documented practices that emerged across schools but were not in the framework.

A primarily inductive approach was taken to analyzing the data collected in each school. Analysis began with the research team sharing observations from each school about practices and stances. Discussions involved the sharing of emerging categories, patterns, themes from interviews, and observations in each school. These discussions ensured that the level of detail across the four schools was somewhat consistent despite the different stories and personalities that each school embodied.

These discussions and the case study drafts informed a cross-school synthesis of findings. Using grounded theory and cross-case analysis, recurring themes that reflected the Indicator Framework were tallied by school, and new recurring themes that were not reflected in the framework were also entered. After charting the findings for all four case studies, a theme was determined to be “cross cutting” if at least three case studies discussed the theme.

### *Limitations of Methods*

We acknowledge a number of limitations due to the short amount of time for case studies, which affected the amount of data we could collect and analyze:

- Due to resource constraints, schools were visited for only two days—thus, the case studies are a snapshot of a particular point in time rather than representations across time. Classroom observations were limited in number due to time constraints, so observation findings were triangulated with interview data.
- Because of the gap between the study period for which these schools were identified as doing comparatively well by Black and Latino males (SY2009–SY2012) and the case study data collection period (spring 2014), the memories of staff members—even of those who were present in the schools over the duration—may not have been entirely accurate, and their perceptions of their own practices may have differed from reality due

to the context of the school and the district. We addressed the possibility of recall bias during interviews by making sure more than one person gave us the same information in separate interviews, phone calls, or emails. Observations had not been conducted during the study period.

- Comparison schools, such as those that were performing as predicted or lower than predicted, were not studied. Thus, some of the practices that emerged in the case study schools might also be found in those schools.
- Student and family interviews were limited to a small number, and interviewees were selected in an ad hoc fashion rather than through a specific sampling method.
- We were unable to examine Black and Latino male experiences outside of school, in their families and communities.
- Four case studies is a limited sample of schools. The study of more schools with similar demographic profiles and comparatively strong outcomes is a recommendation of this study.

### *Limitations of Framework*

- As already mentioned, one limitation to using the framework is that very little literature examines the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, and/or effective schools. Much of the writing is theoretical, with little empirical evidence to help refine the theory. What empirical evidence does exist is descriptive in nature, such as case studies of particular types of schools (Chenoweth, 2009; Fergus et al., 2014).
- Schools may use approaches and strategies that are not grounded in theory and easily measured outcomes, but rather in experience. During all stages of the research study, we made space and openings for practices and policies to emerge from the school

participants rather than allowing ourselves to be constrained by the indicators in the framework.

- Each of the theories that informed the framework reflects decades of study, development, and refinement among scholars. These ideas have been condensed to descriptions for the Indicator Framework to make it concise and usable.

# **A Proactive School: Community, Leadership, and Academic Rigor at Tallmadge Elementary**

Vivian Dalila Carlo and Alethea Frazier Raynor\*

## **Introduction**

The Benjamin Tallmadge Elementary School is housed at the foot of a hill in an old, red-brick building with a large outdoor playground.<sup>3</sup> On entering through the heavy blue doors on the lowest level of the school into a small alcove, one sees an old wooden plaque with gold letters that spell out the school mission and vision:

### **MISSION**

Children are the heart and soul of the [school name]. Our school family is committed to effective teaching and best practices to prepare all students to achieve academic excellence. The entire [school name] community works together to help our children become successful.

### **VISION**

The [school name] students will participate fully in society and continue as life-long learners.

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\*Vivian Dalila Carlo is an associate professor at the Lesley University Graduate School of Education, where her research is centered in multicultural education, linguistics and cultural diversity, and social justice. She is Puerto Rican, and both of her children attended the Boston Public Schools. Alethea Frazier Raynor is a director in District and Systems Transformation at the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University and has worked in three urban districts, at the state level, and as an adjunct university professor. She was the founder of a successful all-male academy for young men of color in Savannah, Georgia.

<sup>3</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all subjects, programs, schools, and locations in this study.

The lower level houses the library and the cafeteria, which one must cross to begin the climb to the third floor, where the main office is situated. On each level, handmade posters, collages, schoolwide projects, awards banners, and encouraging and inspirational posters such as “College Begins in Kindergarten” or “What you stand for is what you become” adorn walls. One wall-sized poster of a tree with “leaves” of sticky notes, each one a commitment to make the world a better place, encourages the reader to “Pay It Forward.” On an adjacent wall, a large collage of photographs of brown-faced children discovering and interacting with nature chronicles a trip to the Wakefield Estate. On another wall, a second-grade project displays the Pledge of Allegiance, surrounded by the words “Freedom,” “Equality,” “Liberty,” and “Justice for All” along with a picture of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the children’s work that embellishes the large poster, each child has finished or illustrated the sentence “We Dream of a World. . . .”

In the main office, the secretary/receptionist greets visitors, parents, and students, inviting them to take a seat or directing them to where they need to go. An open box of royal blue T-shirts emblazoned with the words “The Tallmadge School STRONG” (in reference to a motto, “Boston Strong,” sprung from the aftermath of the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings) leans against a wall in the corner of the reception area. These artifacts all preview and reflect key findings in this case study.

### ***School Context***

In SY2012, Tallmadge, a small school, served 150 students in grades K–5; 63.3% were Black, 33.3% were Latin@, 1.3% were White, and 0.7% were multiracial, Asian, or Native American. Tallmadge’s Black population significantly surpassed the BPS elementary school

average of 34.7%, while its Latin@ population was 11 percentage points less than the district average.

Tallmadge had 10 full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers and a student-teacher ratio of 15:1. Of these teachers, 30% were Black and 10% were Latin@, representing a slightly higher proportion of Black and Latin@ teachers than the district average. Twenty percent of Tallmadge's teachers were White males. All of Tallmadge's male administrators, paraprofessionals, and other support staff members were White.

During SY2012, a larger portion of Tallmadge's students were from low-income households, as measured by eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) (84.0%) than the BPS elementary school average (74.9%), and the Black and Latino male populations' low-income rates were also almost 10 percentage points higher than their respective district averages. Tallmadge had a significantly smaller English language learner (ELL) population (13.3%) than the BPS average (35.2%). Tallmadge Black males had a similar proportion of students with disabilities (20.9%) as both the overall school and district averages, but a lower rate than the BPS average for Black males (27.4%). Latino male students, however, had a higher rate of disabilities (33.3%) than both the school average and the average for Latino males in Boston (25.2%).

Tallmadge's Black and Latin@ attendance rates roughly matched the overall school's rate of 94.4% and the BPS average. Tallmadge also scored high on student and teacher climate surveys, surpassing BPS averages for elementary schools in students' perceptions of school safety, strong structure and routine, and friendly environment.

In terms of academic outcomes, Tallmadge had higher MCAS ELA and math proficiency rates for all students (52.7% and 43.2%, respectively) than the district average by almost 20 percentage points for ELA and 8 percentage points for math. The gap between Tallmadge's

average proficiency rates and their Black and Latino male rates was also smaller than the BPS average, and Latino males' ELA proficiency rate, at 54.5%, in fact surpassed the Tallmadge average. The school was chosen for case study because of its relative success with both Black and Latino males. Table 3 summarizes the quantitative data about students and teachers at Tallmadge compared to the district elementary grades as a whole.

Table 3

*Tallmadge Elementary School Student and Teacher Data*

		Tallmadge Elementary School			BPS		
		Total	Black Male	Latino Male	Total	Black Male	Latino Male
Student Demographics	Student Population (N)	150	43	24	25,748	4,680	5,871
	Student Population (%)		28.7	16.0		18.2	22.8
	ELL (%)	13.3	2.3	29.2	35.2	18.4	53.2
	FRL (%)	84	90.7	87.5	74.9	82.4	79.5
	Special Education (%)	20	20.9	33.3	19.2	27.4	25.2
Student Engagement and Outcomes	Attendance (%)	94.4	94.5	94	94.4	94.1	93.8
	MCAS ELA Proficiency (%)	52.7	45.8	54.5	34.1	22.1	24.9
	MCAS Math Proficiency (%)	43.2	41.7	36.4	35.8	22.6	31.1
Teacher Demographics	Teacher Population (N)	10	0	0	1,218	284	112
	Student/Teacher Ratio	15:1			21.1:1		

***Theoretical Framework***

Data for this case study were gathered through school and classroom observations and individual interviews and focus groups conducted with school personnel, parents, volunteers, school partners, and students, and a review of field notes, photographs, memos, and documents. A comparative analysis of qualitative data was performed utilizing theoretical and practical

scholarly work, with special attention to multicultural education from a sociopolitical perspective (Nieto & Bode, 2012), cultural relativity, critical race theory, social and emotional learning (Hoffman, 2009), and the education of Black and Latino males. The organizational framework for articulating findings was informed particularly by the trilevel typology for engagement (behavioral, cognitive, and relational) developed by Fergus et al. (2014) in their investigation of schools that are designed to address the academic and social needs of Black and Latino male students. An additional lens for data analysis was informed by the work of Tatum and her conclusions that “educators must be intentional in working to address the limitations created by racial isolation in . . . elementary and secondary public schools” (Tatum, 2007, p. 20). Tatum encourages attention to her ABCs—“A, affirming identity; B, building community; and C, cultivating leadership” (Tatum, 2007, p. 21)—for creating culturally “inclusive learning environments . . . that acknowledge the continuing significance of race and racial identity in ways that can empower and motivate students to transcend the legacy of racism in our society” (Tatum, 2007, p. 21). Her ABCs provided a lens through which Tallmadge Elementary’s policies and practices could be analyzed for cultural competence and efficacy.

## **Themes**

Three main themes, and several subthemes, emerged that may explain the academic success of Black and Latino male students at the Tallmadge:

- Building a Positive School Climate and Culture to create a safe, supportive, caring, and joyful learning community that affirms the identity of students, especially Black and African American students, and fosters the academic achievement of all students.

- Cultivating and Distributing Leadership to all members of the community to share in the responsibility to create and maintain an academic environment within which all students can learn and achieve.
- Promoting Academic Rigor in Curriculum and Instruction by holding high expectations for students, supporting social-emotional learning, and encouraging ongoing professional development for teachers and staff members.

### ***Building a Positive School Climate and Culture***

Some educators believe it is important to distinguish between climate and culture in order to develop effective and distinct interventions for significant problems that arise in schools (Gruenert, 2008). At the Tallmadge School, both the climate and culture have been positively and proactively developed under the leadership of the dynamic principal, but with the ongoing support and participation of all the members of the Tallmadge community. At Tallmadge, school climate and culture, which come up frequently in data codes, are interrelated and can be defined as the “quality and character of school life. It may be based on patterns of student, parent, and school personnel experiences within the school and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures” (NYSED, 2013). A positive school climate reflects visionary leadership, dedicated and caring teachers, collaborative parents, and committed community partnerships engaged together to challenge students within a safe, supportive, joyful, democratic, emotionally intelligent, and culturally competent environment (National School Climate Center, 2014; NYSED, 2013; Peterson & Deal, 1998), all of which are present at the Tallmadge School. An examination of the Tallmadge School climate and culture reveals the importance of stable routines, a caring and committed teaching staff, engaged parents and community members, and an affirmation of cultural identity, most notably

the rich African heritage found in the majority of students, their families, and the surrounding community.

*Stabilizing and respectful routines*

The day officially gets underway with morning announcements at 8:30 a.m. On this day, 16 second-grade students gather in the audio room across from the main office. The principal, Ms. Johnson, welcomes the school community in both English and Spanish, and asks the second-grade students to lead the school in the Pledge of Allegiance and then the Tallmadge school pledge, followed by a moment of silence. She continues with birthdays and information about the day's visitors. Ms. Johnson gives a stirring message to the school community that includes a reminder of how important it is to pay it forward, which is followed by the second graders singing the "Pay It Forward" song. Finally, the gym teacher leads the school in a series of calisthenics.

In contrast to the respectful, inclusive routine of the morning announcement ritual, in her first year (SY1999), the principal found herself in a hostile, chaotic, uninviting, and educationally unproductive school. According to her:

Students did not have the skills they needed to be successful. . . . We found that the young men seemed to be hostile. There wasn't a lot of confidence in their work. And we knew that we had to build them up.

Since that time, under the guidance and leadership of the principal, the Tallmadge has become a welcoming, joyful, safe environment where students thrive, and where teachers enjoy respect, collegiality, and appreciation. When asked to address how the climate and culture of the school contributes to the academic success of Black and Latino male students, Ms. Johnson explains:

We've established a culture of caring . . . , where we are a family school . . . a community school. . . . It has a lot to do with how you treat people. . . . People have to know that you care and [need] to know . . . that you can talk to them. . . . I take time to listen and I try to be fair and honest and have a way of saying what needs to be said.

### *Building a caring community*

According to Pang (2005), “Conditions of caring, community and culture in classrooms produce higher levels of achievement that lead to greater social efficacy” (p. 217). Pang emphasizes the importance of relationship building among the various populations of the school as integral to the accomplishment of its mission and vision. As the Tallmadge teachers pointed out, it starts with setting guidelines for students, parents, and families when they enroll in the school. The educators at the school emphasize being prepared, being on time, and having respectful behavior, and they work with students and parents to affirm those values as part of the culture of the school. As Ms. Johnson explained:

Students always know when they can get away with something, so we have schoolwide rules. We . . . develop positive teacher/student relationships because we want them all to feel cared about and valued. . . . After they've been at the Tallmadge School for a very long time [we call them] “Tallmadge-'erized,” because they know the expectations here. . . . They know that we have homework every night. They know . . . that we work together . . . as a family. And I think that's critical.

When asked to describe some of the factors that have contributed to the sense of community in the school, the principal states:

Our community partners . . . have their own . . . connection to the school. We have the Tallmadge School Buddies, . . . [The program] was started to build up buddy pairs [for] students that maybe didn't have fathers. We have home involvement types of activities . . . that students do at home with their parents or guardians. . . . We have family homework . . . class meetings . . . reading programs . . ., and whatever we do, parents are always engaged.

### *African-centered environment*

A subtheme that affects the positive school climate and culture, demonstrates caring, and supports a degree of cultural relevance necessary for cognitive engagement and academic achievement (Fergus et al., 2014) is the spirit of Afrocentrism in the school, resulting in an environment in which Black children are experiencing affirmation of their identities and a sense of pride in being Black. In discussing African-centered education, Pollard and Ajirotutu (2000) describe the common themes conveyed as embracing communal and familial notions that welcome students to “feel at home in the school” (p. ix), where teachers and principals are perceived to be extensions of parents and family, and where all community members are welcome and accepted as participatory. Pollard and Ajirotutu (2000) explain, “This model is designed to counter the traditional Euro-centric educational model that has resulted in the alienation of generations of African American students” (p. ix). Although African-centered education is not articulated as intentional by the principal, the environment at the Tallmadge reflects Pollard and Ajirotutu’s (2000) description.

Across from the doorway of the principal’s office is a large photograph of Maya Angelou, which, in essence, introduces the African-centered environment that informs the culture of the school. The walls of the principal’s office are covered with framed prints of Black children and

adults in a variety of settings, including a photo of President Obama’s family. Desktops and bookshelves are decorated with African-centered artifacts. Perched on the top of three bookcases are children’s books, most with African-centered images or themes, for example, *Amazing Grace* and *Mufaro’s Beautiful Daughters*. Draped on a chair is a beautiful formal white dashiki, resplendently embroidered with gold thread, a gift to the principal from a family whose children are enrolled at the Tallmadge. The spirit of African-centered education has been a part of the school for as long as the principal has been there. As respondents in a focus group of volunteers describe:

In earlier years, there were full assemblies where you would have teachers and students participating in somewhat of a Black African cultural event. . . . Our Somalian family came up in their cultural attire, and they presented cultural attire to [the principal]. . . . And there was tremendous celebration here when we had our wonderful governor and president. . . . The children understood the seriousness of it and the pride part. . . . It goes along with pride in Black leadership in the state and in the country.

Pride in being Black is encouraged by teachers in classrooms, where children hear about the contributions of Black and African American people in a variety of content areas. Mr. Alvarez, the science instructor, has requested that the upcoming Black History month be focused specifically on Black scientists. In Ms. Green’s first-grade class, she lifts up George Washington Carver, shares Shaq (Shaquille O’Neal) stories, reads about the lives of Wilma Rudolf and Satchel Paige, discusses the heroism of Ruby Bridges, and honors the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. Ms. Green explains that she believes it is important for her children to see “positive images of people who look like them.”

Because Ms. Johnson believes that “it’s important to help students be proud of their skin color, so that students, when they draw themselves, can make pictures that look like them,” it is not surprising to observe in a K1 classroom a child affirmed for using brown to draw his face in a self-portrait, or to hear discussions in a K2 classroom about shades of skin color all being beautiful.

*Creating a positive reputation for learning*

Ms. Johnson and her staff engage with families and community partners in the development of a positive school reputation and a culture that honors effective teaching and learning, although Ms. Johnson reports that her tenure at the Tallmadge has had its fair share of instructional challenges:

[The Tallmadge is now] academically sound . . . parents choose our school because of that. They know that students are getting a good education. We were not always that way . . . we were never on the list of being a chosen school. And now we have a waiting list in every class.

Teachers at the school confirm the positive reputation of the school and discuss the impact that this status has on them both as individual teachers striving to meet a certain standard of excellence in their classrooms and as staff members in their collective desire to meet and exceed high standards of excellence for the school. One teacher described the source of her commitment:

The school has a . . . very positive reputation. So coming in, you know you need to live up to what's . . . going on in the school. So, there is a lot of pressure in a good way that, okay . . . they do a great job here. This school is where kids want to be. I need to meet that.

Furthermore, in discussing the correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement, Kunjufu (2013) points to “school culture [as] the glue and the conduit through which [African American] boys will fail or succeed” (p. viii). At the center of the Tallmadge’s successful framework is an explicit focus on the instructional core and the approach to schooling that is shared by Ms. Johnson, the teachers, the families, and all adults who nurture and support students at the school. In Ms. Johnson’s words:

We don't let anyone fail. We hope that when people become a part of us they see what our expectation is, and that setting high expectations is just paramount. And they see why our school is different, and how far . . . we've come!

This philosophy serves as a strong foundation for the actions that individuals take, the language they use, and the rituals they have embedded in the fabric of the school.

Although the building itself is old and could use improvements, and space for one-on-one tutoring or conferences is limited, the positivity of the climate mitigates seeming deficiencies. As one teacher said about the culture and climate of the school:

I love coming here. I love being in this building. It’s a nice, calm place to be that feels like—you know, it feels like academics are happening all the time, and learning is happening, and community is happening.

### ***Cultivating and Distributing Leadership***

The second major theme that emerged as highly significant in the academic achievement of Black and Latino male students at the Tallmadge is the emphasis placed on the cultivation and distribution of leadership. Effective leadership has been widely acknowledged as an essential component of creating and sustaining effective schools and is a significant factor in why some schools are able to raise student achievement while other schools are not. The Wallace

Foundation research findings confirm: “There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 3).

At the Tallmadge, leadership begins with the principal, who understood when she was first assigned to the school that she would have to harness support from every facet of the school community if she was going to transform the school to be successful. In 1999, the school represented the deficit end of the academic continuum, with achievement scores among the lowest in the district. Today, student achievement at the Tallmadge ranks among the highest in the BPS, and the school has surpassed most other elementary schools in the district in fourth-grade English language arts (ELA) proficiency. Moreover, it has sustained a vision and mission that is fortified by a principal who believes that success at Tallmadge does not happen through the efforts of one committed leader, but by the collective and committed efforts of an entire community of leaders.

Principal Johnson’s personal commitment to hold herself to a high standard of leadership is matched by her expectation that everyone who has contact with children in the building—whether they are teachers, counselors, cafeteria staff, secretaries, librarians, custodians, bus monitors, parents, tutors, or other volunteers—has the potential to meet those high standards and can be recruited to support the academic, social, emotional, and physical development of Tallmadge students. Her personal philosophy becomes evident in how she describes the adults who are working in the building:

The leader certainly makes a difference, but unless everyone takes ownership to that vision and knows what it looks like and knows what it means, it won't work. So,

everyone is responsible. Everyone who is a part of the Tallmadge School family has a job to do and they're responsible for making sure that our vision becomes a reality.

In order to achieve the Tallmadge School vision, Principal Johnson models and supports “distributed leadership” throughout the school in both formal and informal ways. In interviews and focus groups, teachers often talked about the leadership style and demeanor of the principal and how her enacted practice of formal and informal co-leadership (Spillane, as cited in Harris, 2012) contributes to an overall ecology of leaders growing leaders throughout the school. As one teacher explained:

Ms. Johnson has an infectious personality that just exudes positivity all day long. Like when the normal person would take a break from being positive, she's still at 110 percent. And it helps everyone else to . . . keep that momentum going. And the kids see it, and the kids feel it. . . . And, you know when it feels really good, when we can do what we've set out to do, and when our kids are successful . . . [then] let's keep doing it and keep feeling good about it.

Leithwood and Mascall (2008) contend that distributed leadership practice points to multiple sources of influence and agency that dispel the notion of one great leader, yet at the same time substantiate the critical role of the principal. As they state:

Evidence shows that effective principals orchestrate the structural and cultural conditions in which distributed leadership is more or less likely. They play a key role in leadership distribution and are a critical component in building leadership capacity throughout the school. (p. 529)

Embracing a distributed leadership framework inspires adults and students at the Tallmadge to work together in support of the school's core mission (Spillane & Coldren, as cited

in Harris, 2012). This practice has had an overall impact on the organizational development of the school. The following sections describe how students, teachers, community volunteers, and parents contribute to the leadership capacity observed throughout the school.

### *Student leadership*

Principal Johnson has engaged a social and emotional learning (SEL) program in order to establish a culture of leadership at the school, beginning with the cultivation of leadership in students. As she explains:

We're trying to help [students] to become leaders. So, we have the Leader-In-Me Program. . . . And this helps us to build character and self-esteem for our students to do their best, and they know that we expect them to be leaders. We're showing them how to become leaders. And we hope that in our school that you feel it, that they're becoming proactive, that they synergize, that they think win/win.

When asked about the leadership roles that students have at the school, one student described a variety of them:

We have jobs . . . like teacher's assistant leaders [or] to welcome . . . visitors. . . . There are substitute leaders, announcement leaders, supply leaders. . . . I've been a teacher's assistant; I've been an open circle leader; a supply leader; and I've been a communications leader.

By understanding that leadership comes from every facet of the community, Principal Johnson and the staff members are cultivating leadership in Tallmadge students and preparing them to be “active participants in a democracy” (Tatum, 2007, p. 22).

### *Teacher leadership*

The significance of distributed leadership at the Tallmadge School is reflected in the thoughts and comments of teachers. Teachers acknowledge that Ms. Johnson has provided many opportunities for them to assume leadership, either independently or with others, and they feel supported by a committed principal.

Instructional leadership, which is focused primarily on classroom practice, is critical in moving a school toward rigorous curriculum and instruction, particularly to advance high-quality education for boys of color (COSEBOC, 2014; Fergus & Noguera, 2010). Leadership of this kind is transformational because it requires a more expanded role for both principal and staff members that “draws attention to a broader array of school and classroom conditions that may need to be changed if learning is to improve” (Leithwood et al., 2004, p. 6). When leadership is transformational, it embodies the ability to generate a collective vision as well as collective action to enhance the work of individuals in terms of their practice; this sense of communal responsibility is instrumental in schools that are successfully educating boys of color (Fergus & Noguera, 2010).

Transforming a school requires the capacity of all members of the school to engage in and sustain a process of collective problem solving (Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1994). As a staff, teachers at the Tallmadge discuss the idea of collective identity, and emphasize the importance they place on being part of a high-performing team. They describe their actions as being mutually supportive and reinforcing in terms of the overall beliefs and value system they have embraced so fervently. As one teacher described:

There's really an understanding . . . that . . . no one gets left behind, because anyone left behind reflects poorly on everyone else. . . . It's not only for the good of that kid, but it's

also for the good of the group and the school that everyone is an important piece of what we're trying to do here . . . so you can't let anyone slip through the cracks.

Because the mission and the message is clear throughout the school that failure is not an option, the principal is diligent about hiring teachers who can demonstrate a professional and personal commitment to teaching and learning above all else. Teachers define the staff's collective responsibility to hold their expectations high and to foster ongoing professional development by describing how the high standards require every teacher to work hard on a team to ensure that students are "ready for the next teacher."

Fergus et al. (2014) found in their work that principals of schools designed to meet the academic and social needs of Black and Latino male students cited ongoing professional development as necessary for teachers to be effective with those populations. Several Tallmadge teachers mentioned using data, both quantitative and qualitative, as a focal point around which they come together to examine, discuss, and understand individual student or grade-level issues, noting that the achievement of Black and Latino male students has been discussed before:

And it really makes a difference when we can talk to each other . . . "Hey, how is so and so doing? [He] had that problem last year." . . . So, in our grade level meetings, our [ongoing professional development], we're really able to talk about some things. . . .

We've actually looked at the subgroups of African American and Latino students, boys in particular, and said, "What's happening here?"

Principal Johnson sets an expectation of ongoing professional development for herself as well as the teachers. Each summer, Ms. Johnson identifies and purchases a book on effective teaching practice that she passes out to the faculty on the last day of school "for their summer reading." Upon teachers' return to school in September, "book-study" meetings are scheduled for

the faculty and the principal to discuss the topics and recommended practices, their applicability for the school's curriculum and instruction, and how teachers can support each other to implement new strategies and initiatives.

### *Community leadership*

Another way in which distributed leadership has enhanced teaching and learning at the Tallmadge has been through the use of community volunteers. There is a stream of volunteers that moves throughout the building daily to provide services to students and staff members in literacy, numeracy, music, dance, fitness, mentoring, and personal development and in other areas aligned with the school's mission. A few years ago, one volunteer was instrumental in creating and establishing the library on the first level, conducting fundraising and developing library programs. One literacy volunteer shared that, according to the librarian, "The youngsters in the school who are most active in the library volunteering and borrowing books are boys."

Volunteerism is often hard to come by in urban schools and even harder to maintain over time, yet volunteers at this school are committed to coming back year after year. Some volunteers have been coming to the Tallmadge School for over 10 years. During one focus group, one volunteer described her service at the Tallmadge as a "gift" and considers herself as having "great luck" in being able to return year after year. She offered these thoughts on how the principal's distributed leadership affects the overall organization of the school and empowers her to be more effective in her role:

One of [Ms. Johnson's] skills is making excellent use of the volunteer help. . . . There is an immediate action for any problem that comes up. Everyone feels backed by their superiors or by their team or whatever. I found that I could go in and ask quick questions of people . . . to make some things I knew more practical . . . so I could be more effective.

### *Parent leadership*

Parents are expected to work with staff members to facilitate their child's education, but are also asked to commit two hours every year to help the school. Most parents meet their goal for the Two-Hour Power Campaign by attending the first Open House, but parents volunteer in a variety of capacities at the Tallmadge, and, regardless of role, are referred to as leaders by Ms. Johnson. There are parents who come in every day to be "lunch leaders," parents who assist in the before-school or afterschool activities, and parents who help plan and create school-sponsored events like International Day and Step-Up Day. Parents are required to ensure that students come to school wearing uniforms, an important aspect of leadership in the principal's perspective, because, as she explains, "By wearing uniforms, students are dressing for success."

When asked, most parents interviewed agreed that what inspires them to get involved is "opportunity . . . because the principal, she gets you involved. And if you don't mind being involved, you're there." Another parent describes what Spillane (2006) refers to as "reciprocal interdependencies that shape leadership practice" (p. 58) when she sums up parent participation and leadership at the school this way:

The principal . . . is key . . . , [but there have] to be people that are willing to follow. And we are, as you see. I have plenty of things to do this morning, but because she asked, I'm here. So, that usually is what happens, because she's so awesome; and she'll do the same for you and for your child. . . . And you need to have people like us to follow up and help that leadership.

The cultivation of leadership through distributive leadership is apparent on any given day at the Tallmadge, and at the center of this activity is a principal who never seems to lose sight of the important role she plays in channeling the leadership energy and capacity she has amassed.

### *Promoting Academic Rigor in Curriculum and Instruction*

In her critique of high-stakes tests for judging student achievement, Tatum (2007) states, “The key to . . . academic success in school is not inborn ability, but rather effective effort produced in the context of high expectations” (p. 42). The third major theme that emerged in this study and that contributes to the academic achievement of Black and Latino male students at the Tallmadge is the emphasis on academic rigor, expressed primarily through high expectations and the valuing of hard work, but also supported by curriculum and instruction “designed to create a culture of academic seriousness at the school” (Fergus et al., 2014, p. 209) while meeting individual student’s needs.

#### *High expectations and hard work*

According to Fergus et al. (2014), an example of relational engagement is evident in successful schools when all the members of the school community—that is, teachers, parents, and other students—“hold academic excellence and high expectations as normative” (p. 132). Likewise, Nieto and Bode (2012) stress the importance of affirming the identity of each student as being academically capable, especially students of color and students of lower socioeconomic circumstances, who, according to Sleeter (as cited in Nieto & Bode, 2012), “can achieve when the teachers and the school believe they can and take responsibility to make it happen” (p. 79).

As Principal Johnson explains:

Students have to come to school and be good students. . . . Parents have a responsibility . . . to make sure that [students are] on time and that they do their homework. . . . Teachers take responsibility for their classrooms . . . and I, as the administrator, make [teachers] accountable for what they should be teaching.

Ms. Johnson sees a reciprocal relationship among, and a direct line that links, high expectations and respect with the hard work necessary for achievement. In Ms. Johnson's words, "Having high expectations is my number one priority." She adds, "It's critical to remember that when we treat students with respect, they tend to respect as well. . . . The more willing . . . they are to please, the harder they want to work."

High expectations for learning and high support are effective when students and teachers establish positive relationships. As noted psychiatrist and child development expert James Comer states, "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship" (as cited in Edwards & Edick, 2013) p. 1), and having a strong, caring, and accountable relationship is especially important in successfully educating Black and Latino males (Noguera, 2003). Tallmadge students respond to both the high expectations and high support they receive, according to this teacher:

There is no fussing about staying up[stairs] if you need extra help or you didn't get that. . . [Students will] ask, "I didn't get that. Can I come back at lunch?" So, instead of it being a battle, they just get it. They know. I need to get this skill. I need to do extra work on this, and they want to come up [and work].

All parents interviewed for this study articulated appreciation of the values of high expectations and hard work that are the norm at Tallmadge, and of how these norms have benefited their sons, but they also acknowledged that parents and teachers must work together to ensure academic success. One Latino father shared the experiences of his two sons, one a student with special needs who excelled at and graduated from the Tallmadge despite learning challenges, and a current student, who transferred into the Tallmadge after beginning at another school. The father explained that he moved his son to the Tallmadge because he wanted his son

to be exposed to an academically rigorous educational experience, which included homework expectations.

Understanding that their task as educators is to provide high expectations from a strengths-based approach focused on resilience (J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011), Tallmadge teachers address the needs of their students in ways that take into account the challenges their students face without defaulting to an image of them as deficient based on their family situation or context. One teacher's comments illuminate this perspective:

We'll do whatever we can to help you, but you're still going to be accountable for getting your homework done. . . . We all have a story to tell, our lives, our upbringing, what we did or didn't have. But you shouldn't use that to define who you are as a person.

Nonetheless, while the teachers as a whole support a “no excuses” policy as an organization, they do recognize that students have different needs and challenges, and so high expectations are met with high support for students—when and how they need it—to assist them in moving forward to achieve their goals. As one teacher suggested:

Part of why the school is successful is because each student is treated as an individual. And we look at what they bring to the table . . . where they are when we get them . . . and where we need to bring them. And the only question is, what tools . . . do we have to put in place to get them where they need to be?

The “tools” the teachers at the Tallmadge use to encourage academic achievement for Black and Latino male students are the instructional practices and curricular approaches described in the next sections.

### *Curriculum and instruction*

The approach to curriculum and instruction implemented by the administration and the teachers at the Tallmadge includes an array of proven strategies that have been shown to enhance the academic achievement of Black and Latino male students (Fergus et al., 2014), such as differentiated instruction; social-emotional learning (SEL); culturally relevant curriculum and instruction; and a gender-relevant extracurricular activity, the Boys Group. The school has also sporadically attempted to infuse cultural relevance into teaching and learning, and conducted a brief foray into single-gender classes.

**Differentiated instruction.** Differentiated instruction emerged as a significant code in the analysis of data, with most teachers recounting individualizing curriculum and pedagogy to meet the academic needs of students. One teacher recalled a teaching experience where she had to adjust her pedagogy to the needs of one child:

That was real learning for me to realize that just because I'm comfortable with [a learning style] . . . , it doesn't mean that's always the best way to teach all of the students. . . . Since then I'm trying to be very sensitive. Some children learn better by doing it [in a] different way and some children not.

One parent of a Black male student who has benefited from differentiated instruction at the Tallmadge discussed her concern that teachers in other schools might not understand her son's behavior, which could limit his chances for academic success:

My son is active—he can flip four times in a row. He is a karate expert, does basketball. . . . But I see where getting him to read a book and sit, I have to be firm, and getting him to finish his homework, I have to be double firm. I have to give him multiple directions before he gets it. That worries me. . . . So, what happens to my

son who needs that and may not get that and may be interpreted as a child that doesn't want to do it and he is not that kid? He is an awesome, excellent, motivated child, but in that area needs that pull; and so I worry [when he leaves the Tallmadge].

**Social-emotional learning.** A subtheme that appears to contribute to both academic achievement and the building of community is the emphasis placed on social-emotional learning (SEL), or the development of the ability to

understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. . . . SEL programming is based on the understanding that the best learning emerges in the context of supportive relationships that make learning challenging, engaging and meaningful. (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning [CASEL], 2014)

According to Hoffman (2009), interest in and the implementation of SEL programs has steadily increased since its introduction into educational settings in the 1990s. Due to a growing awareness of the importance of emotional intelligence (Hoffman, 2009) and the efforts of educators and policy makers to ameliorate risks associated with the social, psychological, economic, and cultural issues that affect student learning and academic achievement, more schools are implementing SEL programs and practices, and some school systems are adding SEL standards for K–12 students to certification requirements (Hoffman, 2009).

The SEL programs implemented at the Tallmadge include the following:

- *Open Circle*, designed “to work with school communities to help children become ethical people, contributing citizens and successful learners” (Open Circle, 2014).
- *Urban Improv*, “an interactive program for young people that uses improvisational theater workshops to teach violence prevention, conflict resolution, and decision-making” (Urban Improv, 2014).
- *The Leader in Me* engenders responsibility and creativity, and teaches students to set and meet goals, to develop cultural competence, and to resolve conflicts and solve problems (The Leader in Me, 2014).

All of the teachers at the Tallmadge support these SEL initiatives. In the words of two teachers, these programs help students to develop the affective life skills needed for future learning:

I believe that it’s really important to give students the tools to discuss emotions and to handle problems without resorting to physicality. I’m very hopeful that taking the time to provide [students] with those strategies will lead to better decision making in the future.

I’ve worked in schools where you see the one kid that’s always in the hallway, that’s always in trouble. . . . That’s education that’s not happening. . . . And you just don’t see that here. . . . We have behavior problems like everywhere. But those kids . . . get the attention they need. They get the push. They get the personal connections. They get the mentors.

The principal explains how discipline strategies that consider SEL principles and relationship building can lead to greater academic success:

We try to incorporate the approach to discipline and classroom management based on the recognition for children to develop their social skills and moral understanding in such a way that they learn academic skills and concepts. . . . We want students to be inspired by their greatness . . . but when students are put into a situation of challenge because someone called them a name or hit them, or talked about their Mama . . . , our challenge is to get them . . . to ask the right questions.

At the Tallmudge, the SEL programs “promote a schoolwide systemic approach that encourages fundamental social and emotional skills [development]” (Hoffman, 2009, p. 535), thereby improving the quality of the educational experience for all students, including Black and Latino males.

**Culturally relevant curriculum and instruction.** Fergus et al. (2014) define culturally relevant instruction “as the use of learning materials and instructional strategies that are directly connected to the heritage and lived experience of students” (p. 66). Ladson-Billings (as cited in Milner, 2012), who first coined the term in 1992, envisioned the concept of culturally relevant pedagogy as the impetus for students to critically consider the social, political, and historical realities of American education and how these realities contribute to negative self-perceptions and unequal academic outcomes. Nieto and Bode (2012) explore culturally relevant practices within a concept of care, “loving students in the most profound ways: through high expectations, great support, and rigorous demands” (p. 256). As described throughout the literature, the

purpose of culturally relevant curriculum and instruction is to empower students to reject dominant ideologies in order to discover the linkages between their cultural identities and high academic achievement, a precept of social justice and an equitable education (Fergus et al., 2014; Milner, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Questions regarding cultural relevance in curriculum and instruction were posed to every Tallmadge subject interviewed for this study. Data reveals that the meaning of culturally relevant teaching within notions of care and social justice can be found at the Tallmadge in the mission and vision of the school, in the goals and beliefs of the principal, in the African-centered environment, and in the practices of the teachers and literacy volunteers—although to varying degrees, given staff members’ personal definitions and understanding of what culturally relevant curriculum and instruction are. When first asked, Ms. Johnson stated that the curriculum and instruction at the Tallmadge are *not* culturally relevant, although she went on to say:

And then the question is, what does that mean? What does it look like? I grew up with main characters not looking like me. But I find that it's important for the teacher to make the curriculum—the text, the scenario, the background knowledge—culturally relevant for that child, for that individual, for that population.

When asked if she thought Tallmadge students were having the same experience of not being able to see themselves in their curriculum, Ms. Johnson again revealed why cultural relevance is a personal commitment to her even though she leaves its inclusion up to teachers:

[Students] have more of a possibility of seeing themselves. . . . I didn't learn anything about Black history growing up. . . . But even when I was a teacher, I made sure that I incorporated various [images] that represent different races, different cultures so that students could identify with [the curriculum]. . . . So, I think that's important.

The African-centered environment helps to foster cultural relevance in the school climate and in the practices of some teachers, as evidenced in the content integration observed in Ms. Green's K2 class, in the commitment to explore Black scientists in Mr. Alvarez's science lab, and in the caring support offered to a young student in Ms. Steven's K1 class. But contradictions abound, most probably because there is no one formal definition of cultural relevance at the Tallmadge. For instance, a literacy volunteer described herself as "colorless" in how she sees her students, but went on to say that she chooses Ezra Jack Keats books for her young readers so that they can have characters with whom to identify.

For some teachers who have taken specific courses that address social justice and/or culturally relevant pedagogy, the focus can be stronger, eliciting direct results in what students learn. When asked to define culturally relevant pedagogy, Ms. Heath, the third-grade teacher replied,

I would say that it's education that considers the perspective of every student from all backgrounds and doesn't rely solely on materials produced by the dominant culture or focusing on the dominant culture.

Ms. Heath reported that she had explored social justice issues in education in her graduate studies, and when asked if she brings any of that knowledge into how she teaches the male students in her class, she answered:

One thing that I do is, when you ask a third-grade boy what [he wants] to be when [he grows] up in this community, the answer is generally "football player," and I don't accept that answer. . . . I'm very straight with my boys about, "Okay, but what's your backup plan . . .?" I try to direct my boys to have goals other than athletic [goals], goals that are based on their intellect and their education.

Echoes of this lesson can be heard in the response of a fifth-grade Latino male student when he was asked what he liked most about school:

Just learning, because I want to get a good education. I want to be a basketball player, but I also have a backup plan, because if I'm not going to be a professional basketball player, I want to be a lawyer or a doctor, something in that kind of field. That's what I want to do, and I want an education to fall back on.

Most parents interviewed agreed that their sons are benefitting from the culturally relevant atmosphere at the Tallmadge, and one parent was able to articulate how the school has prepared her children to interact within environments where no one looks like them. She acknowledged that Tallmadge has many African American administrators and educators, whose encouragement and cultural competence has prepared her children for predominantly White environments because of their increased self-knowledge and confidence.

**Single-gender classes.** In several instances, respondents spoke about differentiating instruction to address students' academic needs based on gender, race, or both. Ms. Johnson became interested in differentiated instruction based on gender when she began her doctoral studies a few years ago:

I was [studying] the difference between [male and female learners]—and the expectations of girls [and boys] in science and how that impacted their learning. So, it took us the whole year to talk to parents and talk to students and [to] find out if boys were not learning, especially Black boys . . . not learning as fast as they should or as quickly as they should and for what reason.

Based on the principal's research, Tallmadge teachers agreed to pilot single-sex classes for fifth-grade girls and boys, an effort that benefited the students as learners and informed the

pedagogy of the teachers. Teaching the all-male fifth-grade class was a learning experience for Ms. Green:

I learned a real hard lesson. As a woman, I'm a multitasker. So, when I give assignments, I give two, three, four, five things to do at one time, because I know different people finish at different times. But I did that in the boys' class, and I said, okay, do this; after you finish that, do this, do this, do this, do that. Then they started acting up. I said, "What's up? I gave you all so much to do. Why are you behaving like that?" They said, "Ms. Green, give us one thing at a time to do. We'll do that. Then after we finish that, then give us the next thing. Otherwise, on the third thing you lost us."

Despite articulated success, the single-gender classrooms were discontinued prior to our case study data collection, although they are reported here specifically because they were in operation during the time (SY2009–SY2012) ascribed for the Phase I quantitative study, which identified this school for its promising practices.

**Gender-relevant extracurricular activity—The Boys Group.** According to Mr. Davis, a member of a community partner organization that has had a longstanding presence in the school, when Ms. Johnson began in 1999, she could see that the Black male students in the school were “feeding off of each other’s bad behaviors.” She wanted role models for the male students who could stress the importance of education while providing positive images for the youngsters to emulate in order “to help make the boys productive members of society.” Ms. Johnson invited members of the organization into the Tallmadge to be a resource to the teachers and the principal. The goal was to reach out to young Black males. Mr. Davis notes, “We didn’t

try to be exclusive, but that's how it worked out. Later we had some Latinos, or sometimes White boys, but our focus was always Black males." He recounts:

I would speak about things that were culturally relevant to the boys, encourage them to consider Black colleges. We took them to hear the Morehouse Glee Club and to a ball game. We bought the boys gold ties, and Governor Patrick met with us and we took pictures. We initiated an essay-writing contest on the five characteristics of good democratic behavior.

Mr. Davis believes that boys "need to understand competitiveness, or they will get lost. They need anything that can reinforce the importance of hard work and the idea that they can do something if they try."

Ms. Green, who formerly taught one of the all-male classes, described lessons learned from teaching all boys that she has carried forward into her coed classroom today:

As female teachers, we're trying to put [boys] in our round hole, when they're really square. . . . Their energy level, their thinking, everything is just totally different. . . . As far as behavior . . ., you have to understand their energy level. . . . It takes a lot to be able to keep them engaged.

Mr. Davis also emphasized that providing the young men with examples of success among African American men counters the internalization of stereotypes that dehumanize them (King & Wilson, 1994) and, as Mr. Davis articulates: "helps them to understand that we were not always slaves. We were kings." As he pointed out, if the boys are consciously socialized to embrace their Afro humanity "they can go back to that [understanding]."

### *A Challenge to Affirm the School's Growing Latin@ Presence*

Because of the Tallmadge School's history as predominantly African American, and the teachers' irregular rather than intentional approach to cultural relevance, some students' identities are affirmed while others' may not be. According to Fergus (2012), "The racial and ethnic identification process . . . influences how racial/ethnic minority children make sense of their school experience and engagement" (p. 220). Likewise, Nieto and Bode (2012) demonstrate through a series of case studies that there is a strong link between teachers' positive affirmation of students' (racial/ethnic/cultural) identities and academic success.

As of 2009, the Latin@/Hispanic population in the United States was listed as 48.4 million, making it the largest and fastest-growing minority group in the country (Nieto & Bode, 2012). According to the American Community Survey (Fergus, 2012), of the population, 54.3% identify as White Hispanic, 40% identify as "other race," while only 1.5% self-identify as Black Hispanic, an interesting phenomenon, given that the experience of Blackness exists throughout Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (Jiménez Román & Flores, 2010).

At the Tallmadge, dark- and medium dark-skinned students of families of Latin@ descent may be able to experience pride in their Blackness, however the lack of attention to the affirmation of the complexity of Latin@ ethnicity at the Tallmadge may be contributing to an experience of Latin@ invisibility. Tatum (2007) asks, "Is there a relationship between invisibility in the curriculum and the underachievement of Black and Latin@ students?" (p. 29). Although there is a rich demonstration of Afrocentrism within the school in displays, art, and artifacts, and an acknowledgment of the contributions of people of African heritage in content areas, as mentioned in the findings, observations, and data gathered for this study, there were no Latin@ cultural displays or artifacts nor mention of the contributions of any important Latin@

figures in the curriculum. Indeed, the only mention of a Latin@ event was in regard to "Cinco de Mayo," a traditional Mexican holiday, in a school without any Mexican children. Several examples of the lack of awareness of the presence of Latin@s at the Tallmadge reinforce this as an area of improvement for the school. During a focus group, while teachers acknowledged the presence (though limited) of Latino males in their classrooms, they did not seem to be aware that 35% of the student population was Latin@. Yet two hours later, a teacher interviewed reported:

I'm realizing today that we have more Latinos than I thought. After we met with you, I went to my first class . . . and I started looking around the room. I was like, oh, wow . . . wait a minute, there's a lot more Latinos in this classroom than I had realized.

In interviews, several teachers shared that they do not reference Latin@ historical figures in their curriculum like they do for Black historical figures, because, as one teacher said, "It's not the dominant group in my classroom." When asked what she did to represent Latin@s culturally in her class, one teacher said she shows the children where they come from on a map. At times Latin@ invisibility is reinforced because of the microaggressions dark-skinned Latin@s encounter, as evident in the words of one Latin@ parent when asked about his child's cultural identity being affirmed in the school:

I tell him . . . you have to . . . identify with the person who is asking you. If they don't look like you and . . . they ask you what you are . . . just tell them you're Black and move on. . . . But if you know the person looks like you, kind of your complexion, and they look at you and say, where are you from? then you can say, I'm Puerto Rican and Honduran.

The African-centered environment at the Tallmadge affirms Black and African American students, who are encouraged to see themselves within a positive and fulfilling self-image. However, because of the convergence of race and ethnicity within notions of Latin@ identity, educators need to consider the historical and social experiences as well as the intersectionality of ethnicity and race (Fergus, 2012; N. Lopez, 2012) if the affirmation of Latin@ identities as an imperative for academic success is to take place.

## **Conclusion**

Clearly the Benjamin Tallmadge Elementary School has much to offer its students in terms of a strong school culture and rigorous curriculum and instruction, all made possible by committed and distributed leadership among all of the adults in the building. The principal and school staff members have intentionally incorporated evidence-based practices of effective schools, such as creating a caring and positive school culture, distributing leadership among all stakeholders, combining high expectations with holistic support for students, and implementing a rigorous curriculum. As a result, the Tallmadge posts good academic achievement results for their Black and Latino males, and family satisfaction with the school is high.

At the same time, Tallmadge's selection as a school doing well by Black and Latino males still needs to be considered as relative. Tallmadge males may be succeeding compared to other BPS males, but compared to students in better-funded systems or better-funded schools, Tallmadge students as a whole continue to lag behind in academic indices. As the principal states, "Our students are improving"; however, more broadly, there is still much work to be done to narrow achievement disparities between Black and Latino males and their White and Asian counterparts. One teacher reported that the school is still too focused on the results of the MCAS and the need to teach to the test, limiting teachers' ability to educate students to be lifelong

learners. Another teacher spoke about how the “scripted curriculum” deterred teachers from using hands-on projects as learning opportunities, and yet another said she would not send her own child to the school, even though a glimmer of hope could be heard when she followed the comment with “Not yet.” With more intentionality focused on professional development for teachers—specifically on the theory and practice of culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy and a more systematic approach to understanding and meeting the needs of not only Black but also Latin@ students and their families—Tallmadge could even better prepare its students for secondary and postsecondary education.

Nonetheless, the success of the Tallmadge deserves recognition and support to continue its development as a school with promising practices. As one parent eloquently described the Tallmadge success story:

If you were to ask me just the simple question of why our kids do well here, it starts with the leadership and . . . the undying positivity, and the undying sense that you're the best, and you can do great things. But you have to work hard. It doesn't just happen. So the idea of working hard and getting results, and then the super-dedicated, highly qualified teachers, and all of the other adults in the building that are here to support them. It's that mix which really makes this the kind of place that it is.

## **Equal Outcomes Through Equitable Means: Individualizing Education and Welcoming**

### **Families at the Fairview K–8**

Paul J. Kuttner and John B. Diamond\*

#### **Introduction**

The Fairview K–8 School is a full-inclusion school where students with and without developmental and learning disabilities are educated together in the same classrooms.<sup>4</sup> Fairview’s mission emphasizes its inclusive environment, a focus on academic excellence, partnerships with families, and placing a high value on the individuality of each student. Fairview’s elementary program, which is the focus of this case study, begins in grade K1 and extends through grade 5. During SY2012, the school’s elementary program served 274 students and had 36 FTE elementary teachers, for a student-teacher ratio of 7.6:1. The school was chosen for case study because of its relative success with Black males.

#### ***School Context***

The student body at Fairview is somewhat more diverse, and less low-income, than the BPS averages. In SY2012, Black, Latin@, and White students each made up slightly less than one-third of the school population, while multiracial, Asian, and Native American students made up the remaining 3.3%. Meanwhile, Fairview’s low-income populations, as measured by eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL), among all students (55.1%), Black males (70.2%) and Latino males (59.0%) were lower than respective Boston averages. The same was true for the school’s total ELL population (15.0%) and Black male and Latino male ELL students

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\*Paul J. Kuttner is a Postdoctoral Fellow in Critical Communication Pedagogy at the University of Utah. A White man raised in the segregated suburbs of Boston, Paul is a husband, father, and former community arts educator. John B. Diamond, a sociologist, is Hoefs-Bascom Associate Professor of Education, University of Wisconsin–Madison. He coauthored the recent book *Despite the Best Intentions: How Racial Inequality Persists in Good Schools*.

<sup>4</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all subjects, programs, schools, and locations in this study.

(6.4% and 30.8%, respectively). Fairview's special education rates were comparable to BPS averages. In SY2012, 27.3% of Fairview's elementary and middle school teachers were Black; 4.0% were Latin@; 64.6% were White; and 4.1% were multiracial, Asian, or Native American, which paralleled BPS averages. Within both the elementary and middle schools, 8.3% of teachers were male, and a third of them were Latino. Fairview had no Black male teachers and no Black or Latino male administrators, paraprofessionals, or other support staff.

Fairview stands out among BPS schools for its academic outcomes among Black male students in particular, while Latino male students also demonstrate above-average outcomes. Fairview's Black and Latino male attendance rates roughly matched the overall school's rate of 96.1%, and were slightly higher than BPS averages. Fairview had higher MCAS ELA and math proficiency rates for all students (50.4% and 48.9%, respectively) and for its Black male population (50.0% and 53.8%, respectively) than district averages. Black males' proficiency rates for ELA and math were 27.9 and 31.2 percentage points higher, respectively, than the BPS Black male averages. The Latino male proficiency rates for ELA and math were over 9 and 16 percentage points higher, respectively, than the district Latino male averages. Table 4 summarizes the quantitative data about K-5 students and teachers at Fairview compared to the district K-5 grades as a whole.

Table 4

*Fairview K–8 School Student and Teacher Data*

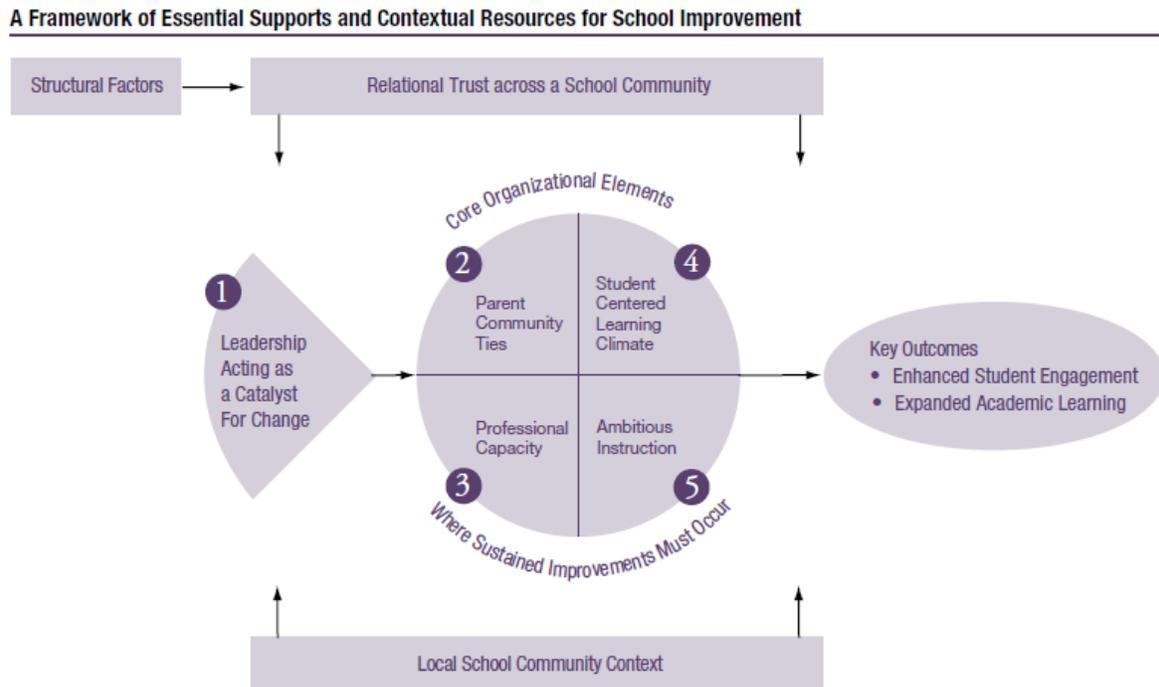
		Fairview K–8 School (K–5 only)			BPS (K–5 only)		
		Total	Black Male	Latino Male	Total	Black Male	Latino Male
Student Demographics	Student Population (N)	274	47	39	25,748	4,680	5,871
	Student Population (%)		17.2	14.2		18.2	22.8
	ELL (%)	15	6.4	30.8	35.2	18.4	53.2
	FRL (%)	55.1	70.2	59	74.9	82.4	79.5
	Special Education (%)	22.3	29.8	23.1	19.2	27.4	25.2
Student Engagement and Outcomes	Attendance (%)	96.1	96.6	95	94.4	94.1	93.8
	MCAS ELA Proficiency (%)	50.4	50	34.8	34.1	22.1	24.9
	MCAS Math Proficiency (%)	48.9	53.8	47.8	35.8	22.6	31.1
Teacher Demographics	Teacher Population (N)	36	0	1	1,218	32	20
	Student/Teacher Ratio	7.6:1			21.1:1		

In this case study, we look closely at the Fairview’s pedagogical and organizational practices in order to better understand its success with Black males and to make initial suggestions for future growth. First, we briefly situate this study in the literature on organizational supports for school improvement. We then highlight four themes that emerged from our research, each of which contributes in an important way to the experiences of Black and Latino male students. These themes include (a) educating all students through inclusive supports, (b) engaging diverse families (by race/ethnicity and income status), (c) building collaboration and community among staff members, and (d) implementing culturally relevant and multicultural pedagogies.

## ***Theoretical Framework***

High-quality teaching and learning in schools depends on multiple people working together with a focus on instruction and its improvement. While there are many organizational and interpersonal factors that shape student outcomes, researchers at the Consortium on Chicago School Research (the consortium) have developed a powerful framework—the Five Essential Supports—that draws on a broad range of what is known about school improvement, and is based on extensive, rigorous research the consortium conducted in Chicago elementary schools. As outlined by Sebring et al. (2006), the Five Essential Supports include (1) leadership that catalyzes change, (2) parent and community ties, (3) professional capacity, (4) a student-centered learning climate, and (5) ambitious instruction. In addition to these supports, social capital in the form of trusting relationships across the school community is seen as a critical resource for school improvement. Here we briefly discuss this model and how it helps us make sense of what we have learned at the Fairview (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



Source: Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Bryk, A. S., Easton, J. Q., & Luppescu, S. (2006). *The essential supports for school improvement*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, Consortium on Chicago School Research.

*Leadership* is a critical component of school improvement. As discussed here, leadership does not necessarily reside with the school principal alone, but is instead spread across multiple actors who focus on instruction and engage in practices that support instructional improvement. Such leadership establishes the conditions for the four core organizational supports shown in Figure 1.

- *Parent and community ties* emphasizes common educational expectations across home and school, and can also include parents' involvement in volunteering at the school and participation in school-based decision making.
- *Professional capacity* emphasizes the knowledge and skills of the faculty and staff, their ongoing professional growth, and their sense of responsibility for student learning.

- *Student-centered learning climate* emphasizes the need for a safe, nurturing, stimulating environment focused on learning.
- *Ambitious instruction* refers to instruction that challenges students to achieve basic skills and that extends learning to deeper levels of critical thinking and reflection.

When each of these essential supports is strong within a school community, the work of instructional improvement is more likely to be successful. Research conducted by the consortium demonstrates that schools exhibiting these characteristics were far more likely to improve math and reading test scores than schools that lacked strength in these characteristics. This research also demonstrates that a lack of strength in any one of these characteristics can diminish the positive impact of the other supports.

Social capital is a collective resource that is generated through social relationships and enables the establishment and maintenance of essential supports. Research has demonstrated that social capital helps social systems (e.g., schools and communities) function effectively (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Coleman, 1990). One important aspect of school-based social capital is referred to as *relational trust*, the extent to which members of a school community develop strong, trusting relationships characterized by mutual obligations, respect, and clear expectations.

Ensuring that schools are strong across the five essential supports, and that they maintain high levels of relational trust, requires that faculty and staff members participate in regular practices that help to institutionalize and normalize these positive organizational characteristics. Research on *organizational routines* provides a theoretical base for understanding such practices.

Organizational routines are the day-to-day practices through which the work of an organization gets done. In a school, these include activities like the beginning-of-school routine, cycles of classroom instruction, parent-teacher interactions, lunchtime and recess, and teachers'

planning time and professional development activities.<sup>5</sup> Once established, organizational routines can become regularized practices that define how the organization works and that help reinforce expectations for members of the organization—in other words, they form the fabric of the school’s culture. These daily practices can also provide the foundation for ongoing instructional improvement.

## **Themes**

In this case study, we share some of the key factors that arose from our research that informants said might explain the school’s relative success in supporting the education of Black male students. Fairview does not have any efforts or initiatives targeted specifically at male students of color. Moreover, there are no consistent schoolwide practices that address questions of race or gender, leaving individual teachers and administrators with much latitude. Fairview’s success, we believe, is rooted in a number of systems—made up of policies, routines, and aspects of school culture—that align with the five essential supports described above, and that address some (though not all) of the key barriers facing Black and Latino male students. Moreover, these systems create a context in which individual teachers and administrators can, and sometimes do, take steps to explicitly address questions of race and gender in their work. These systems include:

- a focus on “educating all students” through student-centered, individualized approaches;
- parent engagement and leadership across diverse families; and
- a high level of teacher collaboration, community, and shared leadership.

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of organizational routines, please see Pentland, B. T., & Feldman, M. S. (2005). Organizational routines as a unit of analysis. *Industrial and Corporate Change*, 14(5), 793–815. For specific application of organizational routines in education organizations, see Spillane, J. P., Parise, L. M., & Sherer, J. Z. (2011). Organizational routines as coupling mechanisms: Policy, school administration, and the technical core. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(3), 586–620.

We also explore a fourth theme that represents an area of potential growth for the school in addressing the needs of male students of color: the school's intermittent and underdeveloped application of multicultural and culturally relevant pedagogical approaches. In addition, throughout the following sections we have interwoven other important subthemes such as organizational learning and growth, the use of data to inform pedagogy, and an overall culture of caring for students.

### *Educating All Students*

If there is one central, driving vision at the Fairview, it is to “educate all students” regardless of background, ability status, or prior academic and behavioral performance. Many teachers spoke passionately about the need to have high expectations for all students. However, unlike much of the “no excuses” rhetoric in education discourse that is at times punitive and fails to account for students’ individual needs, at Fairview these high expectations are paired with a deep commitment to understanding and accommodating the diverse and particular needs of individual students. Ms. Ryon, one of the fifth-grade teachers, described the goal as “that balance of meeting kids where they are, but still holding them accountable for what you deem appropriate.” This combination is what former principal Laura Bedwin termed “equal outcomes through equitable means.”

### *Inclusion*

This philosophy showed itself in some form during almost all of our staff member interviews, and is rooted in the Fairview's inclusion model. BPS has 18 inclusion schools and has recently formed the Inclusion Task Force to oversee further development and expansion. Rather than segregating students with learning or developmental disabilities in order to fulfill their Individualized Educational Programs (IEP), inclusion places these students in regular

classes alongside their non-IEP peers and seeks to increase the capacity of the school to offer child-centered, differentiated instruction across a range of student abilities and needs (SEDL, 1995).<sup>6</sup> Starting with its youngest students, Fairview implemented and began scaling its inclusion model annually, moving up one grade level per year, so that inclusion had been implemented through grade 5.

As part of this shift to inclusion, Fairview implemented a new model for grade-level teaching teams. Two teachers in adjacent rooms work with one special education instructor who moves between the two classes. At least one paraprofessional works with each grade-level team, and there are visits from specialists such as speech teachers or occupational therapists and assistance from parent volunteers. As we describe below, these teams have developed well-oiled routines that allow them to oversee a full class while assisting individual students and adapting lessons across students as needed. About a quarter of Fairview's students receive some special education support, and each class has six seats set aside for students with "moderate to severe" disabilities.

Former principal Bedwin, who oversaw the transition to inclusion, describes initial resistance from some teachers, but over time inclusion has become an integral part of the school culture. Ms. Rogers, one of the school's inclusion teachers, explained, "Basically, the principles of inclusion have pretty much been a guiding factor for a lot of the work that we do." Our interviews and observations demonstrated that differentiation at Fairview goes beyond attention to the needs of students specifically designated as needing special education services. It is about

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the BPS approach to inclusion, see Boston Public Schools, Office of Special Education and Student Services (OSESS). (2014). *Inclusion and universal design: Supporting ALL students*. <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/249/Inclusion%20and%20Universal%20Design%201%209%2014.pdf>

understanding the individual needs of each student and then differentiating instruction to meet those needs. Teachers at Fairview describe inclusion as benefiting all students, including Black males, because it rejects a one-size-fits-all approach to education, and as one teacher explained, it challenges the racialized tracking and segregation that often take place in traditional special education (Losen & Orfield, 2002). As Bedwin explained:

I think that a big piece, too, was un-separating special education and regular education, and just putting everybody's brains on kids who were struggling, whether they technically had IEPs or not. It was a culture change that I think supported the achievement of Black boys, because we know that otherwise they're overrepresented [in special education] at such a high rate. We just kind of put the brakes on the whole system.

This practice means that inclusion teachers are not solely focused on identified inclusion students; they are also part of a larger school focus on individualized support and differentiation. Ms. Conway, an inclusion teacher in one of the higher elementary grades, told us:

I know when I walk in a room who needs help. So they use my expertise to help the ones who are struggling. . . . Even though I have a responsibility to children on educational plans [IEPs], many of the students I work with are not on educational plans . . . I could be sitting with the "smartest boy in the room" and working on a math problem or going over and working with someone who is a great reader on their writing.

One of the school's specialists, Ms. Thomas, offered an example of how teachers collaborate to carry out differentiation in the class by ensuring that all students, with and without IEPs, can connect with the material in a manner that works for them. While the ultimate goal is

for all students to meet the same standards, the starting points and teaching practices can vary quite widely at times.

I was meeting with one of the teams the other day, and over the years have pretty much taken Reading Streets [an elementary reading instruction curriculum] and rewritten a lot of the stories so that different kids can access it. . . . Let's just use the water cycle as an example. So, there is a story that comes in Reading Street, but one group may be looking at a picture presentation of the water cycle and getting an oral explanation; another group might be getting a highlighted version of the photocopied text where it just has the main text kind of pulled out for them; other students might be getting a more advanced version of the text, where it gives them more details or more examples of the water cycle, depending on what they're ready for.

### *Individualized instruction*

In our visits to classrooms, we had the chance to see these inclusion practices firsthand, and were impressed by how normalized these routines had become for both teachers and students. For example, we visited a K1 classroom with around 20 students, including four inclusion (IEP) students. Inclusion practices began even before the teacher was in the room, with sign-in sheets that differed based on each student's progress in being able to write his or her name. When the class sat down on the rug for morning activities, each step involved some form of accommodation. After an activity, the teacher would pause to give a modified version of the same activity to specific students. For example, rather than saying the date, "Today is June 3rd," a couple of students were asked to recognize the number "3" on a card. Alternatively, another adult would offer support to an individual student during an activity. During an activity that involved calling out the name of someone else in the room, a paraprofessional working with a

student with muscular dystrophy pulled out a photo of himself as a visual prompt. All the students waited patiently during these accommodations and the extra time that some students took to answer questions. Next, the class broke up into four groups, which we were told had been created based on assessments early in the year. Each group worked with a different adult, and one group worked independently on projects like building Legos, connecting dots, and making rubber band art.

### *Data-driven instruction*

To guide its differentiation and inclusion efforts, Fairview regularly analyzes data, a process in which it is supported by a partnership with the Achievement Network (ANet), a nonprofit organization that helps schools to integrate methods for data-driven instruction. In particular, Fairview utilizes Response to Intervention (RTI) to facilitate early detection of and design differentiated responses to the behavioral and learning needs of all its students. Staff members analyze data on students, pinpoint students' specific learning or behavioral needs, create "intervention groups" that receive tiered interventions depending on how much support they need, and monitor the success of the interventions.<sup>7</sup> According to Bedwin, this regular analysis of data to guide practice was resisted by some teachers at first, but over time has become a widely accepted part of the school's regular routines. In response to our questions about the school's successes with Black and Latino male students, Bedwin argued that this targeted, data-driven process is a necessary piece of addressing the so-called achievement gap between White students and students of color:

I think what was really so powerful at [school name] was the data. . . . I think that data work is a critical piece of actually doing anything about the achievement gap, because

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<sup>7</sup> For more on RTI, see Fuchs & Fuchs (2006).

otherwise you're just talking in theory. The actual data is in front of us on a regular basis, every four to six weeks, just to help us process it really got us into like, okay, let's look at which kids are struggling. We started setting up intervention blocks. We started doing really different instructional work to have different instructional outcomes.

Building on its success in implementing inclusion, the school has begun integrating other practices schoolwide, such as those associated with Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL).<sup>8</sup> What these systems and inclusion have in common, despite their different origins and terminology, is that they are student centered, fulfilling one of the five essential supports put forward by Sebring et al. (2006). Each program is rooted in both an appreciation of the fact that students learn and engage with school in a wide variety of ways and a commitment to meeting each student where he or she is.

### ***Engaging Diverse Families***

Almost every person we interviewed spoke about high levels of family engagement at the Fairview, pointing to strength in another of the five essential supports Sebring et al. (2006). Interviewees suggested that family engagement has played a key role in Fairview's successes, including its positive results with Black male students.<sup>9</sup> We repeatedly heard comments like this one from Ms. Conway:

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<sup>8</sup> For more on PBIS, visit the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs' (OSEP) Technical Assistance Center at <https://www.pbis.org/>. For more on UDL, visit the Center for Applied Special Technology at <http://cast.org/udl/>.

<sup>9</sup> Due to data collection limitations, we were able to speak with only one parent at Fairview. This interview was not recorded, so we do not have quotes from parents in this case study. However, that parent confirmed the high level of family engagement, and we analyzed three years of minutes from parent council and School Site Council meetings, and were able to confirm a consistent focus on parent engagement and parent leadership from both parents and staff members.

The parent involvement in the school is tremendous. You have a big investment of parents. At other schools I've been to, I would be at an open house and I'd have no parents come. We have all the parents come all the time. That's a big key to our success, because parents know we work with them and they get involved.

### *Relationship building*

Fairview teachers are engaged in ongoing communication and relationship building with parents, from school newsletters and regular phone calls to informal conversations at events and during student pick-up time. Some teachers go further in their efforts to reach out to families, making home visits or giving out their cell phone number to parents. Ms. Edwards, one of the first-grade teachers, spoke at length about the importance of having strong relationships with parents, arguing that:

If you don't have a relationship with the parents, it makes your job that much harder. . . .

It's not just about the kids, it's about the families. We can all come together as a community and build community if we're not only invested in the children, but also willing to build relationships with families.

She went on to explain how building relationships with families can make it possible for teachers to support both students and parents, which she says is an important part of addressing racial disparities:

Closing the achievement gap happens when you have a relationship with not only the student but with the family. . . . I had one family where the child was struggling, but the mother was also struggling with literacy and she felt ashamed. . . . She couldn't help her child with reading because she could barely read herself. So then what happens? You start giving her resources, telling her how she can go to things at the library that are

available to help her improve her literacy skills, and letting her know that it's okay and that you're not judging. Then a relationship starts. And then that mother, she starts to open up, and she's not as resistant or hard . . . now you've made a bridge by communicating with that parent. And then that parent feels better about herself [and she knows that] we can give extra support in school because now we're aware of something that we didn't know if we hadn't made the phone call, if we hadn't made the visit, if we hadn't gone the extra mile.

Ms. Conde, a second-grade teacher, also spoke about the importance of connecting with families. Her comments focused particularly on a set of African American teachers who had built strong community ties, which in turn helped them to support some of the students who were struggling:

So, there were core teachers of color that . . . were passionate about what they did . . . the teachers were African American teachers that have a passion, have a caring for them, reach out to the family, live in the community. . . . So, there was a connection. People went to the baseball games or they went to events if they could. Other schools, you're in, you go home. But the teachers were a part of the community. If there was a recital, maybe a teacher would go to it in one grade level. I was laughing the other day because several kids were coming up saying, "I have two recitals coming up. Which one do you think you can get to?" And I'm thinking, my Saturdays are going to be [full]—but they feel comfortable knowing that we know their lives and we know their families.

### *Opportunities to engage*

Fairview is involved in a number of programs that engage parents in their children's education. One is a home reading program focused on oral language skills, in which parents

pledge to read one story a night to their child and chart their reading in a log that is shared with the school. Fairview is also involved with the program Tech Goes Home, which is used by schools and community centers across Boston. With Tech Goes Home, both students and parents have the opportunity to enroll in a series of technology training workshops, and at the end have the chance to buy a new laptop for \$50. According to Ms. Meadows, a fifth-grade teacher who taught the Tech Goes Home program at Fairview, of all the school's family outreach programs, this one in particular attracts Black and Latin@ families. Deborah Parker, the current principal, organized a series of monthly coffee hours during which parents discuss topics such as how to support your child at home in reading or math. In addition, a few teachers also reported engaging parents as volunteers for classroom-based activities or through home-based academic projects.

Importantly, parents at Fairview have opportunities to take on leadership roles in the school rather than only working in support roles, as is often the case (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hong, 2011). The school has a strong parent council that has been active in reaching out to new parents, communicating with parents, and building a parent community. While the parent council takes on more traditional, PTA-type responsibilities such as raising money and running events like the school's Field Day, parent leaders are also represented on key decision-making bodies. Parents sit alongside teachers on the Inclusion Committee, which is involved in the ongoing implementation of inclusion at the school. Parents make up half of the School Site Council (SSC), which, according to an analysis of minutes from its meetings, has been increasingly proactive about addressing decisions at the school around budgeting, space usage, and technology purchases. The SSC implemented a survey of parents and teachers that it has used to pinpoint specific issues to address. The SSC was also involved in the hiring of a new principal,

and spent time discussing how to include diverse parents in the decision-making process, as the following notes from an SSC meeting demonstrate:

We want the process to be team oriented. We want to make sure the school community participates fairly and ensure we have representation from different groups—SPED, ELL, minority parents, etc. This has proven successful in previous principal-hiring processes.

*Blurring the home-school boundary*

Perhaps more important than any specific activity is an overall culture of family engagement at the Fairview, both among parents and school staff. Mr. Hughes, a community partner who teaches a leadership development and conflict resolution program at the Fairview, described the school's culture as one that blurs the lines between home and school, just as family engagement experts like Epstein (1990) have long promoted:

The community developed here with teachers and parents and the principal, I mean they're not separate bubbles. I mean, everyone is really in the same loop. Everyone is trying to work towards the same thing. And everyone . . . is treated exactly the same way.

Many interviewees described strong parent engagement at the school. As Ms. Rogers from the first-grade team put it, "I think it is just culture here. That's what parents do. And the parents reach out right off the bat to incoming parents." She described the culture of parent engagement as one of activism and advocacy:

My first year here I was overwhelmed with the sort of activism of the parents. At the other school that I worked at there was a strong parent community. They would support in multiple ways, whether it was helping out in the room or different initiatives. But I felt that there was more of a passive relationship. Whereas here, . . . the parent culture here is one of a little bit more reaching out and advocating.

While many staff members credit parents for being so actively engaged, school leaders and staff have also taken steps to make the school a welcoming place for parents. Interviewees discussed the importance of inviting parents into the school, promoting an “open-door policy” for parents, and addressing possible barriers such as language and scheduling. As Ms. Vaughan, a second-grade teacher, explained:

When kids come here and their parents come here, I feel that every parent feels pretty darn welcome. . . . We have a lot of parents that only speak Spanish, and we have faculty that speaks Spanish, because of that we're always able to translate. There was a time that we could not because we had no Hispanic teachers or Hispanic faculty in the building, and that has completely changed. . . . And African American parents come in, they're welcome here. I don't think anybody feels nervous to come through the door.

Of particular relevance to the school’s successes with Black males is the Fairview’s history of actively engaging a diverse and representative group of parents. When former principal Bedwin first came to the Fairview, the parent council was dominated by White, more economically privileged parents. Moreover, Bedwin says, while these parents were active in supporting their own children, they were not always focused on the improvement of education for all students at the school. Central to shifting this dynamic was the school’s involvement in the Race Dialogues program, carried out through a partnership between BPS and the YWCA. Over the course of a number of years Fairview parents and teachers took part in frank, facilitated conversations about race, racism, and privilege. According to interviewees, these dialogues offered a chance to build relationships among parents who otherwise did not interact, as well as between parents and teachers. More significantly, perhaps, it encouraged more Black and Latin@ parents to become involved in leadership at the school. Bedwin explained:

[The parent council] started with a group of White parents who were explicitly interested in issues of equity, and so specifically had chosen the [school name] because of its diversity, not in spite of its diversity. But we started the Race Dialogue Series and really actively [brought] more parents of color into the circle; by the time I left the leaders of the SPC [School Parent Council] were people of color.

Effective family engagement requires that staff members hold a core set of underlying beliefs and orientations toward parents, including a belief that parents care about their children and have something to offer the school, and a partnership orientation that sees educators and parents as partners in a collaborative effort (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davis, 2007). In interviews, we heard a number of comments suggesting that Fairview staff members hold these kinds of beliefs, though such comments were not universal. For example, Ms. Edwards explained that building relationships with parents requires “not feeling like parents are the enemy, because they are not the enemy.” Principal Parker, in turn, captured what scholars call a “partnership orientation” in her comments about how staff members think of meetings with parents whose students are struggling academically: “Those conversations had to do with the parents as partners, and what role they can play in supporting their child, because we were very clear: we can't do this alone. We need your help.”

Fairview continues to face challenges when it comes to engaging parents. According to teachers, the school benefits from the fact that a large number of students live in the neighborhood and walk to school. This allows many more opportunities for parents and teachers to interact, as when parents are dropping off or picking up students, and makes it easier for family members to participate in school-based activities. School leaders and teachers and the parent council have more trouble engaging parents who live farther away and whose students

take a bus to school. Moreover, the work of engaging a racially and ethnically representative group of parents is an ongoing process.

### ***Building Collaboration and Community Among Staff Members***

Most teachers at the Fairview, particularly in the younger grades, report a high level of staff member collaboration through both formal systems and more informal, but routinized, avenues. This collaboration is situated in what many describe as a culture of community, caring, and collective responsibility for all children. Collaboration is a key aspect of the school's differentiated, inclusive approach to education and offers opportunities for educators to play leadership roles in their grade-level teams and in the school as a whole. In terms of the five essential supports (Sebring et al., 2006), this collaboration is key to building staff capacity, and points to the existence of significant relational trust and social capital within the school.

#### *Grade-level teams and other opportunities for collaboration*

The most common form of collaboration at Fairview takes place at the grade-level teaching team, which consists of two regular classroom teachers, an inclusion teacher who works across both rooms, and at least one paraprofessional. Each grade-level team meets regularly, from once a week to once a month, and also holds many informal conversations facilitated by shared lunch periods and abutting (often connected) rooms. As Ms. Thomas told us:

I think a culture of sharing does exist here. I think the teachers work really hard, and that we have phenomenal teaching teams here, where teachers share resources [and are] constantly meeting to brainstorm, or constantly meeting to plan and to modify.

This collaborative approach to teaching was clear in our classroom observations. We visited one of the upper-grade classrooms, for example, which was connected to its grade-level partner by a small closetlike space that facilitated interaction and transitions by the teaching

team. When we arrived, students were working on review material in math to make sure they understood key concepts from the previous day's lesson. The lead teacher called a small group of students who were having trouble to a long table set up in the room—three boys, two Latino and one Black. They were working on area problems, and she was asking them questions while other students came up one by one with questions of their own. Meanwhile, the special education teacher moved around the room helping students at their desks. All of the students were on task and seemed open to engaging with both teachers.

Beyond the classroom, there are a range of opportunities for collaboration as well as leadership among teachers. As Principal Parker explained: "I really believe in shared leadership, and I think that coming in, [the teachers] heard that. But now they've seen it." Such opportunities exist on the Instructional Leadership Team, the Inclusion Committee, and the School Site Council. In addition, the school's RTI model requires ongoing analysis of data to inform practice, and this provides another chance for collaboration, leadership, and the fostering of shared responsibility among staff members. As former principal Bedwin put it:

We moved into this team problem solving, like we own this kid together where we're struggling. What interventions are we going to try? How are we going to monitor them? Whose job is it? But it's our kid. At the end it's our kid, at the beginning it's our kid, so we're going to solve this problem together.

### *Professional collaborative culture*

We heard from multiple interviewees that, over time, a culture of collaboration has developed at the Fairview. As Ms. Merrill, one of the kindergarten teachers, explained:

We're in each other's rooms all the time. We're just always kind of checking in, and if something happens, and you're struggling with a student, maybe a behavior, some

student's having a difficult time, you can always depend on someone either to help with the student or just take over your class. So I think we're a close group and we touch base. You know, sometimes after school, after everyone's left, you'll see like all of us just standing in the hallway just kind of debriefing over things that happened throughout the day.

Ms. Howells, a kindergarten-level inclusion teacher, agreed, stressing a point that we heard often—that teachers simply enjoy working at the Fairview and being part of the school community:

It's a community. We help each other out. There have been children in crisis here for different reasons. We all pitch in, we're all CPI [Crisis Prevention Institute] trained [in the use of safe restraints], we all take turns if we have to step into the situation so nobody's too stressed out. It works. And the dedication of the teachers. . . . I don't know what we do different, I think everybody's happy so they just help each other out and just love to work here. And everybody, like I said, does their job. All the paras are wonderful, they always put their best and it's not like they sit back. I've been to some buildings, they sit back and they'll read a book or something. It's like they're always invested in learning with the kids. I mean, our paras are our equals. They teach small groups right alongside us. So they're like a major piece of our puzzle. So I just think that everybody works to their ability, and it just makes it a great place to be.

Talk of community across the building seemed less present, however, in the higher grades (i.e., 3–5). Ms. Conway, an inclusion teacher in one of the higher grades, said that she is connected only with the other members of her teaching team. As for the rest of the school:

We never see each other. We're always working. No one knows anything other than the principal's daily bulletin on what's due, we don't know anything. We get together Friday for social. We have our coffee, and that's the only time I really get to see everybody because everyone's working. . . . Someone will make a pot of coffee in one room and we'll kind of gather there, touch base about how things are going with people. So we do have the personal connection. But it's—we're busy. It's a busy school.

Still, given the teaching profession's long history of individual teacher autonomy and “egg carton” organizational models (Little, 1990; Lortie & Clement, 1975), the level of collaboration at Fairview was striking to us as researchers, as was the obvious caring that teachers had for the students. With Fairview's benefiting from its small size and the high level of parent engagement, we saw evidence of an overarching sense of community and an ethic of caring that embraced students as well as colleagues. In the words of Ms. Edwards, a first-grade teacher:

You have to be able to create an atmosphere for learning in the classroom. And in that, having an environment where children feel safe, where children feel that they're loved, where children feel that they're cared about, you can't begin to teach the child unless—I feel—you can't begin teaching a child until . . . they know that you care about them, that you're invested in them. And how does that play out in the mind of a 6-year-old, loving and caring? It's just key. It's just key. I mean, these are babies who have only been on the planet for 6 years, right?

### ***Implementing Culturally Relevant and Multicultural Pedagogies***

When the topic of specifically addressing the racial and cultural backgrounds of students came up in our interviews, staff members at the Fairview expressed a wide range of attitudes.

Some allied themselves with culturally relevant or multicultural approaches to pedagogy and curriculum, while others put forward a color-blind philosophy, stating that they “treat all kids the same.” Overall, we saw that attention to the racial and cultural backgrounds of students, while sometimes apparent with particular teachers or projects, was not guided in any systematic manner and was consistently overshadowed by the intensely individualized focus of the school.

The school, overall, demonstrates what Banks (1999) has called the “contributions” approach to multicultural education—more popularly known as “feasts and festivals” or “heroes and holidays” for its emphasis on traditional holidays and a small number of famous individuals of color. For the early grades in particular, interview questions about culture or race often elicited descriptions of celebrations, including celebrations of Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, and Chinese New Year. Some teachers spoke about being conscious of having a range of texts available in their rooms, what Banks (1993) refers to as multicultural “content integration.” Ms. Meadows, a fifth-grade teacher who had recently taken a graduate school course in multicultural education, pointed us to a crate of books in her room labeled “multicultural read-alouds,” full of picture books focused on African American, Latin@, and Asian characters.

#### *Pockets of culturally relevant pedagogy*

The research team did hear about a few efforts that addressed the racial and cultural diversity of the school by seeking to bring students’ home cultures into the classroom in a way that linked directly to the curriculum, in the vein of culturally relevant and asset pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2014). For example, Ms. Halprin put together a music-based project in which, instead of selecting the music herself, she reached out to parents to have them send in songs that they listen to at home. For Ms. Halprin, this was one way of tapping into the “wealth of knowledge” that students bring to the classroom based on their diverse

backgrounds. Another project involved kindergarten students working with their parents to create posters about their family backgrounds. This offered an opportunity for students both to learn about the diversity of cultures within their classrooms and to connect with their own heritage.

Ms. Merrill told us:

[The response] is great. And I have families saying, “You know, I never even had this conversation with my child yet. My child doesn't even know that we're from this area.” . . . We keep it in the classroom for about half the year, so they're constantly going back to those [family background projects]. We bind them, so the kids can lay out on the rug and just read and look at kids' pictures and talk about them and talk about where they're from and what they do and all of those things. I think you do see a sense of pride in where they're from and the fact they can share that with other kids.

Like Ms. Meadows, referred to above, a few teachers spoke about having received training in, and wanting to implement, aspects of multicultural education or culturally relevant pedagogy. They said that they were allowed to integrate these practices as they saw fit, but that there was no schoolwide push toward such approaches. Ms. Rogers noted this dynamic by comparing Fairview to her previous school:

The other building that I worked at, there was an awful lot of great professional development around cultural sensitivity. I think a lot of that was based on the fact that that particular administrator felt very strongly about the achievement gap . . . it was sort of schoolwide culture. . . . When I came here, primarily the mindset was inclusion and how to have students be successful, students that would typically be substantially separate in placement in a regular education environment. I think that some of what I learned and studied and experienced with more of an achievement-gap lens weaved its

way into the same kind of work. But I couldn't say that that was the premise when I came here. That was just sort of my own know-how.

Similarly, Ms. Conde took it upon herself to build up a library of books that were relevant to the students in her classroom.

I would say, 75% of the books I have, they're my personal library. Save-A-Lot, any store I could find, if a teacher was leaving I would go through their books, and over the years I've accumulated them . . . especially the ones for the students of color, the stories mimic their lives, and they could relate to them. So, I started pulling those kinds of books to make sure that the boys knew about them, that they would start to read them. . . . So, that was my own passion. . . . I have teachers that come in to borrow from my library. I thought that was really good. . . . And there are still boys that I've had, especially Daniel, he is Hispanic, who comes down and borrows a book every week from me, but he is in fourth grade.

*Focus on individuals instead of groups*

Former principal Bedwin told us that while explicit attention to race is valuable, the Fairview's individualized approach is in itself a way of taking into account the racial and cultural backgrounds of students and families—perhaps even a better way than more generalized attempts at cultural relevance. She said that, although activities like the Race Dialogues program had been important in terms of raising questions about race among teachers,

What was really so powerful at [school name] was the data. Again, it was actually bringing it back to, "We're going to have these conversations; we're going to dig into our own stuff around race. But almost more importantly, we need to be looking at our actual

kids and their actual performance and actually thinking about how we're going to change our instruction for them.

In line with this argument, some interviewees suggested that considering the racial and cultural backgrounds of students is an integral part of the individualized and inclusive support of the school. As one first-grade teacher put it, “Whether it's being inclusive of children with different needs based on disabilities or cultural differences, I feel that just overall here that there is an eye on being inclusive overall and being sensitive.” Principal Parker agreed, pointing out that:

Our staff is very culturally proficient. They absolutely embrace students’ individual cultures, and if that child that needs individual assistance or has been identified as having needs—yes, the cultural background and needs. [For example,] there are some kids that just don’t make eye contact because that's their culture. So we need to know that and we need to respond accordingly.

Other teachers, however, were adamant that they did not treat students differently based on race. As Ms. Delaney explained: “We treat everybody the same. If you're a boy or you're a girl, you're still treated the same. Like I said, races are the same. . . . I don’t really see any difference. I think you see every child that comes in and attend to whatever needs they have.” Comments like this raised questions among our research team about whether the inclusion practices described above could really fulfill the educational needs of Black and Latino male students without a sustained commitment to explicitly engaging with race and cultural diversity.

Moreover, we were troubled by the use of terms like “sensitivity” and of addressing cultural “needs.” This language implies that culture is a problem to be solved rather than a resource upon which to draw. Moreover, by treating culture as an “individual” attribute, the

school may be missing opportunities to address and leverage the shared experiences of students of color in the school. We suggest that the Fairview would benefit from a more systematic and sustained approach to race and culture, one that does not diminish the value of its inclusion-based model. More critical and transformative approaches to multiculturalism and cultural relevance (Banks, 1999; Paris, 2012) could move the school beyond “heroes and holidays” toward addressing key issues related to power and racism with students, as has been done for parents and teachers through the Race Dialogues. Such changes, we suggest, may assist the school in building on its success with Black and Latino male students as well as in improving educational experiences for all students. This is not simply a matter of being “sensitive” to cultural differences; it is about raising the level of students’ critical thinking and engagement with the world in order to ensure that the school maintains a focus on ambitious instruction (Sebring et al., 2006) in all areas.

## **Conclusion**

Through our brief engagement with Boston’s Fairview K–8 school, it became clear to us that the school has a number of strengths. These strengths have contributed significantly to the school’s successes with Black male students. Fairview shows evidence of being strong in key areas identified by researchers as “essential supports” for school improvement. In particular, faculty and staff members discussed having a very student-centered climate, high levels of family and community ties, and collective staff capacity rooted in collaboration and relational trust. There was a commitment to holding high expectations for all students and providing the supports they needed to reach these expectations. We also saw evidence of strong leadership—from the two principals we interviewed as well as other staff members—which was instrumental in the introduction and institutionalization of new systems related to the other supports.

The fact is that Black and Latino male students face a number of barriers to academic success in our public schools, some of which are addressed by the supports at Fairview and some which are not. For example, we know that Blacks and Latino males in need of special education services in BPS are more likely to be placed in separate classrooms than their White and Asian counterparts, and that Black and Latino male students are generally overrepresented in special education compared to White male students, problems that can be mediated by successful inclusion efforts (Losen & Orfield, 2002; Miranda et al., 2014) such as those at Fairview.

In addition, while Black and Latin@ families are as invested in education as families from other racial groups, they are at times less involved with their students' schools than White parents for a range of reasons, including a sense of being unwelcome at school, differences in cultural expectations about family involvement, and mistrust between families and teachers. This can be turned around, however, by creating a welcoming environment and opportunities for authentic leadership and partnership (Henderson et al., 2007), as Fairview has done. Moreover, a sense of shared responsibility for all students, and an approach that focuses on individual differences, will likely be able to address some of the more personalized challenges that Black and Latino male students face in a way that a "one-size-fits-all" approach could not.

At the same time, Black and Latino male students face barriers that are not directly addressed by these more generalized supports. Students feel more connected to their schools when their backgrounds or cultural perspectives are celebrated, and when they see the links between school lessons and issues that directly affect their families and communities. Moreover, Black and Latino male students, as well as their classmates, can benefit from drawing on the strengths and assets of their communities in order to develop a more critical, ambitious curriculum. We suggest that, in addition to building on its current strengths, the Fairview and

other schools like it could improve educational opportunities for Black and Latino males, and all students, by working together to develop a systematic, schoolwide approach to addressing race, ethnicity, and gender at all levels of the organization. Such an approach would build upon the excellent work that already appears to be underway at the Fairview, not supplant it.

## **Black and Brown at Bruin High**

Melissa Colón and Jaime L. Del Razo\*

### **Introduction**

Bruin High School is a small (less than 250 students) college preparatory high school that has set acceptance to college as a graduation requirement.<sup>10</sup> As a pilot school, Bruin High has discretion over its staffing, budget, curriculum and assessment, governance, and daily schedule.

### ***School Context***

Students interested in attending Bruin High are randomly assigned through the district's lottery system. Bruin High serves students from diverse backgrounds and neighborhoods throughout the district, and shares a similar demographic profile to the district's general student population. In SY2012, 84% of students were either Black (42.2%) or Latino (41.8%), while 11.3% were White, and 4.7% were multiracial, Asian, or Native American. The school was chosen for case study because of its relative success with Latino male students. Study participants reported that, although the Latino student population was quite diverse relative to race, country of origin, home language, and migration and immigration trajectories, there was a high concentration of students of Puerto Rican, Dominican, and Guatemalan heritage at Bruin High. Eighty-eight percent of Latino students in Bruin High were born in the continental United States, and 52.9% were native speakers of a language other than English.

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\*Melissa Colón is a doctoral student in the department of Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University. She is a Puerto Rican mother of two young children and a former public school teacher. Jaime L. Del Razo is the son of Mexican immigrants and was born in East Los Angeles. He is a U.S. Army war veteran, a first-generation college student, and is married and the Chicano father of a daughter.

<sup>10</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all subjects, programs, schools, and locations in this study.

In SY2012, the population of Bruin High's low-income students (77.5%) and students with disabilities (21.6%) roughly matched district averages, while its number of ELL students (5.6%) was significantly lower than the district average. More Latino males at Bruin High were likely to be from low-income households, as measured by eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) (86.3%) and to be English language learners (9.8%) than the school averages, but their special education rate was the same as the school average.

While the majority of the student population at Bruin High were students of color, a smaller percentage of the teachers were teachers of color. Of the teachers, 21.4% were Black and 7.1% were Latina—slightly lower than the BPS averages for high school teachers (25.2% Black and 10.6% Latin@). Half of Bruin High's teaching staff was male, exceeding the BPS average of 42.5%. Among its male teachers, a higher percentage were Black (42.9%) than the BPS average (30.1%). In SY2012, Bruin High had no Latino male teachers, and no Black or Latino male administrators, paraprofessionals, or other support staff. During SY2012 there were 14 full-time-equivalent (FTE) teachers in Bruin High, for a student-teacher ratio of 15.2:1, slightly surpassing the district average. Table 5 summarizes the quantitative data about high school students and teachers at Bruin compared to the district high school grades as a whole.

Table 5

*Bruin High School Student and Teacher Data*

		Bruin High School			BPS -- High School (no exam schools)		
		Total	Black Male	Latino Male	Total	Black Male	Latino Male
Student Demographics	Student Population ( <i>N</i> )	213	48	51	14,725	3,594	3,006
	Student Population (%)		22.5	23.9		24.4	20.4
	ELL (%)	5.6	2.1	9.8	23.4	16.7	34.4
	FRL (%)	77.5	79.2	86.3	77.2	76.5	75.5
	Special Education (%)	21.6	29.2	21.6	22.6	31.4	23.9
Student Engagement	Attendance (%)	88.9	89.8	88.1	84.6	84.9	82.4
	Out-of-School Suspensions (%)	5.2	4.2	15.7	4.2	6.8	4.4
Student Outcomes	MCAS ELA Proficiency (%)	100	100	100	64	59.7	58.4
	MCAS Math Proficiency (%)	57.4	33.3	61.5	53.6	48.8	52.6
	MassCore Completion (%)	20.0 ( <i>N</i> = 8)	50.0 ( <i>N</i> = 2)	0	19.9	16.3	13.1
	Cohort Dropout (%)	27.8 ( <i>N</i> = 15)	50.0 ( <i>N</i> = 4)	16.7 ( <i>N</i> = 2)	24.2	27.5	28
	Cohort Graduation (%)	61.1 ( <i>N</i> = 33)	37.5 ( <i>N</i> = 3)	66.7 ( <i>N</i> = 8)	66.9	63.6	57.6
Teacher Demographics	Teacher Population ( <i>N</i> )	14	3	0	885	113	34
	Student/Teacher Ratio	15.2:1			16.6:1		

We begin with a brief description of the theoretical frameworks and research design used to inform the analysis of the data collected and the writing of this case study. Together, the theoretical frameworks and research design served as backdrop to identify three salient themes that emerged: school climate, a culture of caring relationships, and high expectations. Within each of the three thematic areas, we detail relevant findings and practices that we attribute to the success of Latino male students. Given the space limitations for this study, only the most

relevant sources from the literature are cited. We end the chapter with a discussion of the salient findings, the possible implications for practice, and a set of recommendations.

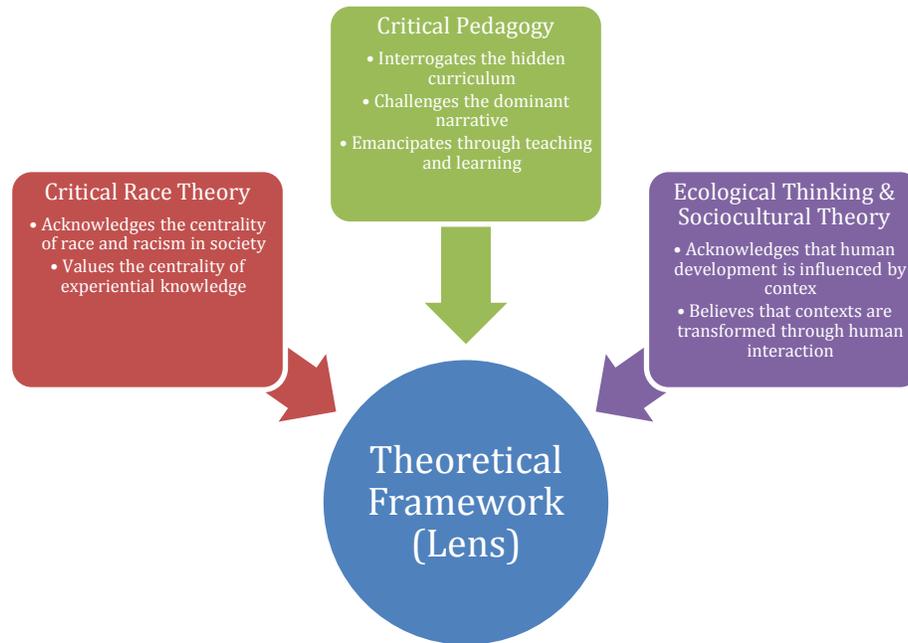
### ***Theoretical Framework***

In a study that asks “What practices are evident in Bruin High that likely contribute to the success of Latino males?” and “What are the perspectives and experiences of education within the Black and Latino communities of Bruin High?” one must be prepared to honestly and critically engage with issues of race, teaching and learning, and systematic constructs that affect and are affected by the students at the school. In answering these questions, our theoretical framework benefited from critical race theory (Bell, 2008; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, 2013; Haney-López, 2006, 2007, 2014; Matsuda et al., 1993; Solorzano et al., 2000; Yosso, 2006), critical pedagogy (Darder, 2002; Freire, 1970, 2005; Giroux, 2001; Grande, 2004; McLaren, 1995, 2014; McLaren & Kincheloe, 2007), and ecological systems thinking and socialcultural theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1993; Coll et al., 1996; Rogoff, 2003). Our own perspectives as researchers of color also focused the critical lens we brought to this work.

This three-pronged theoretical framework provides a lens to analyze what we saw and heard at Bruin High, such as how race, teaching and learning, and human agency are discussed, developed, and transformed at Bruin High, with particular attention to how this happens for Latino boys.

Figure 2

*Theoretical Framework for Bruin High School Case Study*



Finally, and most importantly, we deliberately placed the lived experiences of Black and Latino males at the center of analysis. In so doing, we seek to contribute to a growing body of literature that uses an asset-based paradigm to describe the experiences and positive contributions of Black and Latino male students.

**Themes**

***“I’d be the first one to go to college”: A Mission-Driven School Climate and Culture***

The thing that I like about this school more often than . . . I’ve experienced in different schools, it’s that everything seems so clear-cut, as though you have to come to high school, do good, go to college, major in something and then go. (Robert, an 18-year-old Guatemalan Bruin High senior)

At Bruin High, a practice that likely contributes to the success of Latino male students is the alignment between the school's climate and culture and its mission and vision to prepare all students to attend college. Climate is the spirit or attitude of the school that reflects its culture, or personality (Gruenert, 2008). A school's culture is formed from its norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Gruenert, 2008). Changing climate is a leverage point in changing culture (Gruenert, 2008). In our data analysis, the code "climate" had one of the highest frequency counts (42), and it co-occurred with 28 other codes across 18 resource documents. High co-occurrence with the codes of mission and vision, college-going culture, college readiness, and discipline were observed. We observed a climate that was friendly, purposeful, efficient, and fully aligned with the school's mission.

As Robert, a study participant, aptly described, everything at Bruin High "seems so clear-cut" relative to its mission. Nestled among several large universities and medical institutions, Bruin High is housed in a classic, more than 100-year-old New England brick-and-mortar school building, and it stands on a corner of a busy city intersection. Most students travel to school on public transportation. Teachers and students reported that, given the limitations of public transportation in their neighborhoods, it takes approximately an hour and a half for many students to get to school. Despite what many would consider a long commute, many students arrive early and take advantage of the school's breakfast program. Bruin High's attendance rate (88.9%) was, in fact, higher than the BPS high school average (84.6%), and the attendance rates of Black and Latino male students were roughly the same as the school average.

Upon entering the school building, one is welcomed by a spacious marblelike foyer that is peppered with posters from different universities, pictures of student trips and community

service activities, and informative bulletin boards. Students tend to arrive in groups of three or four and actively display gestures of camaraderie toward other students, faculty, and staff members. The academic schedule is organized into seven course periods. Course offerings at Bruin High reflect a traditional college preparatory curriculum, and include honors and AP courses. All students are required to take two years of Spanish. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, ninth- and 10th-grade students are required to stay an extra hour for specialized academic programming. Bruin High also offers a supervised afterschool program (from 2:30 to 5:00 p.m.) where all students are welcome to drop in and receive free tutoring, snacks, and access to a computer lab as needed. In addition, students can participate in several extracurricular activities, including a running club, an award-winning mock trial team, athletic teams, and a community service group. A nonprofit, multiservice community-based organization also provides afterschool programming for student athletes.

### *Curriculum and instruction*

The curriculum and pedagogical practices at Bruin High appear to be in close alignment with the school's mission, and contribute to a climate that is efficient and driven. During our visits to Bruin High, for example, we observed classes that employed a myriad of pedagogical approaches, including small group work, minilectures, class discussions, primary document and text analysis, and student-led discussions and presentations. Teachers shared with us that they are able to develop their own curricula, based on the state's benchmarks. In the classes we observed, the vast majority of students appeared to be engaged. They asked thoughtful questions and contributed to class discussions. The majority of students were prepared with appropriate materials, books, notebooks, and backpacks. Despite the fact that the school is a full-inclusion school and that some students are English language learners, in the classrooms we observed, we

were not able to discern which students were receiving specialized services. In addition, several classes we observed were structured like undergraduate college-level seminars, where students were engaging with college-level content and materials, and teaching practices typical of university settings.

During lunch and free times, we observed students socializing in small groups, completing school work, listening to music, being silly, or playing games like chess or Scrabble. Smiles and visible friendships were abundant. Whether students were going from class to class, eating at the cafeteria, or socializing with friends, most appeared to be composed, collected, and purposeful.

As described above, the mission of ensuring that every student receives a college preparatory education was manifested in many aspects of the school's culture. Every interviewee cited the mission of the school as a frame that grounded his or her experiences at Bruin High. In order to achieve this mission, faculty and staff members had identified a set of core values to describe the school culture. These values included (a) high expectations, (b) a commitment to providing a rigorous academic education, (c) respect for each other, and (d) an understanding of the role of education as transformational. Given the four-year cohort graduation rates in SY2012 of 37.5% and 66.7% for Black males and Latino males, respectively, the staff members and faculty acknowledged that there was still a lot of work in front of them. Preparing students to go to college, particularly young men, was not relegated to guidance counselors or specialized programs; rather, it was part of everyone's responsibility in meeting the school's mission.

Without being prompted, Marvin, a 16-year-old sophomore who described himself as Puerto Rican and El Salvadoran, said, "I don't know if it's one of the topics on here, but it's like

my personal connection to the school. It's like what motivates me. It's like I'd be the first one to go to college.” Later in his interview he added:

When you get here, within a week or so you have what you call “advisory,” where you talk to a guidance counselor and all that. And they ask you, “Oh, what do you know about college?” And all this stuff. And then, what I remember we did, we made like a collage using different college-like magazines and made a collage of what you think college is about. And then someone comes in that's actually in college that graduated from the school . . . and tells you, this is what college is actually about. And then they come and talk to you about what you necessarily have to do to ensure yourself to go to college. And then people from [name of organization], which are the financial advisors for college, come in and talk to you about how much [the] cost would be for college, but also if you work hard, you can get scholarships. There's just an overabundance of presence about what college is in the school.

The different aspects of his school life, classes, teachers, and outside organizations, as described by Marvin, reinforce the importance of preparing to go to college for students at Bruin High. Beginning in their first year, students are given the opportunity to learn more about college and the process that one needs to undertake to get there. This work happens at multiple levels—in their classes, with their guidance counselors, and with assistance from outside college-access programs. Marvin concluded, “So, everything they basically do here is, like, for college. They have a purpose for everything.”

In conclusion, it is important to underscore that the faculty and staff fully recognize that living up to the school’s mission is a challenging endeavor. For example, the school has moved four times in four years, they lack adequate equipment and space, and students often arrive with

disrupted educational trajectories or without the academic skills to do high school level work. Teachers recognize that they are doing more than what other schools expect their teachers to do, leading to burnout and tensions with the administration. They are also aware of the academic disparities between males of color and other student populations, and they are not satisfied with their students' results on standardized tests and their college graduation rates. They worry about what lives their students will have once they graduate from Bruin High. Despite these challenges, Dr. Perry, an administrator at Bruin High, reiterates the mission and culture of the school as fully committed to ensuring the students college opportunities:

So, I would like our students to be prepared so that there is no need for remediation. I think [there should be] more work around the marriage between the college and the student. Students pick colleges based on what friends say or what the financial aid package is. I understand all of that. But they end up, some of them end up realizing at the end of the first year [of college], this isn't the right match for me, which means time wasted, more money incurred.

### ***A Culture of Caring Relationships***

Our data demonstrates that personal and caring relationships between students, faculty, and staff members matter, and likely have contributed to the success of Latino male students at Bruin High. The culture of caring relationships at Bruin High that corresponds to the Latin@ cultural value of *personalismo* was identified as a practice that likely contributed to the academic achievement of Latino male students.<sup>11</sup> As a code, we defined *personalismo* to mean “examples

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<sup>11</sup> Our use of the term *personalismo* relates directly to the person-to-person caring relationships we define further in this section. It is not related to any definitions of domination, subordination, and/or tyranny that are used in other literature. This term was selected based on literature we reviewed that best described the sense of *comunidad* (community) that we witnessed at Bruin High. In examining the educational experience of Latin@s, we considered this practice, grounded in the Latin@ cultural tradition, to be very important.

of one-to-one personal and meaningful relationships between Bruin High community members; acknowledgments of the importance of these types of relationships (e.g., students' desire to have special one-to-one attention).” The way we operationalized this term both for coding purposes and as a descriptive term in our case study was grounded in the authentic sense of caring and closeness that individuals had for one another during our observations at Bruin High. This caring and closeness was evident, with the code *personalismo* having a frequency count of 53 excerpts across 18 resource documents and co-occurrence with 123 other codes, making it the most frequently appearing code in our analysis. Our use of this term is grounded in the intentional and authentic one-to-one relationships that help foster a sense of community, trust, and family among its participants.

Although a full discussion of cultural values and beliefs espoused by Latin@ communities is beyond the scope of this study, *personalismo*, as a culturally grounded practice that likely contributes to the success of Latino male students, merits elaboration. Housed within a Latin@ cultural framework that values communalism and interdependence (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Marin & Marin, 1991; Triandis, Brislin, & Hui, 1988), *personalismo* refers to a culturally driven expectation for warm, caring, and reciprocal interpersonal relationships (Collins, 2011; Marin & Marin, 1991; Santiago-Rivera, 2002). Through *personalismo*, trust, respect, loyalty, and personal rapport are built (Santiago-Rivera, 2002). *Personalismo*'s grounding in close personal relationships can pose a challenge to the expectation for professional distance commonly accepted in many public sectors, including schools. The importance of caring relationships between students and teachers has been well studied (Calabrese & Poe, 1991; Fine, 1991; Jordan, Lara, & McPartland, 1996; Valenzuela, 1999). Poor teacher-student relationships have been found to contribute to negative feelings toward school and to students' inclination to drop out of

school (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; Halx & Ortiz, 2011; Jordan et al., 1996; Tidwell, 1988; Turner, Laria, Shapiro, & Perez, 1993). A growing body of literature has identified that the significance of caring relationships with adults may be especially salient to the engagement of Latin@ students (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Collins, 2011; De los Reyes et al., 2008; Flores-González, 2002; Halx & Ortiz, 2011; Hernandez, Cervantes, Castellanos, & Gloria, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999).

At Bruin High, *personalismo* serves as a mechanism through which an ethic of caring is operationalized. We have identified three different forms in which caring is expressed and understood at Bruin High: (a) teachers caring and building personal relationships with students; (b) Latino male students recognizing that teachers care for them; and (c) Latino students caring for each other.

Our code of “caring” was defined as “examples of and/or references to a school culture in which students, faculty, and staff feel respected, trusted, and supported by one another and by the instructor; a general feeling of harmony and goodwill.” This definition was informed by Valenzuela’s examination of caring relationships and how they relate to teacher-student relationships. Valenzuela writes, “*Ser bien educado/a* [To be well educated] is to not only possess book knowledge but to also live responsibly in the world as a caring human being, respectful of the individuality and dignity of others” Valenzuela (1999, p. 91). Our data indicate that this type of *educación* was demonstrated in various ways by both teachers and students.

#### *Teachers caring for students*

When asked what practices at Bruin High likely contributed to the success of Latino male students, all teachers that participated in this study identified that having personal connections and relationships with their students facilitated learning and contributed to a climate of caring.

Investing time in getting to know each student as an individual was the most important way in which teachers showed their care and concern. The vast majority of the faculty reported that they purposefully developed teacher-student relationships that helped foster a teaching and learning environment that was authentic, caring, meaningful, and respectful.

Mr. Farrow is a White, middle-aged male teacher who has been teaching 12th-grade English at the school for 15 years. He demands a lot from his students in terms of effort and critical thinking. He scaffolds learning by providing various ways that students can share their analysis of the readings they do for the class. These readings include theoretical pieces that examine issues such as colonization and domination. When asked what practices he saw as being particularly helpful for Latino male students, Mr. Farrow responded as follows:

I think a lot of it is relationship building. You show them that you're listening to them and that their ideas matter to you, and that you care about what's going on in their lives. I think that matters a lot, with young men of color especially. It should come naturally. I think it does come naturally for a lot of teachers.

In the quote above, Mr. Farrow describes this relationship building as being authentic by listening and validating their ideas while also showing them that you care about them. This authenticity is further validated when he states, “It should come naturally.” This means that caring cannot be a scripted curriculum that teachers regurgitate to students but must be embedded within the emotions and thoughts of true caring toward their students. In response to the stories his Latino male students told, Mr. Farrow modified his curriculum to incorporate their lived experiences. He explained:

What I've added since then is expressive writing sections and narrative writing sections where kids tell me their story and reshape their story. So, that's been a work in progress,

but I've been doing that for some years now. And I think, like, reading where they're at helps me to understand what they need, and it helps me to understand what is going on with their lives.

Teachers described that they often began to build relationships with Latino boys by engaging with students outside of class through extracurricular activities, including attending athletic events, hosting nonacademic events (such as potlucks or film screenings), having one-on-one hall chats, and creating spaces within the class routine where talking about the self mattered. Teachers also spoke of the importance of the quiet moments between the teacher and student where respect and dignity—*respeto y dignidad*—trumped all interactions.

Mr. Clark, a White, middle-aged teacher who has been teaching humanities at the school for the past eight years, reflected on his own commitment to get to know students:

I make a lot of effort to get to know all of my students and just to have, as frequently as I can, conversations with them outside of class that aren't about class, but that are about other things, just finding out what their interests are and things like that. So, I think that that definitely helps.

The presence of caring, personal relationships between teachers and students at Bruin High is compatible with the Latin@ cultural value of *personalismo* and has contributed to the success of Latino male students. As further described in the next sections, Latino male students value these relationships and identify them as an important part of their school experiences.

#### *Students recognize that teachers care about them*

From our interviews with students, we recognized the important role that caring and having personal relationships with their teachers had on both their academic and social well-being. Most of the student participants provided positive views of the teachers, and attributed the

success of Bruin High to them. The following quote from Pablo, a junior at Bruin High, exemplifies this: “The teachers are always asking us if you have any questions or need [help], please talk to us. They're here after school, during lunch and some teachers before school. So, really just whenever you want. . . .” In this quote, the student describes a school culture where the faculty is readily available and prioritizes time for students as their main job. What we observed at Bruin High is commensurate with this student’s depiction of the faculty. Throughout our time at the school, we observed that teachers were consistently available to their students.

When asked what works well for Latino males at Bruin High, Pablo stated:

It's pretty much what the teachers do. The teachers aren't really just here for the paycheck. I feel like they're really here to teach us. Like Ms. [name of teacher], like, talks to me about what works and what doesn't work, and she asks me questions, and she let me lead the discussion a couple of times.

In the quote above, the student recognizes that teachers at Bruin High treat their profession not just as a job that provides an income, but as one that embodies all the positive connotations that come with the word *teacher*. The student perceives that there is a genuine effort made by the teachers to understand how their students learn.

William, a 16-year-old student of Dominican heritage who was born and raised near Bruin High, transferred to the school at the beginning of his sophomore year. He described his previous school as a “nightmare,” where he spent more time out of school than in classes. He said, “I am smart, but I was getting F’s. Skipping, getting into trouble. Here, I don’t even want to skip. I want to go to college. There is no reason to skip.” When asked what the biggest difference between his previous school and Bruin High was, he simply said, “The teachers here, they are cool. They actually care and they know how to teach.” In less than a year at Bruin High, William

transformed himself from an F student to being placed in honors classes and getting A's. These are but a few examples of student descriptions that show how teachers demonstrated care and how that affects students.

There is an authenticity to the Bruin High teachers' relationships with their students. There is an old adage that says, "Students know the teachers that care about them." At Bruin High, the students "know," and they told us.

*Latino students care for each other*

At Bruin High, we observed examples of *hermandad* (brotherhood) between male students. It was a kinship that transcended race, as we saw boys of the same and different races caring for one another. This kinship supported what researchers found in other studies about Latino boys when they stated that, "while this theme of emotional intimacy in friendships has been echoed by most of the hundreds of boys in our studies over the past two decades, it has been particularly evident among Latinos" (Way, Santos, & Cordero, 2012, p. 256). We offer as evidence the following vignette from our observations toward the end of a math class at Bruin High.

*“I got a full ride”*

It was first period at Bruin High and a cool spring morning. Many of the most competitive universities are the last to notify their applicants about admittance, so many students had yet to hear back from their “reach” colleges. In calculus, Ms. Neden, a middle-aged woman of color, told us that she believes in her students’ abilities to succeed and offers as much assistance as possible to them, in and out of class. Ms. Neden is firm in her classroom management but demonstrates an authentic caring for her students. Her expectations for her students are high, and she requires students to play an active role in solving problems on the board. The class has a college seminar or study-group feel to it, with Ms. Neden playing more the role of a facilitator throughout the class than a deliverer of knowledge. Hers is a great example of a constructivist classroom.

With active and constructivist participation by students and teacher, the class finished a few minutes early. As the students were packing up their belongings, one student looked around and made the following announcement: “I got a full ride to [name of university]!” Instantly, all of the boys stopped what they were doing and turned their heads to this student and began to congratulate him.

“What?!” one student exclaimed. “That’s dope!” another student shouted out. All the while, students were “high-fiving” him, hugging him, and shaking his hand, telling him “Congrats!” The teacher smiled and said, “They really care for each other.”

Throughout this exchange, we could sense an *hermandad*, or kinship, that was shared among the students in the class. There were no students who demonstrated disinterest or jealousy,

just a display of authentic caring and love for one another as young men and students. It supported the findings of previous research on Latino boys that showed that they

. . . value their male friendships greatly and see them as critical to their mental health not because their friends are worthy opponents in the competition for manhood, but because they are able to share their thoughts and feelings—their deepest secrets—with these friends. (Way et al., 2012, p. 256)

This depiction of males of color showing kinship and love for one another, especially Black and Brown males, is one that is not often reported or described in the dominant narrative. Instead, more often than not, Black and Brown males are depicted as criminal, violent, and emotionally distant (Noguera, 2008), and they are tagged with a coded racist terminology hiding behind a color-blind rhetoric that maintains a negative perception of people of color (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Haney-López, 2014). Yet the research shows that the vast majority of Black and Brown males do not fit this description, and their negative depiction is a leading contributor to frequent disproportionate and punitive disciplinary and legal enforcement practices (Conchas, 2006; Conchas & Vigil, 2012; Noguera, 2008, 2012; Way et al., 2012). Due to the limitations of our study, we were unable to see if this *hermandad* was prevalent across the majority of the male students at Bruin High, but we certainly saw examples as in the vignette above.

The theme of *personalismo* was the most salient one that existed between faculty, staff members, and students in different combinations. It was a practice that likely contributed to the relative success of Latino male students at Bruin High. As noted by Collins (2011), the presence of *personalismo* is “an indicator of academic success for Latino students as it provides a culturally based foundation for learning.” We contend that *personalismo* is important because it counters the suspicion and fear that many Black and Brown males experience due to a racist,

negative stereotype of them that is portrayed in the dominant discourse. The students' and teachers' development of such a counternarrative through the culture of *personalismo* at Bruin High may explain, in part, its Latino male students' relative success.

***High Expectations: “We need to do better”***

At this point, I cannot say that there are any practices in particular geared toward Latino males outside of an awareness that we need to do better. (Dr. Beverly Perry, Bruin High administrator)

While acknowledging there is a lack of intentionality by gender and ethnicity, Dr. Perry's statement also exemplifies the high expectations she and others at Bruin High have for their students. Other adults at the school also expressed the sentiment that they should be doing better. Despite their school having been selected as one that was doing comparatively well by its Latino males, the interviewees did not feel that they had reached the level of success they wanted for their students, especially for Black and Brown boys. If one assesses success by results on the MCAS, the state's high-stakes standardized tests, the school's Latino males posted higher proficiency rates than the district averages in both ELA and math. One hundred percent of all Bruin High students who took the MCAS ELA test, including 11 Black and 13 Latino males, scored proficient, significantly above the district average for all students (64%) and for Black and Latino males (59.7% and 58.4%, respectively). In math, Latino males had a higher proficiency rate (61.5%) than the average for all Bruin High students and for BPS Latino males (52.6%). Black males, on the other hand, performed worse than the Bruin High average of 57.4% (33.3%) and that of BPS Black males (48.8%).

The majority of teachers in our study had high expectations of their students. As a code, “Teachers' High Expectations” had one of our highest frequency counts (27), while appearing

across eight of our documents. Below is an exchange with Mr. Farrow that exemplifies how students, including Latino boys, were thought of by teachers:

**A:** I think the high challenge is something that the males sort of get engaged in.

**Q:** *The high-challenge work?*

**A:** High-challenge work, but also choice. Their exercise in high-challenge work is an expression of themselves. So, they're crafting their own original response to a text; their own original thesis is the kind of competitive thing that sort of gets young men going, and certainly, young Latino men, in my experience.

In the excerpt above, Mr. Farrow presents this “high-challenge work” as a choice that is relevant to his students’ lives. Several teachers consciously sought ways to make their classrooms high challenge and relevant to the lives of their students. Teachers expect a lot from their students while also scaffolding their learning through the development of caring, personal relationships with them. Mr. Farrow has also noted the use of competition as a method for reaching boys. Below, he expands on this by providing an example of how this “academic competition” plays out for boys:<sup>12</sup>

I remember a colleague describing to me, maybe three young Latino males some years ago, sort of playing ball with him on the weekend and trash-talking to each other's thesis, like, “I got the better thesis.” So, it wasn't about the game, it was—or like the high-level academic skills was another kind of game in which to sort of exercise your power and your strength. So, I think choice and creativity, along with the challenge. If I just challenged the students without giving them authentic choice in what to bring to the table, it wouldn't work.

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<sup>12</sup> Academic competition is a motivating technique not just for boys, but also for girls.

The three boys in Mr. Farrow's example view academic knowledge not only as a source of power, but also as something driven by their own agency that they want to utilize and show off. This shifts notions of academic knowledge as being "soft" to one of its having strength and power.

Teachers' perceptions of Brown boys at Bruin High were positive and asset based. Ms. Rivera, a Latina Spanish teacher, said: "I think for the majority, I think the Latino males that are in the school, they're very goal oriented. They want something out of their lives. They have goals and dreams, and they share [them] with you." Ms. Rivera, in this quote and in her interview, described a closer understanding of her Latino male students, given their common heritage, and she recognized that a majority were driven to do well. Her views are consistent with the literature, which shows that students of color have high aspirations for themselves (P. L. Carter, 2005; Conchas, 2006; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2006).

### ***"Tough Love"***

As previously mentioned, Black and Brown male faculty members were underrepresented at Bruin High in relation to the student population and to the district averages. We interviewed and observed one teacher who identified with the students, Mr. Reed. He is a middle-aged Black man with 12 years' teaching experience, and he has been teaching at Bruin High for three years. His approach to teaching is a stern one, where he announces to his students, "Look, guys, I'm not going to judge you from what happened last year, but I've been hearing it a lot. It's over. It's done. All the knucklehead nonsense, I'm not putting up with that junk. It's done." In this quote, the stern aspect is noticeable, but there is also a sense of starting with a clean slate by informing the students that he will not judge them from what he has heard, only on what he will see moving forward. To set this quote more in context, Mr. Reed went on to inform us that

he also informs the students, “Those of you who want to learn, you're in the right place. Those who don't want to learn, you are going to have the worst year of your life unless you get on point.” This quote is representative of other data sources that showed Mr. Reed’s “tough love” stance toward his students. When he points out that those who want to learn are in the right place, he does not juxtapose it with “those who don’t want to learn are in the wrong place.” He simply states that they will have a difficult time (“the worst year of [their] life”) while in his class. This “will not quit on the kids” mentality, coupled with “tough love,”<sup>13</sup> is informed, at least in part, by Mr. Reed’s high expectations for the success of his students and the school.

Through all this tough love, Mr. Reed talks about his students like they were his own kids when he states, “I get on them, because to me there is not much difference between them and my biological kids.” Mr. Reed extends these relationships with his students even after they leave Bruin High. During the interview, he describes one of his former students: “That's my man. We hang out. He comes to my house for Christmas. Some of my other students too, because I stay in touch with them. They call me to hang out for Christmas dinner, a bunch of them.” Spending holidays with students is not uncommon for Mr. Reed, despite his sternness in his class. Students clearly know the teachers that care about them.

This tough love was informed by the high expectations that Mr. Reed had for all of his students, but especially for the Black and Brown male students in his class. He knew firsthand what it meant to be a young black man growing up and going to school in a similar community. Throughout his interview, Mr. Reed drew often from his own experience and acknowledged its importance in his being able to relate to his students.

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that tough love is still love, and this is what Mr. Reed had for his students.

***A Challenge: “Why haven’t you?”***

We began this section with a quote from the leadership that acknowledged a lack of specific attention given to Latino males. Teachers who had been at the school for several years acknowledged repeatedly that, although they knew their students, they knew little about their culture, language, and community. For example, Mr. Morris, a middle-aged White science teacher who has been at Bruin High for nine years, shared:

The cultural is probably the area that I need to develop the most in. Like, I’m not real deep in it, but I know I need to get more deep. So, that’s an area I need to get more deep in, because I don’t specifically talk about, from real knowledge about each individual child. I want to get better at that, like understanding each kid more, like their background, their growing up. That’s like what I plan to do, like, in summers, like just read more about that. But I don’t feel like I’m really as good as I want to be in that area, in really understanding the Latino culture. I learned bits and pieces, but I haven’t made a real study of it. And I think that will help me. That will help me have a better practice with the kids.

In the quote above, Mr. Morris acknowledged, as had the leadership, that he needed to have a better understanding of his students’ cultures and communities. Yet, there were only minimal connections to the communities where students lived, despite the significant number of years that many of the teachers had been teaching at the school. While Bruin High teachers are committed to and devote enormous time and energy to the school’s students, our evidence shows that there remain both a need and an interest for them to learn more about the students. The staff members’ collective drive for high expectations of all students must include learning about the communities and cultures that the students come from, live in, and return to after they leave Bruin High.

## Conclusion

We began this case study by asking the following questions:

- What practices are evident in Bruin High that likely contribute to the success of Black and Latino males?
- What are the perspectives and experiences of education within the Black and Latin@ communities of “high flyer” schools?

Throughout this paper, we have attempted to answer both questions. The practices that likely contributed to the success of Black and Latino males included providing a school climate and culture that promotes a place where much is expected and much is done to help students succeed. It is a place where authentic, caring relationships are encouraged and supported. And it is a place where high expectations are placed on students and teachers alike in an honest way. Yet, a deeper understanding of the Latin@ experience, let alone the Latino male experience, was minimal at best, and evident in only a few isolated quarters across the school.

Bruin High is a special place where truly committed adults make a difference in the lives of their students. However, the absence of an honest discussion about race, except in some notable pockets, has resulted in a color-blind mentality that can sustain a dominant discourse of how we talk about a people. For example, adults and students alike often used the word “Spanish” to describe Latin@ students. This term is dated, and relegates Latin@s to a language and lineage from Spain. Mislabeled Latin@s in this way only compounds the issue of colonization that many Latin@s endured in their countries of origin. This does not mean that the Spanish language is not valued in the Latin@ community, or that some students may not have strong connections to Spain, but characterizing an entire, growing population according to a single language and/or country of colonization ignores the enormous diversity in heritage and customs that is the

Latin@ diaspora. By addressing the issue of race more openly and honestly, Bruin High could truly reach the high expectations it has set for itself.

# **Black Male Achievement at Hilltop High School: Effectiveness Requiring More Intentionality**

Daren Graves\*

## **Introduction**

Hilltop High School (HHS) is a large, comprehensive high school composed of four small learning communities—an exclusive ninth-grade academy and three other academies for 10th through 12th graders.<sup>14</sup> Hilltop’s mission statement prioritizes both a supportive community and college preparation:

[School name] is committed to providing a personal and engaging high school experience, leading to life-long academic and civic excellence. By creating an inclusive community and offering challenging curricula, we empower our students to be successful in their post-secondary education and beyond.

Students echoed this positive mission statement with descriptions of the emotional and relational environment of the school as being safe and a place of belonging:

I just feel like I can come here and I’m just free from the outside world. . . . Sometimes I feel like I can just get away from the outside world and just focus on school and do what I got to do and just be successful in life. . . . I mean violence is everywhere, but just like people shooting each other on the street, robbing, just a whole bunch of crazy stuff in the world. I feel like school is like a more secure place, like a more safer place. (Keon, 11th-grade student)

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\*Daren Graves is the son of African American parents who made education the top priority in his life. He is currently an Associate Professor of Education at Simmons College in Boston, Massachusetts. He is grateful to be married with three brilliant daughters.

<sup>14</sup> Pseudonyms are used for all subjects, programs, schools, and locations in this study.

In contrast to the positive feelings that students expressed about the school, the building itself is large and imposing, and was alternately described as like a church or a prison by Black male students. The prisonlike description was supported by our observations of students entering the school in the morning. We saw long lines of students filing through a windowless hallway to be screened by the school's security apparatus, which includes a metal detector, three police officers, and two security guards.

### *School Context*

During SY2012, HHS served over 1,000 students, of whom 46.5% were Black, 44.2% were Latin@, 5.4% were White, and 3.9% were multiracial, Asian, or Native American, roughly matching BPS high school averages.

There were 72 FTE teachers in SY2012, for a student-teacher ratio of 16.8:1, higher than the district average of 13.6:1. HHS also had a less diverse staff than BPS averages: 13.9% of HHS teachers were Black, while in BPS as a whole, 25.2% of high school teachers were Black. One-third of HHS's teacher population was male, slightly lower than the BPS average of 42.5%. Among its male teachers, 29.2% were Black, which matched the BPS average. HHS had one Latino male teacher, although around two-thirds of its administrators and paraprofessional staff were Black or Latino males.

In SY2012, Hilltop had a larger proportion of students from low-income households, as measured by eligibility for free and reduced-price lunch (FRL) (83.8%) than the district average (77.2%). Black males had a slightly higher low-income rate (77.4%) than the district's Black male average (76.5%), and Latino males had a higher low-income rate (85.0%) than the district's Latino male average (75.5%). HHS had a slightly lower rate of total students with disabilities (18.2%) and of Black and Latino male students with disabilities (27.4% and 17.9%, respectively)

than the averages for the district. The school's ELL population (35.1%) was higher than the BPS high school average (23.4%).

On student engagement indicators, Hilltop's Black and Latino attendance rates roughly paralleled the school's overall rate of 82.7%, which was two percentage points lower than the BPS average. HHS's out-of-school suspension rate (17.1%) was higher than the district high school average of 4.2%, and while HHS Latino males had roughly the same suspension rate as the school average, the Black males' rate was 27.7%, more than four times higher than the BPS Black male average (6.8%).

In terms of academic outcomes, HHS had similar MCAS ELA and math proficiency rates both overall and for its Black and Latino male populations compared to district averages. Notably, HHS Black males had a higher proficiency rate in math (54.2%) than the school average (49.3%), while the district average for Black males, at 48.8%, was lower than the district average for all students (53.6%). MassCore completion rates for HHS Black and Latino males roughly matched the school average (6.3%), which was significantly lower than the BPS average of 19.9%.

Hilltop had a cohort dropout rate (26.5%) similar to the BPS average. The Black male average also aligned with the district average, while the Latino male average, at 36.8%, was nine percentage points higher than the BPS Latino male average. HHS had an overall lower graduation rate (60.7%) than the district average (66.9%), although both its Latino and Black male graduation rates were higher than the district's respective averages. The Black male graduation rate, at 73.3%, significantly exceeded Hilltop's total rate and the BPS average for Black males (63.6%). The school was chosen for case study because of its relative success with

Black male students. Table 6 summarizes the quantitative data about students and teachers at Hilltop compared to the district high school grades as a whole.

Table 6

*Hilltop High School Student and Teacher Data*

		Hilltop High School			BPS – High School		
		Total	Black Male	Latino Male	Total	Black Male	Latino Male
Student Demographics	Student Population (N)	1,212	296	319	14,725	3,594	3,006
	Student Population (%)		24.4	26.3		24.4	20.4
	ELL (%)	35.1	17.6	52.4	23.4	16.7	34.4
	FRL (%)	83.8	77.4	85	77.2	76.5	75.5
	Special Education (%)	18.2	27.4	17.9	22.6	31.4	23.9
Student Engagement	Attendance (%)	82.7	82.4	81.4	84.6	84.9	82.4
	Out-of-School Suspensions (%)	17.1	27.7	16.9	4.2	6.8	4.4
Student Outcomes	MCAS ELA Proficiency (%)	64.4	59.2	51	64	59.7	58.4
	MCAS Math Proficiency (%)	49.3	54.2	38.8	53.6	48.8	52.6
	MassCore Completion (%)	6.3 (N = 14)	7.0 (N = 4)	6.1 (N = 3)	19.9	16.3	13.1
	Cohort Dropout (%)	26.5	25	36.8	24.2	27.5	28
	Cohort Graduation (%)	60.7	73.3	60.3	66.9	63.6	57.6
Teacher Demographics	Teacher Population (N)	72	7	1	885	113	34
	Student/Teacher Ratio	16.8:1			16.6:1		

***Theoretical Framework***

In our analysis of the qualitative data, we utilized both deductive and inductive lenses. For a deductive lens, we employed critical race theory (CRT) (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Concepts such as “color-blind racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003), “racial realism” (Bell, 1992), and “interest-convergence” (Bell, 1980) helped us foreground ways in which race and racism are relevant and normal in today’s society, even though interpersonal, explicit racism is less

tolerated than it has been historically. Bonilla-Silva (2003) defines color-blind racism as the covert circulation of racist ideas through the extension of abstract liberalism (e.g., centralizing issues of agency, choice, and effort) and the naturalization of racial behaviors. Bell (1992) defines racial realism as a mindset that foregrounds the indelible impacts racism has had on people of color that thereby allows them “to avoid despair, and frees [them] to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph” (p. 374). Bell (1980) describes the concept of interest-convergence as the process whereby the interests of those without power or privilege to achieve equality will be accommodated by those with power only when it best serves the latter’s interests. Throughout our data analysis, these concepts informed by CRT emerged as partially explaining the school culture and its academic outcomes for males of color.

In terms of an inductive lens, we looked for unanticipated themes or topics that seemed common across the qualitative data collected. We paid particular attention to themes that were consistent between student and teacher interviews and the interview and observation data.

## **Themes**

The themes that emerged from the data begin to, but do not completely, explain the school’s relative success with Black male students. The school has a supportive environment for all students in that structures are in place to foster their academic and general well-being. These structures include supports for struggling students and athletes, many of whom are Black and Latino males. However, using the lens of critical race theory, we begin our presentation of themes by discussing the school’s lack of explicit discussion and design around students’ racial identities. This lack of intentionality about race, coupled with a description of the identities imposed upon Black and Latino males, presents an area of opportunity for improvement for the

school and sets the stage for the other two themes, possible explanations of why Black males at Hilltop do better than their district counterparts.

### *Lack of Intentionality Around Issues of Race*

A 10th-grade, self-identified Haitian student named Andy shared that discussions about race do not happen at Hilltop:

*Q: Now, I'm going to ask about race at school. Do you guys ever discuss race at school, here at Hilltop?*

**A:** No.

*Q: Not at all, not in your classes?*

**A:** No.

*Q: So, the answer is just no?*

**A:** No.

The exchange is indicative of the sentiments that both students and teachers put forth when asked about the ways that issues of race were directly engaged in at Hilltop High. The key stakeholders at Hilltop High were quite open in stating that the school did not, with any intentionality, institute any practices to address issues of race, much less discuss Black or Latino boys specifically. In fact, Dr. Grayson, the principal, and other members of the leadership team expressed surprise that they were identified as one of the system's schools that was producing comparatively good achievement results by Black males. Dr. Grayson wondered "what data they're relying on to suggest that this is the case, so we can celebrate and build on it."

### *Adult perspectives about intentionality*

While the teachers and administrators did not cite any policies or practices geared toward facilitating the success of their Black and Latino boys, their words did indicate that they

recognized the presence and importance of Latino and Black boys in their school. The teachers and administrators saw their student body as primarily composed of Black and Latin@ students, and framed their work as aiming to meet the needs of their entire student body (i.e., not geared toward specific groups of students on the basis of race or gender). Dr. Grayson described the difference in intentionality around addressing the needs of Black and Latino males between his position at Hilltop and his previous one at a suburban school. He related that there were more-targeted and intentional initiatives at the suburban school, where Black and Latino males were a minority. According to Dr. Grayson, at Hilltop, where Blacks and Latin@s represent the majority of the school population, the approach is different:

There [was] more of a conscious discussion around race and around socioeconomic differences [in the suburban school] than here. It was an additional part of the work. Here [at Hilltop] it's the work. So, that whole conversation—the whole conversation here is just different. It doesn't feel like this is “in addition to,” this *is* what we're doing.

Dr. Grayson admits the lack of a specific push around Black and Latino males at Hilltop because of the predominance of Blacks and Latin@s in the school. Mr. Bryant, an African American science teacher who is also a member of the Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), expressed a sense that, while the teaching staff was aware of race and ethnicity in the lives of their students and the school, rarely if ever was this a lens through which they talked about or delivered student support:

Unfortunately, because the school's population is higher in African Americans and Dominicans, Haitian kids or Hispanic kids tend to be the ones that stand out. But as far as addressing that, . . . even though they try to be understanding of the situation, they don't address it necessarily per race. They address it per student. . . . They try to resolve

whatever the problem that the child is having. And I think that's best. I don't think that going after particular ethnic groups because of their ethnic groups, you're stereotyping there but for the wrong reasons. But I think that if it is taken care of in a just way, you can still address that kid's deficits and try to get them to come back into the fold. And I think that's part of the thing that they do here that's very efficient.

Mr. Bryant's response captures his sense of how and whether to talk about race as teachers and administrators. Mr. Bryant supports this color-blind approach because of his concerns of "stereotyping . . . for the wrong reasons." What remains unclear, in this case, is whether Mr. Bryant feels that excluding race as a lens is a good strategy overall, or whether he avoids it for fear of counterproductive racial stereotyping.

The leader of the ILT, Ms. Jones, also describes a lack of intentionality around targeting Black and Latino males, especially as it relates to gender issues or identities. She states:

I have to say, I don't think we've done a ton of specifically looking at boys versus girls. . . . I know we really try to push all the students. We're obviously aware that there is a crisis with Black and Latino boys. But I've never really seen us make a specific push around Black and Latino boys. . . . I do think that—I mean, if you look across over the history, we've definitely had more girls in the honors and the AP classes, and that's something that we're aware of and something we've been sort of working on, not as a concerted effort, but I think a lot of teachers are aware of that and how do we push more boys into that.

While Ms. Jones expresses that she and the teaching staff are increasingly aware of gender-based differences in students' experiences and the "crisis [facing] Black and Latino boys,"

generally, she is unable to name a way in which the teaching staff does anything to address assets or needs by race or gender.

*Student perspectives about intentionality*

Students experienced the teaching staff's lack of intentionality around programming for Black and Latino males as a lack of opportunities to engage with such issues in their classes with their teachers. Keon, an African American who is the star running back for Hilltop's football team, answered, "No, we don't cover that," when asked if teachers ever encouraged him or others to discuss or engage issues of race or culture in class.

Keon, along with other students interviewed, did identify times and ways in which issues of race were engaged in classrooms. These occurrences were often informally initiated and navigated by the students themselves. Keon recalls that:

Sometimes it's like a little debate . . . we'll be in class and a Spanish group of boys and girls will start talking Spanish, and a student will say something like, "This is America, speak English," or something like that, and then they'll kind of be back and forth.

This scenario, in which Spanish-speaking students are challenged by other students (presumably with English proficiency) to "speak English" in class, indicates both that students' engagement of issues of race was not planned or frequent, and that teachers were not involved in either the initiation or facilitation of such conversations. Alex, an 11th-grade Haitian student for whom Haitian Creole is his first language, also stated that he never experienced teachers initiating conversations or lessons on race. He described the ways that he experienced students initiating such conversations in school:

**A:** No. Honestly, like the thing about race is we just make fun of each other sometimes.

*Q: Is it a playful making fun of each other, or can it be harsh in terms of making fun of each other?*

**A:** I never feel it that way.

*Q: It's playful you think?*

**A:** Yeah, playful.

*Q: When you say each other, who are the each other? Who are the different groups here?*

**A:** Latin@s and Blacks, Asians, everybody, every nation.

Alex indicates that the race talk that happens between students at Hilltop is “playful” banter between students of different racial backgrounds. While we cannot speculate on whether others might also characterize the banter as playful, his answer seems to indicate that the conversations were informal and independent of the teacher’s influence or planning.

While Hilltop’s teachers rarely engaged in discussions of race or focused on Black and Latino males specifically, some students did identify pockets where teachers were attempting to forge connections between Hilltop’s students’ racial and ethnic contexts. Robi, a first-generation Dominican 10th grader, described an experience in his biology class as follows:

In biology, the teacher showed a film of the time in Santo Domingo when Trujillo was alive and the dictator, about the Mirabal sisters, and all of that. That interested me a lot, and like our history teacher was telling us, the Blacks there were considered slaves. I didn’t know that, in Santo Domingo, Haitians were considered an inferior race. Trujillo had them on another side.

Robi describes an opportunity to study the racial politics of his native Dominican Republic.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately, this opportunity was the exception rather than the norm in his classes.

Possible explanations for the avoidance of explicit discussion about race did not include a lack of awareness of the nuances of race and ethnicity, but rather (a) a reluctance to use a deficit lens to portray Black males; (b) an assumption that Latin@s were English language learners; and (c) a segregation of the students in people's minds as either immigrants or nonimmigrants. We therefore describe how Black and Latino males were conceived of by teachers at Hilltop.

### *Black males at Hilltop*

While Hilltop was identified as a school doing well by Black boys, and there was a prevailing sense of a lack of intentionality of engaging issues of race, teachers at the school did think about race and were able to articulate an overarching construction of Black males.

In terms of Black boys, African American boys who are born here especially, I feel like, obviously, when I was teaching ninth grade I was dealing with and teaching these students a lot. The ones who were struggling the most were again, the ones who couldn't read very well and had already kind of given up on themselves in terms of school. So, for them it was a lot of confidence building. . . . A lot of scaffolding, support strategies.

English as a second language (ESL) teacher Ms. Davis's words indicate an awareness of some of the diversity at Hilltop in terms of immigrants and U.S.-born Blacks. Her words indicate that she has a specific frame for how she views the experiences of African Americans, specifically. Among the teaching staff that we interviewed, African American boys were often framed as "struggling" or "problems." In the following excerpt, Ms. Jones describes a credit recovery program for students in their junior and senior years:

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<sup>15</sup> Robi came to the United States from the Dominican Republic when he was nine years old.

So, we went through the list. We had a long list. We went through the transcripts. We narrowed it down. We gave out passes. The kids showed up. And, oh my God, every single one, except for one girl, was a Black male. It wasn't planned that way.

In creating a credit recovery program, Hilltop stumbled into creating programming for Black males, but without initial intentionality. The school accidentally uncovered a disproportionate outcome, being behind on high school credits, for Black males. This outcome is the result of “color-blind racism,” or how racist outcomes can be produced without the intentionality of overt interpersonal or structural racism. Color-blind racism is defined as an “ideology [that] . . . explains contemporary racial inequality as the outcome of nonracial dynamics” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 2). The credit recovery program, while created with a color-blind approach, turned out to serve Black males almost exclusively.

While the teaching staff constructed Black boys, and African American boys in particular, as “academically struggling” or “behavior problems,” they had been making initial moves to tackle the problem more intentionally while trying to move away from a deficit lens of viewing Black boys. Dr. Grayson reflected on the school’s review of their suspension data from the previous year:

So, last year, [in] ninth and 10th grade, [we had the] highest in the district, suspensions. And then you peel back the layers and look at who it is. Those subgroups that I mentioned, by and large boys, by and large Black and Latino boys, Black boys on IEPs. So, I see that as a systems failure. It's not about, as some people with that kind of mindset might suggest, “it's who they're sending.” No, it's our inability to engage and connect with them. The suspensions are just a manifestation of our inability to do that.

Dr. Grayson realizes that the behavior problems manifested among his Black (and Latino) male students may have been a function of his teaching staff's inability to identify the teaching and learning issues with regard to this population. Addressing teachers' skills in engaging and connecting with Black and Latino male students is a potential solution.

### *Latino males at Hilltop*

Although the school staff acknowledged the "crisis" of Black and Latino males in terms of educational outcomes nationally as well as in their school, they constructed Latino males differently than they did Black males. Ms. Thompson, a ninth-grade guidance counselor, expressed a particular type of understanding of Latino students by ethnicity.

**A:** I can definitely say that I think the Dominican kids have a really hard time.

**Q:** *Say more about that. Why do you think that is?*

**A:** I don't know what it is. Again, it's not all of them, not to generalize. But I don't know if there is that—it could be their background in education. It could be that they didn't have the most—the best education, early education. It could be the communities that they come from here in Boston. But it just seems like they are sometimes the kids who have it the hardest. . . . But I think there is a big Dominican population in Boston, too. So, maybe that's kind of why. It feels like it's harder for them, that they're involved in more of the outside, negative things outside of here.

Ms. Thompson's description of Dominican students sheds light on a deficit perspective that Latin@ students may have to navigate.

While there was ample evidence in the interview data that the teaching staff recognized diversity among Latin@s at Hilltop, our analysis revealed that asking or talking about Latin@ students often triggered a conversation or thoughts about students who are either English

language learners or recent immigrants. Hilltop is a school with a large Latin@ ELL population. But the ELL population is representative of more than just Latin@s, which the teachers seemed to recognize. However, teaching staff rhetorically conflated “Latin@” students with “ESL” or “immigrant.” Mr. Bryant conflates Hispanic and ELL teachers:

And just to say something very quickly about the Hispanics, the ESL teachers, these ESL teachers at this school do something that I've never seen before. The school year is out. It was over. They're in the summer. They literally will go to [Dominican Republic], spend the summer there. They'll go to Spain. They literally immerse themselves into the culture, so that when they come back here, if a kid is doing something, they say, okay, I understand that. . . . So, you have teachers here who go really above and beyond to educate the student at all levels. But I think that most of the teachers here are really dedicated to educating all students, particularly those of minority, the Haitians and the Dominicans or the Cape Verdeans.

In this example, we can see the way Mr. Bryant ends his answer, recognizing the racial and ethnic diversity of the ELL population in the school. However, his answer starts off by referencing “Hispanic kids” and the over-the-summer work that “the ESL teachers” do to meet their students’ learning needs. Mr. Bryant refers to Spanish-speaking countries as places that the teachers traveled to. We saw this rhetorical “Latin@,” “ESL,” “immigrant” relationship in most of the teaching staff interviews. While the way that teachers discuss Latin@ students is problematic, the ways that the teaching staff also talked about the multiple forms of diversity within the Latin@ community at Hilltop indicates that the teaching staff had a nuanced view of the diversity of their Latin@ students’ experiences.

### *ESL/immigration status*

Marcos, an older Honduran ninth grader who recently immigrated to the United States, described how he ended up at Hilltop:

Well, since I had the problem with immigration, they took me and they told me that I had to study. My father made himself responsible that I came over; they told him that I needed to study. They gave us the papers where we could go. We went, they told us where we could go, the schools that spoke Spanish, because initially, well I don't know much [English] now, but I know a little bit, but when I came I didn't know anything. I needed a school where they spoke Spanish, and where I went to leave the papers [at registration], they told me about [school name], that it was near us and they spoke Spanish.

From our interviews with students and teachers, as well as our observation data, it was clear that Hilltop serves a substantial population of students for whom English is not their first language. Hilltop has developed the reputation of being a school that is welcoming to Spanish-speaking, if not other, recent immigrants to Boston.

In the previous section we showed the ways that the label “ESL” was often, sometimes inappropriately, connected to the experiences of Latin@ students. We asked both students and teachers about the ways in which students of different racial or ethnic backgrounds might be interacting socially, academically, or otherwise. While our questions tended to focus on race and ethnicity, the students and teachers at Hilltop were more likely to respond in terms of English language proficiency as the characteristic most likely to cause segregation among students. Mr. Bryant has a perception that students who are recent immigrants tend to be more motivated academically; the teaching staff in general regarded ELL students as relatively more

academically driven than their peers. Like Mr. Bryant, Ms. Davis expressed a sense that the ESL students had an exceptional drive to succeed academically:

I'm trying to think back to the eight years I taught ninth grade, because I feel like so many of my ESL students really feel and have that desire to learn. They can see how relevant it is for them. When I was teaching ninth grade, I had a lot more of a challenge to help the students to see the relevance of their education, how it could be important in their lives. And that's why every day it's like, how can we get students to see how education can help them?

In other words, Ms. Davis and other teachers seemed to indicate in words and in actions a commitment to meeting ESL students where they are academically and moving them forward to meet higher standards. A field note excerpt from an observation of an ESL class at Hilltop also demonstrates a teacher working to meet the needs of her students:

Class is now engaged in a read-aloud. "Do you know what 'go mad' means? It means to go crazy," Ms. Brown says in response to female student (brown skinned) who is reading a passage aloud. As female student reads aloud, other students in the class read along with "The Boy with Striped Pajamas." Now another female student reads aloud while other students read/listen along. Ms. Brown stops the reading after 2 minutes and asks clarifying questions. "Have you ever had a time when your parents told you not to laugh at someone if you don't know their story?" Ms. Brown asks. "Yes, I used to laugh at old people," male student says. . . . "I want to see you working with someone and talking in English," Ms. Brown says to the class as they work on worksheet she has just handed out.

The ESL teacher engages her students in authentic literacy activities to build English proficiency and comprehension, pacing the activity and pausing to gauge her students'

comprehension, and accessing students' prior knowledge to build understanding of the text. In other words, we saw parallels between the aspects of the ESL classes that students indicated they appreciated/helped their learning and the practices we observed in ESL classrooms.

In summary, while students and teachers were likely to describe ways that ESL students were socially and academically isolated from their peers with greater language proficiency, teachers regarded ESL students as highly motivated to succeed academically relative to their U.S.-born counterparts. This high regard for the motivation of Hilltop's ESL students seemed consistent with the teaching practices we observed for ESL students and the ways the ESL students themselves characterized their satisfaction with the ESL classes.

### *Academic Supports and Interventions*

The second prominent theme demonstrated the ways in which teachers supported the positive development and academic achievement of Black and Latino males. In addition to critical race theory, we utilized an inductive lens to allow unanticipated themes to arise from a rigorous and close reading of the participants' interview data. What emerged from this level of analysis was a set of practices that were identified and corroborated across and between student interviews, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. In addition to strong teaching practices, the strategies most frequently mentioned were the school's case management system and an array of afterschool programs. For example, Alex, an 11th-grade Haitian student, shared his opinion of good teaching:

**A:** My favorite teacher since freshman year, Ms. Quartz.

**Q:** *And what was the class and why was this person your favorite teacher?*

**A:** She was very nice and she never leaves you behind. She will stay and help you. She will never leave you behind. There are a lot of things about her. She pushes you to do the work. She gets anything that she needed to get done, done on time so you may have free time. She got control of everything. . . . There are days that we work together and there are days you work by yourself just to see the level that you are at. It's always good to help your peers to get to the same level. That's how it is basically.

### *Case management system*

Similar to the credit recovery program and the ESL teaching practices discussed in the first theme, these supports, while not designed to focus on Black and Latino males, ended up doing so. One practice that all teachers spoke about in detail as contributing to the academic well-being of Black and Latino students was the case management system, in which teachers referred students most in need of academic supports to a team for discussion and potential assignment of supports. Dr. Grayson explained the system:

We come together to talk about students whom we're concerned about. And that's the formal mechanism where we come share out. Like, "I thought little Johnny—here is what I'm seeing happening, and I've had success doing this with him," or reaching out to this person or whatever. . . . Teachers who are . . . struggling with a student, bring the information to Guidance and say, can you help me strategize around what we might do? Well, let me grab this other teacher. Little Johnny is doing well in this class, so let's see if we can't put something together. So, that happens informally and frequently, but we meet twice a month, sometimes once a month depending on what's going on.

This case management system is a formal and informal process of teachers and counselors collaborating around specific students' learning needs. Mr. Bryant, the biology

teacher, regards the case management system as a way to keep students from slipping through the cracks:

So, all of these measures are put in place to try to catch kids who fall by the wayside.

And it's depending upon the teachers to, first of all, see the kids who have fallen by the wayside and address it during Case Management, and then bring it to here and hopefully we can resolve it. . . . So, that's our effort in trying to catch the kids before they fall through the cracks. If the teachers don't say anything . . . that's more of a reflection of us than it is on the child.

### *Afterschool tutoring programs*

Robust afterschool tutoring programs were another key practice that the teaching staff at Hilltop identified as having a high impact for Black and Latino males. When we conducted our observations at the school, we received a schedule that showed the official school day as six periods. A seventh, afterschool period also appeared on the schedule. In the course of our observations, we noticed that most students did not leave school at the end of six periods. Rather, the afterschool period felt very much like an authentic seventh period of school. Teachers and students identified three different afterschool tutoring programs, staffed by stipended Hilltop teachers. One program is geared toward helping students who were at risk of not meeting proficiency on the MCAS. A second program, Pulse, is a more generalized tutoring program geared at giving students more time and teaching around the concepts/issues covered in their classes. The third program, called the Zone, focuses on student-athletes and will be discussed in the third theme. Ms. Jones, the ILT leader who coordinates the afterschool programs, told us that while afterschool attendance is not mandatory, the teaching staff make concerted efforts to encourage the students who need support to attend. Ms. Thompson, a ninth-grade English teacher,

discussed afterschool programs as not only providing extra academic support and enrichment, but also building the school's sense of community:

We also have a program . . . called Pulse . . . And it's for students who are challenged academically. They have an MCAS prep for each of the MCAS [content areas]. They also do different things like art or dance and different programs to help students be more excited about staying after school. . . . They do a homework help portion. And I think that's really helped students academically, but also feel a little bit connected to a group of kids who are also staying after school.

By offering extracurricular activities with the academic program, the school builds a learning community for students. At the same time that their academic needs are being met, students feel a greater sense of belonging. Mr. Bryant describes how the Instructional Leadership Team serves as a structure for matching students to afterschool programs:

We talk at ILT about the struggling populations in our class . . . we've had different interventions. Some are the Pulse and the MCAS interventions. We've had other MCAS interventions after school for students, specifically for ESL students that was separate from Pulse. We have talked about having groups for different students. I think there was like a boys group.

The fact that the ILT is led by the afterschool coordinator, Ms. Jones, means that decisions are carried out efficiently. We observed the afterschool academic supports for ESL students at Hilltop. In the field note excerpted below, we observe a group of seven to eight ESL students in the afterschool program. Some students were there for targeted MCAS support, and other students were doing homework or make-up work.

Ms. Mitchell goes around to check all the student progress for the MCAS prep students on the lefthand side of the room ("Ooh, la, la. Do you know how you got this answer?" she says as she sees some answers that she finds problematic). "Miss," a non-MCAS Latino says one more time before Ms. Mitchell comes over to talk with him.

2:30—at this point the room is virtually silent. (The two African girls are whispering to each other. They seem to be done with the work.) Ms. Mitchell asks numerous students who their math teacher is and shows them some different packets to see what assignments students had over the April vacation.

"Do you want to see how to check it? Do you want to find out if you got it right?" Ms. Mitchell asks of non-MCAS Latino. She explains the procedure to him. He hands his paper to Ms. Mitchell, and she says, "Great work. Now you can go."

In this field note excerpt, the teacher seamlessly helps students who are attending for MCAS prep and for general tutoring. There is a system in place such that the teacher is familiar with the work that is happening in their classrooms during the day, so that the afterschool time supports the classwork. Our observations also revealed that the afterschool learning environments were quiet spaces where students received individual attention from teachers and collaborated with other students.

### *Individual teacher practices*

While the teachers at the school identified effective institutional instructional practices, the students identified individual teacher instructional practices that supported them. The goal of case management and the afterschool programs was to give students a more individualized and a better-paced instructional experience. When we interviewed students, the prevailing notion was a sense that while not all teachers at Hilltop were effective, the students were able to identify

effective teachers from whom they enjoyed learning. Andy, a 10th-grade Haitian, describes his favorite teacher as follows:

*Q: What makes her your favorite teacher? What does she do to make the learning in the class good for you?*

**A:** Well, she talks less. She gives us work and she sits down with you one-on-one to explain what to do. If you don't understand something, she will help you and try her best to make sure we understand it. And she also will let us take textbooks home so we could study for quizzes. She also gives less homework too.

Andy describes the individual attention and the time and resources that his teacher puts into investing in his learning process. Other students talked about the ways that good teachers at Hilltop connected learning to issues in their lives, or served as informal mentors. Below, Robi, a 10th-grade Dominican student, describes his experience as a student in Mr. Bryant's biology class, which he identified as his favorite class:

**A:** Because the teacher there, he helps the kids, he gives us advice, sometimes if he is giving a lecture and someone has a question, he stops the lesson and tells us how things are. How people used to live and things like that. It's like he is giving us "life lessons." He is teaching us what to do, giving us good advice.

*Q: And why do you think a teacher who is not only teaching biology, but also giving life lessons, why do you think that is important?*

**A:** Well, I think that is important because we, as kids, our parents [are] always working or separated. We don't have that help by our side to tell us, "Hey, listen, don't do this, instead do that because I already went through it and I don't want you to do it as well." And that is why I think that . . . that is why I would choose that class.

Robi appreciates the way that Mr. Bryant paces his lessons to ensure students' comprehension. He also appreciates the way that Mr. Bryant integrates "life lessons" into his classes because he recognizes that not all students have influential adult mentors or family members to guide them. During class, Mr. Bryant frequently stopped his PowerPoint lecture to answer students' questions. An example of Mr. Bryant's infusing his teaching with a life lesson follows:

Mr. Bryant: "Have you ever [gone] to play basketball and started to cramp up?

That's 'cuz you're low on potassium. Where can we get lots of potassium?"

Student 1: "Bananas."

Student 2: "I'm allergic to bananas."

Mr. Bryant: "How about broccoli?"

Student 2: "I'm allergic to broccoli."

Mr. Bryant: "You're not allergic, you don't like it."

Student 1: "I eat with cheese."

Mr. Bryant: "With cheese? Why with cheese? Broccoli is one of the best vegetables on earth."

Student 1: "You ain't lived until you had it with cheese."

Mr. Bryant: "Who's your English teacher? 'You ain't lived . . .?'"

Student 1: "You haven't lived until you had it with cheese."

Mr. Bryant engages his students as he delivers a PowerPoint presentation on the digestive system, making the lesson interactive while also connecting the concepts to experiences his students can presumably relate to. When he corrects a student's grammar, Mr. Bryant also makes sure that they are applying skills from other courses.

While not intentionally created for Latino and Black males, the case management system and afterschool programs impacted the learning experiences of these populations. Both teachers and students referred to the effectiveness of these formal school offerings.

### ***The Power of Sports—Accidental Excellence***

#### *Maintaining academic eligibility*

Just as Hilltop had a reputation for effectively catering to ESL students, nothing was clearer than Hilltop's reputation for producing top-notch sports teams on the city and state level. Every single student and teaching staff member that we interviewed mentioned the athletic prestige of the school. Even more importantly, this notion of the athletic prestige of the school came in the context of what drives achievement for Black and Latino boys. Keon, the star running back for the school's football team, described his motivation to focus on academics:

I fell in love with [football] and I just ran with the game. I just like it a lot. I just picked up values to be responsible and stuff like that. And I feel like high school, for African American students it's hard. It's definitely hard being an athlete, focusing on school, keeping your grades up. And then you've got people killing each other over foolishness. . . . So, it is real difficult. . . . If I don't got grades, then I don't have football, I don't have nothing. So, I know I have to get my grades to have football to have success.

The pressure is on athletes at Hilltop High to maintain good grades as a way of remaining eligible to play for the school's sports teams. Similar to the development of the credit recovery program, this system of helping athletes remain academically eligible was not set up to intentionally benefit Black and Latino males, but it has benefited them in large numbers because they seek out athletics. Mr. Bryant describes the intersection of race, sports, and academics at Hilltop:

It is very, very, very important, football, baseball, basketball. Baseball is predominantly Hispanic. Basketball, we have more African Americans. Football, we have a combination of both. But it does tend to keep the athletes on track. Because a lot of the athletes would fall by the wayside if it had not been for sports. You have the football coach going to the classrooms of the players, making sure they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. Same thing is true with the basketball coach—Coach Coleman, he'll tell you, you not only have to do your work, you have to be respectful to the teachers. . . . The sports here are really good. And the coaches are invested not only in the students as far as the team is concerned, but they're invested in the students themselves. They want to make sure that the kids do right academically. And I think that's paramount.

The football, baseball, and basketball teams are predominantly Black and Latino males. The athletic teams are serious about making sure that their student-athletes are engaging in the behaviors and dispositions necessary for students to succeed academically. Mr. Bryant sees the coaches' roles as “paramount” in setting high expectations and holding Latino and Black males to them. As Mr. Bryant describes, the coaches may be an added layer of individualized academic support and motivation for the student-athlete population at Hilltop.

### *School pride*

Dr. Grayson described another way the sports teams might be contributing to the positive experiences of Black and Latino males at Hilltop—the connection to and pride in their school and its reputation:

Actually, we've had some really strong athletic teams here in the past few years, the basketball team, the football team have done really well; the baseball team has done well in the past. I think that really helps, because when I was going to basketball games this

season and last, there were a lot of students there really supporting the team, and most of the team were Black and Latino boys, just like our school. But it helps the culture when you really stay behind something and when you feel connected to a school.

The sports teams are major contributors to a positive school culture at Hilltop. In this interview Dr. Grayson indicated that we should not underestimate the power of being part of something that contributes to a positive school culture. The fact that Black and Latino males are central to this culture contributes to a positive attitude toward school for Latino and Black males.

Most of the students and teachers we spoke to talked about sports eligibility as a huge motivator for students at Hilltop. One student, an African American 9th-grade male named Harris, expressed this sentiment personally:

*Q: So, what do you like to do at your school when you're not in your class? Are there any programs, activities, clubs that you're involved in?*

**A:** I did football.

*Q: You did football this year?*

**A:** Yeah.

*Q: Okay. And how did you like that?*

**A:** I loved it.

*Q: Are you going to try to do it— is it your goal to keep doing it for the rest of the time here?*

**A:** Probably not next year, because I don't have a high enough GPA, but yeah.

*Q: Is your goal to get the GPA up so that you can play, or what?*

**A:** Yes, it is.

Harris, a student who expressed to us that he's struggling academically, names his desire to rejoin the football team as a big (if not the only) motivation for him to work to get his grades up.

*Afterschool student-athlete program*

In addition to academic requirements for sports team eligibility driving Black and Latino males' motivation to excel academically, both students and teachers alike identified the citywide afterschool program the Zone, geared toward Hilltop's athletes, as another school practice they felt helps Black and Latino males thrive academically. Ms. Jones describes the program as community building:

What's been nice is we have the Zone now . . . A whole afterschool component. So, that's nice, because I see them in there a lot. There are a lot of boys in there, because they're required to go a certain amount of time during their season. They are not always working, but at least they're somewhere, and they're in an environment with each other, and they're in school, and they're joking around having a good time, and hopefully, getting their homework done.

The students in the Zone, like Juan, a 10th-grade Dominican student, did appreciate the Zone as a place to complete homework:

We have to do an hour [of the Zone]. Then after that you'll do practice. It's mandatory. Like every single day you have to do an hour of homework, because to play any sport, your GPA has to be above a 2.0, I'll say. So, you have to stay after school every day for an hour and do your homework to keep your GPA up. . . . It's kind of good, because you'll see your teammates. And if you have people that have the same classes as you, it will be easier to finish your work.

Like other interviewees, Juan acknowledges the requirement of academic eligibility for participation in athletics as a motivator to keep his grades up. He has benefited from the learning opportunities associated with working with fellow teammates, especially those who are in his classes.

Using a critical race theory lens, the concept of interest-convergence (Bell, 1980) is useful here to explain how the athletic reputation of the school may be facilitating/initiating Hilltop's oblique academic targeting of Black and Latino males. Interest-convergence refers to the ways the people or institutions with power and privilege tend to address inequalities only as they perceive a benefit for themselves. In other words, pragmatism and regard for reputation or resources would more likely influence those with power to address inequalities than would matters of principle. In this case, the concept of interest-convergence sheds light on how Hilltop's preoccupation with its athletic prestige, more than principles of equity or racial justice, may have driven the school to meet the needs of its Black and Latino males. The CRT lens also illuminates how society has constructed race in ways that create acceptance of the roles people can or should play in society. In this regard, mainstream society has deemed sports an acceptable venue for Blacks and Latinos in which to excel (Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett, 2008). Seen through a CRT lens, this focus on athletics as a means for Hilltop to facilitate the academic success of Black and Latino males and enhance the school's reputation should not be surprising.

## **Conclusion**

The story of Hilltop's relative success with Black males seems to be one in which there was no systemic intentionality. While teachers at Hilltop articulated the diversity among Black and Latino students, they also reduced these groups into monolithic categories: Black males were

framed as struggling academically, and Latino males were framed as nonnative English speakers who came from families and communities with little background in education.

Despite the lack of intentionality around engaging Black and Latino males and the problematic constructions of these students, we were able to identify some useful practices in the school. Hilltop employed a case management system and a robust set of afterschool programming that allowed teachers to plan in groups around meeting the needs of individual students while also providing the students with additional small-group instruction. Hilltop also had a set of formal and informal mechanisms in place to ensure academic eligibility for its athletes, who are predominantly Black and Latino males. While these practices have benefited Black and Latino males, developing a schoolwide intentional approach to addressing race and gender would likely yield even greater success for these students.

## Discussion of Cross-Cutting Case Study Themes

Some of the most troubling findings in our Phase I study, *Opportunity and Equity: Enrollment and Outcomes of Black and Latino Males in Boston Public Schools*, highlighted Black and Latino males' disproportionately low access to rigorous coursework across the district's schools and grade levels, such as Advanced Work Classes, examination schools, and the MassCore curriculum sequence (Miranda et al., 2014). Adding complexity to the opportunity gap findings was the study's detailed description of the increasing diversity of Black and Latino male students; the increasing populations of Black African, Black Caribbean, and Latino Caribbean students have broad implications for educational practice. Given the systemic nature of the opportunity and achievement gaps for Black and Latino males in BPS (Miranda et al., 2014), we reasoned that case studies of Boston Public Schools doing comparatively well by Black or Latino males would help us to answer this overarching question: *What practices, perspectives, and experiences contribute to a school model or design that is more likely to close opportunity and achievement gaps for Black and Latino males?*

School case studies are qualitative descriptions of schools and the people in them at a particular point in time. The findings from a case study are not generalizable to other schools, which have different contexts, student populations, and histories. However, cross-cutting themes, or characteristics, that were found in at least three of the four schools (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2014), will shed light on replicable strategies to remedy these opportunity gaps. Using grounded theory to analyze the four case studies, not only did we find a number of hallmarks of quality, effective schools, we also identified areas of growth across them, all of which map onto the literature-based Indicator Framework for Black and Latino Male Equity and Excellence in the first chapter.

## **Best Practices Found in Quality Schools, Not Specific to Black and Latino Males**

### ***Caring School Culture***

School culture is defined as the guiding beliefs and values evident in how a school operates (Fullan, 2007; NYSED, 2013). The scholarly literature indicates a correlation between an orderly, strong, positive school culture and successful student outcomes (Hargreaves, 1995; Leithwood et al., 2004; National School Climate Center, 2014; NYSED, 2013; Peterson & Deal, 1998).

The four case study schools all had physically and emotionally safe and orderly learning environments, a prerequisite for student learning, particularly for low-income students and students of color (Harper & Williams, 2014; Tung et al., 2011). Many researchers have noted that the practices that lead to caring school cultures are beneficial to learning (Alva & Padilla, 1995; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Chenoweth, 2009; Coleman, 1990; Collins, 2011; Comer, 2001; De los Reyes et al., 2008; Halx & Ortiz, 2011; Harper & Williams, 2014; Noguera, 2003; Pang, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999).

One aspect of school culture that was common across all four schools was the value placed on authentic, caring relationships: among students, among adults, and between students and adults. At Tallmadge, interactions between students and adults exhibited a tone of respect. The principal noted, “It’s critical to remember that when we treat students with respect, they tend to respect as well. . . . The more willing . . . they are to please, the harder they want to work.” At Fairview, a teacher shared a similar perspective about caring and respect:

You have to be able to create an atmosphere for learning in the classroom. And in that, having an environment where children feel safe, where children feel that they're loved,

where children feel that they're cared about, you can't begin to teach the child unless . . . they know that you care about them, that you're invested in them.

Young adults at the two high schools also noted the respectful and caring attitudes of some teachers as primary motivators for learning. At Bruin HS, one student discussed knowing that a teacher cares about students becoming successful leaders: “The teachers aren't really just here for the paycheck. I feel like they're really here to teach us. Like Ms. [name of teacher] talks to me about what works and what doesn't work and she asks me questions and she let me lead the discussion a couple of times.” A student at Hilltop HS described a teacher who not only taught content, he infused his course with “life lessons,” which showed that he knew about his students’ family circumstances and cared enough to provide valuable advice not only about academics but also about navigating adolescence.

Another key aspect seen in the school culture of all four schools was that of high expectations placed on students and adults, which is intertwined with respect. At Bruin HS, most interviewees referenced the school’s mission as preparing students to do well in college. This high expectation regarding both academics and behavior guided aspects of the school culture, curriculum, and instruction. At Hilltop HS, teachers and staff members noted how academic expectations were bolstered by the school’s prestigious athletic program, which required student-athletes to maintain a certain grade point average. A teacher emphasized the expectations for respect and achievement:

You not only have to do your work, you have to be respectful to the teachers. . . . The sports here are really good. And the coaches are invested not only in the students as far as the team is concerned, but they're invested in the students themselves. They want to make sure that the kids do right academically.

As a result of these high expectations and the school’s reputation for athletic achievement, students feel a strong connection to the school. At Tallmadge, high expectations of the educators and of the students to be leaders were combined with high support. As a result of the culture it has developed, the elementary school enjoys a strong reputation in the community as a caring place of joyful learning.

Table 7 summarizes the best practices related to school culture that were found in all four schools.

Table 7

*Cross-Cutting Indicators of Caring School Culture in Case Study Schools*

<b>Caring School Culture</b>	<b>Tallmadge ES</b>	<b>Fairview K-8</b>	<b>Bruin HS</b>	<b>Hilltop HS</b>
The school provides a safe and orderly environment for all students, including Black and Latino males; being open beyond the school day provides students a safe haven.	Socially and emotionally safe	Authentically supportive	Tone of respect and trust	Tone of respect and trust
The school has a mission of high expectations for learning outcomes for all students (using measurable and monitored objectives), with explicit attention to Black and Latino males.	High expectations and rigor paired with high support, both for students and teachers	Challenging work for each student	College-going goal for each student	Standards for academics and behavior to uphold school's reputation
Teachers and students have strong, caring, accountable, and reciprocal relationships with each other; relationships originate with revealing the self rather than with academic knowledge and skills; teachers initiate connections with youth.	Nurturing culture reflected through listening and honesty	Students know that teachers want to meet students where they are	Strong inter-dependence and reciprocity among teachers and students; “not just for a paycheck”	Authentic relationships between teachers and students; “life lessons”

### *Professional Collaborative Community*

The four case study schools reflected findings in the vast research literature on professional collaborative communities as being a key component for successful schools. Schools structured into professional learning communities, in which teachers have time during the school day to meet to discuss practice, have better outcomes for students (Chenoweth, 2009; G. E. Hall & Hord, 2001; J. M. Lee & Ransom, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2004; Lewis et al., 2010; K. S. Louis & Kruse, 1995; McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Vescio et al., 2008). All of the case study schools demonstrated hallmarks of professional learning communities, including a sense of collective responsibility, formal and informal structures to facilitate collaboration, and authentic shared leadership among all stakeholders.

The adults in each of the case study schools had developed a professional community that was driven by a shared mission of responsibility among all adults for all learners. In other words, responsibility for certain groups by race, gender, language, or disability was not divided among different staff members in these schools, but rather was shared by everyone. This emphasis on communal or collective responsibility was evident in three of the four schools. At Tallmadge, everyone was considered a leader, led by “a principal who believes that success at Tallmadge does not happen through the efforts of one committed leader, but by the collective and committed efforts of an entire community of leaders.”

Three of the schools described formal structures that allowed for the practice of collective ownership and collaborative problem solving among adults. A Tallmadge teacher shared that grade-level team meetings were a place for teachers to discuss not only individual students, but also groups of students, such as by race or gender, to identify how they were doing. At Fairview, teachers had multiple opportunities to become leaders, including membership on the

Instructional Leadership Team, the Inclusion Committee, and the School Site Council.

Participation on these teams promoted a sense of community and efficacy. At Hilltop HS, teachers regarded the case management approach as the primary vehicle for staff member collaboration focused on practice. At Bruin HS, teachers created and led many of the afterschool programs at their school with support from the school’s administration.

Table 8 summarizes the best practices related to professional collaborative community that were found in at least three of the four schools.

Table 8

*Cross-Cutting Indicators of Professional Collaborative Community in Case Study Schools*

<b>Professional Collaborative Community</b>	<b>Tallmadge ES</b>	<b>Fairview K-8</b>	<b>Bruin HS</b>	<b>Hilltop HS</b>
The school emphasizes a collective/communal identity and responsibility for student success; responsibility for Black and Latino male achievement is distributed schoolwide, not just among teachers in certain roles.	Principal communicates that every adult is part of the team.	Inclusion model means multiple adults know each student well.	Teachers have a strong sense of ownership.	Staff members work together across roles for the benefit of all students.
Teachers have time during the school day to collaborate to improve knowledge of content, knowledge of students, and instruction; teachers participate in professional learning communities, also known as professional collaborative communities.	Faculty members use data in team meetings.	Many teams meet both formally and informally, including grade-level teams, School Site Council, ILT; use of data is prevalent.		Case management approach is used to prevent students from “falling through the cracks.”

### ***Individualized Instruction***

Individualized, or differentiated, instruction (DI) refers to a teaching approach in which teachers modify lessons to accommodate the diverse learning styles, interests, and needs among his/her students through grouping practices, assignments, and materials (Tomlinson, 1999). Many authors hypothesize that the practice of DI better meets the needs of students, and numerous qualitative studies describe DI operationalized, but only individual, small-scale studies tie the practice of DI to better student outcomes (Hall, 2002; Williams, 2012). Unlike the previous two themes, which are supported by numerous empirical studies and metareviews of those studies, DI remains understudied. Despite the lack of affirming studies, currently popular strategies such as Response to Intervention (RTI) and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS) in place in many schools, including BPS schools, are iterations of DI.

A cross-cutting theme that was prominent in three of the schools was that of meeting individual student needs through school policies and practices. While this theme may partially explain why Black and/or Latino males do relatively well in these schools, the schools' intentions in differentiating instruction to individuals were not specific to certain racial/ethnic groups or genders. While meeting individuals where they are is certainly a positive educational practice, not addressing group needs was a finding we will address later in this discussion.

Fairview's practice of differentiated instruction was the most explicit of the case study schools'. A full-inclusion school following a co-teaching model, Fairview had two or three adults in every classroom, which included students with moderate to severe special needs. While at least one of these adults was a special education teacher, all adults that we observed during the case study worked patiently, modifying instruction and accommodating all students, regardless of disability. Implementation of the inclusion model was meant to "educate all students

regardless of background, disability status, or prior academic and behavioral performance.” One teacher ventured that without being explicit about education practices for Black males, the school has supported their achievement:

I think that a big piece, too, was un-separating special education and regular education, and just putting everybody’s brains on kids who were struggling, whether they technically had IEPs or not. It was a culture change that I think supported the achievement of Black boys, because we know that otherwise they’re overrepresented [in special education] at such a high rate.

As an inclusion high school, differentiated instruction was also widespread in classrooms at Bruin HS. In addition, both the credit recovery program and the afterschool offerings at Bruin HS were ways of meeting the individual academic needs of students, many of whom happened to be Black or Latin@.

At Tallmadge, teachers practiced differentiated instruction, consistent with their belief that they should support every student and family to achieve. While the school did attend to group needs in its special attention to Black families through the African heritage culture and climate of the school, and in some of its strategies to reach males, such as the boys’ group, the schoolwide commitment was to reach students where they were.

The schools employed a case management approach in which teams of teachers discussed both formally and informally the progress of specific children who were struggling. Through this structure, teachers were able to share information about students and identify steps to take to support each one.

Table 9 summarizes each school’s emphasis on individualized instruction.

Table 9

*Cross-Cutting Indicator of Individualized Instruction in Case Study Schools*

<b>Individualized Instruction</b>	<b>Tallmadge ES</b>	<b>Fairview K-8</b>	<b>Bruin HS</b>	<b>Hilltop HS</b>
Teachers differentiate instruction based on learning needs and learning styles.	Teachers practice this approach throughout school	Inclusion school; co-teaching; “equality through equitable means”	Inclusion school, focused on meeting students where they are	Case management approach to identifying what struggling students need

***Family Engagement***

Many educational researchers have shown that active family engagement is correlated with positive student outcomes, and that certain types of family engagement matter more than others (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). The two elementary schools that we studied had developed comprehensive approaches to family engagement, meeting the needs and availability of a diverse group of parents. Fairview developed and facilitated a series of Race Dialogues during the study period. Race Dialogues are community convenings led by trained facilitators who support participants to share their varied experiences in the community, specifically related to race, in safe spaces where all voices can be heard. While these Race Dialogues did not happen during the school day, they did engage parents who were not previously connected to the school. Eventually, parents of color began not only to participate in the Race Dialogues, but also to take on more leadership roles in the school.

At Tallmadge and Fairview, the practice of frequent communication with families was evident. The schools provided many ways for families to feel welcome and engaged, from receiving support for their own learning to one-time participation in events to leadership roles. At Tallmadge, the Afrocentric environment made people of African descent, especially, feel

valued and welcome. Family members not only felt comfortable and respected in the school, they volunteered in a number of roles, consistent with the idea that everyone is a leader at Tallmadge. In fact, an explicit expectation families had was to contribute to the success of students and of the school.

Two Fairview teachers described the concerted efforts made to have staff members that reflected the language and ethnicity of students and to develop supportive relationships with family members so that they would feel comfortable and respected at the school. One had a parent who needed to become literate herself to help her child with schoolwork:

You start giving her resources, telling her how she can go to things at the library that are available to help her improve her literacy skills, and letting her know that it's okay and that you're not judging. Then a relationship starts.

Parents not only had opportunities to interact with staff members, they also had opportunities to become leaders and to advocate for changes in policies. One staff member referred to the lines between home and school as being blurred. Both schools were clearly successful in creating a sense of ownership and belonging among their families.

Family engagement is often greater in elementary school than in high school (Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy, & Weiss, 2007) because of adolescents' need for autonomy and school structures, and our study confirms this observation. While Tallmadge and Fairview elevated family engagement as a priority for becoming an effective school for its students, the topic did not emerge as a theme at the two case study high schools.

Table 10 summarizes the best practices related to family engagement that were found in both elementary schools.

Table 10

*Cross-Cutting Indicators of Family Engagement in Case Study Elementary Schools*

<b>Family Engagement</b>	<b>Tallmadge ES</b>	<b>Fairview K-8</b>
Family members feel “at home” and welcome in the school.	Afrocentric environment	Blurring the lines between home and school
School offers a variety of ways for families to be engaged and informed, since family’s culture may influence comfort with school.	Intentional engagement activities	Partnership orientation; Race Dialogues

**Pockets of Best Practices Specific to Black and Latino Males**

The cross-cutting themes that we highlight in the previous section confirm that the four case study schools exhibited several of the hallmarks of effective schools. However, those themes are not specific to the educational success of Black and Latino males. Moving forward from our literature review and guided by our theoretical framework, we looked for examples of teaching practices that would be aligned with critical race theory, critical multiculturalism, and critical pedagogy. While we did not find a systematic application of any of these practices across any of the case studies, we did observe pockets of such practices in every school. In other words, we learned of individual teachers who intentionally brought those perspectives into their practice. While this practice was not systemic in nature, students received valuable exposure to curriculum and instruction, school culture, and family engagement practices that scholars have theorized work best for Black or Latino males, as well as those that practitioners have experienced as engaging Black or Latino males more than do the traditional curriculum and pedagogy.

***Curriculum and Instruction***

At all four schools, we observed isolated examples of curriculum and instruction that addressed race and gender. At Tallmadge, with the support of a community volunteer, a boys’ group met after school to support character development and academics. In addition, during the

study period, the school experimented with single-gender classrooms, which were anecdotally effective. At Fairview, one teacher described her efforts to create a library of “multicultural” books that featured characters from different races and cultures, “especially ones for the students of color, the stories mimic their lives, and they could relate to them.” Another teacher engaged family members in a curriculum project in which students created books about their family backgrounds and traditions, which gave students “a sense of pride in where they're from and the fact they can share that with other kids.” These two elementary schools included pockets of best practices for males of color; however, these gender-based and multicultural practices were not widespread or sustained.

Several teachers at the two high schools shared stories from their own classrooms that reflected aspects of critical pedagogy. For example, students learned about historical events through the historical and sociological lenses of domination, oppression, and racism. In one classroom, students wrote their own counternarratives to the dominant narrative, facilitated by a teacher who noticed that students opened up and engaged with the curriculum better when he modified it to include “expressive writing sections and narrative writing sections, where kids tell me their story and reshape their story.” In recent years, teachers at Bruin HS have had opportunities to participate in professional development for culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy. Though the school’s leaders recognized that such systemic approaches could have a larger impact on all students, especially male students of color, they also acknowledged that they were not doing enough in this area, and were making plans to increase the frequency and reach of such opportunities.

## *Culture and Climate*

The administrators in each school influenced the schools' culture and climate. Three of the schools had African American principals during at least part of the study period. Males of color in teaching and other staff positions shared lived experiences with the students in these three buildings. At the fourth school, Fairview K–8, a teacher referenced the African American teachers who lived in the community and therefore had ties to families outside of school. One aspect of Tallmadge that emerged from its strong African American female principal was an Afrocentric environment created throughout the building by the public display of artifacts, posters, photographs, and hangings depicting African people and art. A teacher at Bruin HS referred to growing up as a young Black man in circumstances similar to those of his students. Not only did this shared experience inform how he related to the students, it also shaped his high expectations, which he expressed through “tough love.” In addition, another teacher expressed an asset-based view of Latino male students in describing them as being very goal oriented and having high aspirations for themselves. Several staff members at Hilltop HS described student backgrounds and cultures in ways that showed they held nuanced views of race and ethnicity. Clearly the administrators and some of the staff members of color at these schools, while not hired because of their race, were able to create cultures and climates within their spheres of influence that allowed men of color to be seen and understood more fully.

## **The Lack of Comprehensive, Intentional Approaches for Black and Latino Male Success**

In the preceding sections, we shared four cross-cutting themes that scholars have previously identified as practices found in generally effective schools. We noted that the four case study schools exhibited pockets of isolated practices that the literature promotes as specifically fostering the success of males of color. In other words, individual teachers and other

staff members were able to develop these practices based on their own educational experiences or philosophies, not because they were advocated for or endorsed at a schoolwide level.

Interestingly, the high schools were surprised at their selection for this study, suggesting that they were not aware of their relative success with Black and/or Latino males and that they felt they still had a long way to go. At the high school level, the credit recovery program at Hilltop and the afterschool programs to support athletes at both high schools (although only noted at Hilltop) may also be supporting greater achievement specifically for Black and Latino males without having been designed specifically for Black and Latino males. Through a critical race theory lens, while the sports program was not intentionally designed to benefit Black and Latino males, the concept of interest-convergence explains that such success is not accidental in this society (Bell, 1980). Supporting the Black and Brown athletes served to elevate the Boston Public Schools in the public's eye:

Hilltop's preoccupation with its athletic prestige, more than principles of equity or racial justice, may have driven the school to meet the needs of its Black and Latino males. . . .

Mainstream society has deemed sports an acceptable venue for Blacks and Latinos to excel in (Hodge et al., 2008). Seen through a CRT lens, this focus on athletics as a means for Hilltop to facilitate the academic success of Black and Latino males and enhance the school's reputation should not be surprising.

Bruin High's strong focus on college acceptance and Fairview's inclusion model may disproportionately benefit males of color. Our analysis shows that some of the programs that these schools developed may be supporting Black and Latino males as a group *despite* the lack of intentionality behind them.

Given that the district's opportunity and achievement gaps are large and that very few schools had MCAS proficiency rates that made them candidates for the case studies, a greater focus on Black and Latino male educational success is needed. Even though the case study schools' MCAS proficiency rates were high enough for them to be identified through regression as doing comparatively better than other district schools with similar enrollment profiles, in fact, their outcomes were mixed at best, especially compared with state averages.<sup>16</sup> Three of the four schools had lower attendance rates than the state average. The high schools had higher suspension rates and significantly lower four-year cohort graduation rates than the state averages, and except for Black males at Bruin HS, their Black and Latino males also posted higher suspension rates than the state averages for Blacks and Latin@s of both genders. Except for Latino males at Bruin HS, the two high schools' Black and Latino males also posted lower four-year cohort graduation rates than the state averages for Blacks and Latin@s of both genders. On the MCAS ELA and math exams, all four schools posted proficiency rates that were below the state averages. Except for Black males at Tallmadge, the schools' Black and Latino males also posted lower MCAS ELA proficiency rates than the state averages for Blacks and Latin@s of both genders.

Research suggests that a more comprehensive schoolwide and districtwide approach to Black and Latino males could lead to even stronger Black and Latino male student outcomes than those posted by these case study schools.

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<sup>16</sup> Direct comparisons for Latino males and Black males were not possible, because statewide data was not publicly reported by race and gender together.

### ***Knowing and Valuing Students' Cultural and Linguistic Backgrounds***

Black and Latin@ students in the Boston Public Schools are diverse and growing populations, hailing from countries in Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America in addition to the United States (Miranda et al., 2014). In fact, the fastest-growing Black and Latin@ groups are immigrants from many countries and cultures. Several of the indicators in our framework for Black and Latino male success require knowledge of students and their backgrounds and lived experiences. These indicators are derived from critical race theory, critical pedagogy, critical multiculturalism, and community cultural wealth lenses, and include:

- implementing culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy;
- hiring school staff that reflects the student body racially and ethnically;
- addressing and fostering students' sociocultural as well as academic identities by supporting the maintenance of home language and culture; and
- engaging community-based organizations serving particular ethnic groups to support student learning.

To practice these strategies effectively schoolwide and daily, teachers and administrators must be well informed about the diversity of the students in their schools. Our data suggests that across the four schools, with a few exceptions, adults demonstrated and sometimes acknowledged not knowing enough about the different groups of Black and Latino males in their classrooms. One Tallmadge teacher described being at a loss about incorporating Latin@ students' background knowledge or culture into lessons, instead asking students to identify on a map their countries of origin. At other times, teachers' actions betrayed a lack of knowledge about students' culture. For example, an attempt to incorporate multicultural education with a

“feasts and festivals” approach celebrated a Mexican holiday even though the school had no students of Mexican descent. In addition, a teacher at Bruin HS shared:

I don't feel like I'm really as good as I want to be in that area, in really understanding the Latino culture. I learned bits and pieces, but I haven't made a real study of it. And I think that will help me. That will help me have a better practice with the kids.

The discussion of Latino males at three of the schools also suggested that teachers could be more informed, and as a result more responsive, if they clarified (a) which students in their schools are Latin@, (b) the difference between Latin@s and English language learners, and (c) the best terms for describing Latin@s. At Tallmadge, a teacher seemed unaware that his school was one-third Latin@. At Hilltop HS, Latin@ students were assumed to be English language learners, and teachers thought of students as either immigrants participating in English as a second language classes or nonimmigrants, rather than as Latin@s who may or may not be ELLs or immigrants. In addition, at several schools, there was a lack of clarity about the racial and ethnic diversity of Latin@s in the school. Finally, at Bruin HS, the high school that was selected for its success with Latino males, some adults referred to Latin@ students as “Spanish” students, a term that is outdated and not reflective of the vast diversity of the Latin@ diaspora. Strengthening adults’ knowledge of the historical and political contexts of students’ countries of origin, of how Latino male students form their social and cultural identities, and of the terms they use to self-identify would be first steps in embedding best practices specifically for Black and Latino male students into school culture.

The Indicator Framework promotes an asset-based view of Black and Latino male students’ culture and language. An asset-based view represents a paradigm shift in many schools, including these case study schools. While a few individuals with whom we spoke had

internalized such a paradigm for how they perceived and treated Black and Latino males, the overall tone and language at these schools betrayed the more common deficit-based view of them.

For example, the Fairview case study states:

Moreover, we were troubled by the use of terms like “sensitivity” and of addressing cultural “needs.” This language implies that culture is a problem to be solved rather than a resource upon which to draw.

In addition, the use of this type of language suggested that staff member goals were set less to build on the valuable richness that Black and Latino male students bring to the school environment than, albeit with good intentions, to focus on addressing the concerns that these groups of students bring to the school.

### ***From “Color-Blind” to Explicit and Responsive Approaches to Race and Gender***

Scholars suggest that being explicit about the impact of racism in schools and society and developing an antiracist school culture in which people of color feel a sense of belonging and empowerment will lead to better outcomes for students of color (Cabrera, Milem, & Marx, 2012). In contrast to this wisdom, the predominant mindset about race and gender in the case study schools was one of invisibility. Staff members in three of the four schools shared a color-blind approach in which an articulation of race and ethnicity was limited, and the fourth, Tallmadge, paid far more attention to Black identity than to Latin@ identity.

When staff members were asked about focusing intentionally on Black and Latin@ students, many noted that, since they were the majority in the school, there was no need to tailor practices by race/ethnicity. Rather, they assumed that a “we treat everyone the same” approach would be sufficient to meet their goals. A teacher at Fairview shared her viewpoint on meeting students’ needs regardless of gender and race:

We treat everybody the same. If you're a boy or you're a girl, you're still treated the same. Like I said, races are the same. . . . I don't really see any difference. I think you see every child that comes in and attend to whatever needs they have.

As a result, we observed little curriculum or instruction explicitly addressing race, racism, or gender, practices that research suggests lead to better Black and Latino male outcomes (Banks, 1993; Duncan-Andrade, 2008; Fergus et al., 2014; Gay & Hanley, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1998; May, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sleeter & Grant, 1987, 2006). As the authors of the Fairview case study note:

By treating culture as an “individual” attribute, the school may be missing opportunities to address and leverage the shared experiences of students of color in the school. We suggest that the Fairview would benefit from a more systematic and sustained approach to race and culture, one that does not diminish the value of its inclusion-based model.

Other researchers have described this reluctance to talk about race and other forms of difference and the adoption of a mindset of wanting to serve all students (De los Reyes et al., 2008). In “color-mute schools,” this silence leads to incorrect assumptions and generalizations about groups of students (Pollock, 2004). In contrast, some have argued for an antiracist or culturally sustaining stance as an alternative empowering approach that may reduce inequalities and improve outcomes for Black and Latino males (Nieto & Bode, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

This last finding of the lack of a systemic approach to ensuring the success of Black and Latino males speaks to the need to build upon the good work already going on in these case study schools by shifting to more informed, intentional, and schoolwide and districtwide approaches.

### *Developing Systemic Approaches to Culturally Responsive Schools*

Embedding practices explicit about race/ethnicity and gender means turning the pockets of critical pedagogy and critical multiculturalism found in these schools into schoolwide approaches. It requires developing the knowledge and skills to implement best practices throughout all aspects of a school, such as curriculum and instruction, culture and climate, school leadership and organization, and family and community engagement. Doing so requires a systemic approach, meaning that all stakeholders are aware and skilled in theory and practice, starting with a school's mission and vision. The case study schools experienced barriers to such intentional schoolwide approaches to becoming culturally responsive, including lack of:

- discussions about race;
- common definitions of racial/ethnic groups;
- cultural responsiveness; and
- professional development focused on implementation of practices listed within our framework indicators.

In the case study schools, we found a reluctance to name race/ethnicity in one's practice, resulting in color-blind behaviors. This resistance to talking about groups of students by race or gender is a barrier to developing a culturally responsive school culture and climate. Through differentiated instruction, school staff members demonstrated a preference to take an individualized approach to students' learning that ignored the contributions of race, ethnicity, or gender to their identities or experiences. As we observed about Fairview:

Overall, we saw that attention to the racial and cultural backgrounds of students, while sometimes apparent with particular teachers or projects, was not guided in any systematic

manner and was consistently overshadowed by the intensely individualized focus of the school.

In some case study schools, despite the topic being Black and Latino male success, interviewers had to probe about specific practices or observations about these groups. In all of the case study schools, there was a lack of common knowledge about and definitions of racial groups and of cultural responsiveness.

Contradictions abound, most probably because there is no one formal definition of cultural relevance at the Tallmadge. For instance, a literacy volunteer described herself as “colorless” in how she sees her students, but went on to say that she chooses Ezra Jack Keats books for her young readers so that they can have characters with whom to identify.

This volunteer interpreted cultural responsiveness to mean selecting curriculum materials that reflect the students. Other teachers across the case study schools also described attempts to create curriculum that reflected and built upon students’ own lived experiences. For example, one teacher collected multicultural books, another asked for family input into curriculum units about music and family history, another shared about the political history of the Dominican Republic, where many of the students had been born. The few teachers with whom we spoke who described clearly their understandings of multicultural education and critical pedagogy had brought their understandings from previous teaching experiences.

Clearly a barrier to systemic implementation of culturally responsive practices was the lack of common, schoolwide or districtwide professional development for a culturally responsive approach. Since staff members in most case study schools did not address race explicitly, nor had common understandings of cultural responsiveness, it is not surprising that school-based professional development did not focus on building competencies in this area. The Tallmadge

principal described the district-provided professional development in this area as weak and unproductive. While she agreed that a culturally relevant curriculum would be preferable, she left its development and implementation up to individual teachers. A teacher new to Fairview noted that, given the inclusion mindset there, she brought her own lessons from cultural sensitivity and achievement gap professional development to her new setting. While there may have been occasional professional development sessions on this topic at Fairview in the past, no teachers mentioned it during interviews. With the strong parent engagement at this school, the opportunity and resources to make cultural responsiveness systemic are present.

While this study did not reveal comprehensive models for successfully educating Black and Latino males, the findings inform the district's and schools' ongoing improvement efforts, including the Acceleration Agenda (Boston Public Schools, 2014a) and the Achievement Gap Policy (Boston Public Schools, 2014b). *How* to implement a change model systemwide has been addressed in the business world and involves cycles of identifying opportunity or performance gaps, describing critical tasks and work processes, checking for organizational congruence, developing solutions and action plans, and monitoring change (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2002). Organizational congruence means that the people, critical tasks, culture, and formal organization are aligned and support reaching the goals. In education, many researchers have documented the ways in which systemic change, where the many aspects of schooling are coherent and aligned, can lead to improved teaching and learning (Fullan, 2007; Marzano & Waters, 2009; Supovitz, 2005). No one framework or model can capture such complex change processes, but an example is the Coherence Framework (see Figure 3), developed by the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP) at Harvard University (Harvard Public Education Leadership Project, 2014),

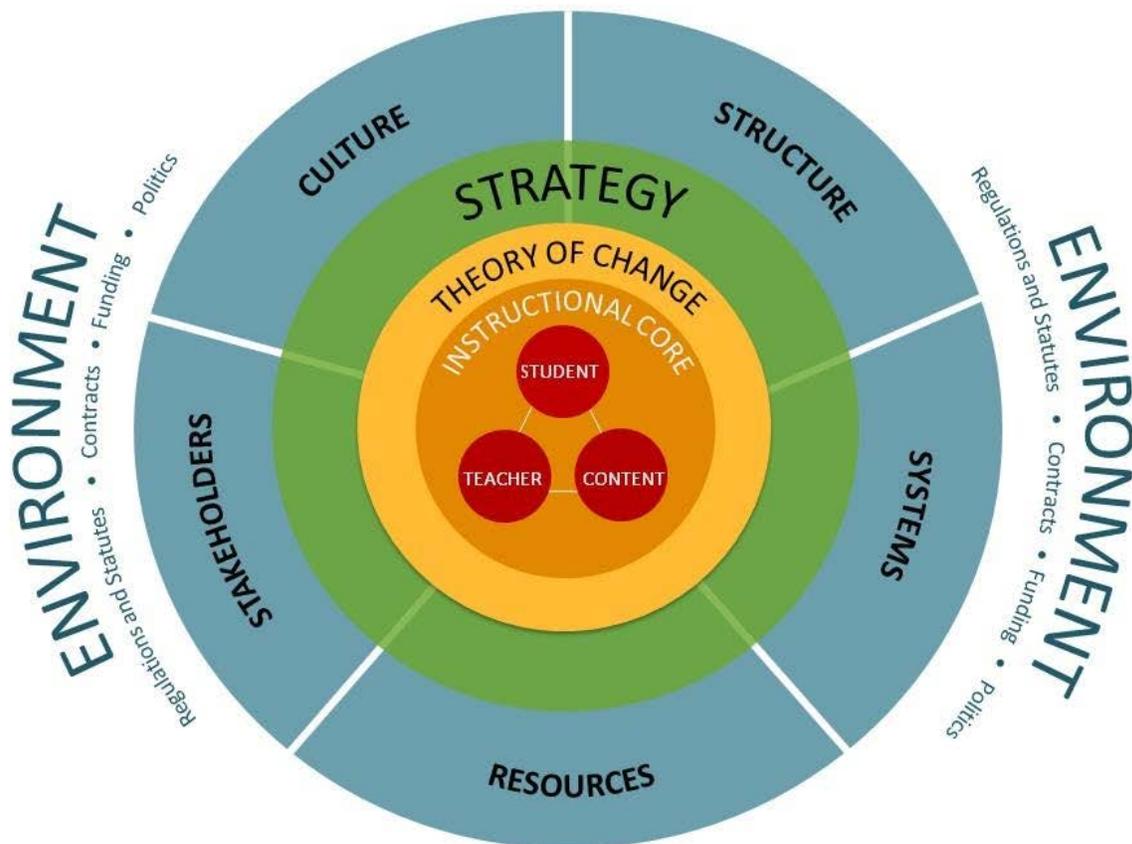
which visually describes how many elements—such as culture, structure, and instruction—are all linked and interdependent with aspects of the environment and the district’s theory of change.

Figure 3

*Coherence Framework from Harvard PELP*

The framework assists with achieving and sustaining coherence by:

- Connecting the instructional core with a district-wide strategy for improvement.
- Highlighting district elements that can support or hinder effective implementation.
- Identifying interdependencies among district elements.
- Recognizing forces in the environment that have an impact on the implementation of strategy.



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Scholars have argued that such coherence in teaching and learning is a necessary condition for improved student achievement (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth, & Bryk, 2001). The case studies and cross-cutting themes presented here confirm that in order to create a more culturally responsive district and schools in which Black and Latino males excel, the Boston community should adopt a coherence mindset and framework to guide the alignment of all efforts at educational change (Newmann et al., 2001).

## **Conclusion and Recommendations for District and School Leaders**

This report presents four case studies of schools in the Boston Public Schools system whose Black and/or Latino male students perform comparatively well. In studying this diverse group of schools, we describe each school's unique mission and culture and offer explanations for their relative success with these students. While the original study design hypothesized that case study schools would exhibit some common practices that were *specific* to Black and Latino males (see the Indicator Framework for Black and Latino Male Equity and Excellence), we found through cross-case analysis that they more prominently exemplified many of the *generic* qualities of good schools, such as positive cultures, a strong professional community, differentiated instruction, and active family engagement.

Surprisingly, only a few individuals in each school demonstrated or discussed using culturally responsive strategies focused on Black and Latino males. If only some students experience these equity-driven strategies, then equity cannot be achieved. These strategies include having a clear and nuanced knowledge of the race/ethnicity of the students, engaging in explicit, communitywide conversations about the history and current status of race and gender power dynamics, and developing a systemic, coherent approach to making all stakeholders culturally responsive to Black and Latino males in all aspects of schools: mission and vision, leadership and organizational practices, curriculum and instruction, school culture, and family and community engagement.

The purpose of this Phase II study was to identify educational models, policies, and practices that might close the opportunity and achievement gaps documented in the Phase I study (Miranda et al., 2014). Although the case study schools did not provide school-based examples of these intentional, comprehensive approaches, we close with recommendations that emerged

from our findings—recommendations that build from the strengths that these schools exhibited and that encourage systemic action addressing culturally responsive and sustaining policies and practices, the “unfinished business” in this study’s title.

The following recommendations are aimed at two stakeholder groups: the district (D) and schools (S). While the school district was not the focus of this study, district leaders’ vision, policies, and practices have direct implications on how schools organize and operate. Ultimately, the school system’s leaders must provide a vision and lead a set of coherent actions that result in more culturally responsive practices in schools for Black and Latino males. This study’s unit of analysis was the school, and therefore many of the recommendations emerged as a direct result of interviews and observations during our site visits. Our cross-cutting themes exemplify widely accepted best practices of effective schools rather than practices specifically focused on Black and Latino males. We encourage educators in all BPS schools to continue to implement those best practices of effective schools: (a) ensuring authentic, caring relationships among teachers, students, and families; (b) building professional collaborative cultures; (c) individualizing instruction to meet students where they are; and (d) engaging families as leaders. We also recommend that school leaders develop a coherent approach to Black and Latino male success by implementing evidence- and theory-based best practices.

Leaders in classrooms, schools, and districts should adapt these recommendations for their own settings and use them to inform professional development, district and school board policy, community-based supports, and families as they make choices about the education of their children.

## **Mission and Vision**

- Communicate a vision of high expectations for student learning that includes goals for persistence and for college readiness and attendance for each student group, including Black and Latino males; accompany high expectations with high support for both teachers and students. (D, S)
- Use an asset-based paradigm instead of a deficit view in all aspects of planning, discussions, programming, and communicating for and about Black and Latino male students. (D, S)
- Establish and monitor district goals and metrics for creating culturally responsive schools across all areas of practice. (D)
- Update the district's School Quality framework to include some of the practices in the Indicator Framework for Black and Latino Male Equity and Excellence proposed in this study. (D)

## **School and District Leadership and Organizational Policies**

- Recruit, retain, and place a cadre of racially, culturally and linguistically diverse and effective principals, teachers, and staff members (who represent the different cultural and linguistic experiences of the student body and who value authentic, caring relationships with other adults and with students) in the schools with the greatest opportunity and achievement gaps. (D, S)
- Establish standards and strategies for culturally responsive practices for educating Black and Latino males (like the Indicator Framework in this study), and create tools and guidelines for implementing and assessing them. (D)

- Model and fund the development of cross-functional professional learning communities among adults at the school and district levels, with opportunities to collaborate, share strategies, and discuss both problems of practice in and promising practices for educating Black and Latino males. (D, S)
- Continue “Courageous Conversations” about race at the school and district levels so that all educators develop a common understanding and language about cultural responsiveness in service of educational equity. (D, S)
- Prioritize and hold district and school-based educators accountable for cultural responsiveness in teacher evaluations. (D, S)
- Emphasize collective responsibility among all adults in the school, regardless of role, for the success of all students, including Black and Latino male students. (S)
- Utilize multiple formal structures for professional learning and collective responsibility, including grade-level teams, instructional leadership teams, school site councils, case management teams, and committees focused on specific topics. (S)
- Ensure that all teachers and staff members participate in regular professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy and behavior management, and ensure that daily, in-school professional collaboration time is used to improve curriculum and instruction, paying specific attention to Black and Latino males. (S)
  - Build capacity and establish greater comfort for having conversations about race/racism, gender, power, and equity in which stakeholders learn how to name and productively address challenges and tensions that arise across race lines among staff members and families. (D, S)

- Routinely disaggregate and report on assessment and other data by race/ethnicity, language, gender, and disability status, such as through an “Equity Dashboard” for the district, networks, and schools, to identify disproportionalities, determine their causes, and develop and implement plans to address them. (D, S)
- Identify school and classroom barriers to Black and Latino male achievement and conduct action research in an effort to eliminate them. (S)
- Support student leadership and decision making. (S)

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

- Draft, vet, and adopt definitions for culturally responsive curriculum and culturally responsive pedagogy that are applied across the district. (D, S)
- Ensure that every school conducts professional development sessions on culturally responsive curriculum, instruction, and assessment, including:
  - peer-to-peer classroom demonstration lessons and observations, such as lesson study;
  - coaching observations and debriefs; and
  - data-based inquiry for planning, informing practice, and monitoring outcomes. (D, S)
- Encourage and support specific instructional strategies that focus on increasing Black and Latino male engagement, identity, voice, and agency, such as writing counternarratives, interrogating current events through a critical lens, and sharing home traditions and language. (D, S)

- Continue to support differentiated instruction and tiered levels of support to meet the needs of individual Black and Latino male students while also addressing group strengths and needs by gender and race/ethnicity. (D, S)
- Continue to expand and monitor Inclusive Schools, whose instructional model may address the disproportionately high rates of Black and Latino male placement in substantially separate special education settings. (D)
- Continue to increase access to rigorous coursework, including MassCore curriculum, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate courses. (D)
- Incorporate ample curriculum materials, resources, and literature throughout the curriculum that reflect the race/ethnicity, culture, and history of the students. (S)

### **School and District Culture and Climate**

- Shift the culture from a deficit view to an asset-based view of Black and Latino males through explicit discussions about the many forms of cultural, familial, linguistic, and other kinds of capital that students bring to enhance their schools and communities. (D, S)
- Make all racial/ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups in BPS visible to district and school leaders through sharing disaggregated data about and resources for these specific groups in Boston. (D, S)
- Learn about and affirm all student identities—by gender, race, ethnicity, language, culture, sexuality—through explicit curriculum, instruction, professional development, and programming that includes discussions about gender differences, analysis of the

complex intersections of ethnicity and race, and creation of clubs for groups of students sharing identities. (D, S)

- Develop facility among district and school leaders in understanding theories about the education of students of color so that they can model explicit talk about racism and other -isms in our schools and classrooms. (D, S)
- Continue to value and create physically and emotionally safe and nurturing learning environments. (D, S)

### **Family Engagement**

- Organize and facilitate Race/Ethnicity/Gender Dialogues in schools and communities to support educators and district residents in learning how to talk about these topics in productive, meaningful, and respectful ways. (D, S)
- Recruit and cultivate parents as leaders in schools, providing them space and a range of opportunities for feedback, advocacy, and participation in decision making. (D, S)
- Partner with preservice urban teacher residency programs focused on critical and equity pedagogy to develop a pipeline of teachers who are culturally responsive. (D)
- Create a welcoming environment for families through culturally and linguistically responsive staffing, culturally relevant décor, warmth, and respect. (S)
- Continue to intentionally engage Black, Latin@, and ELL families with student learning at school and/or at home, and communicate frequently using multiple modes, thereby emphasizing the partnership between school and home. (S)

- Continue and expand programming such as family literacy classes for English language learners, family Reading and Writing clubs, family Math clubs, and family literacy nights.
- Host school events at various hours of the day, various days of the week, and in various locations so that more families, particularly those who are less comfortable in schools, can participate.
- Enhance home-school connections with home visits and open houses early in the school year.
- Reach out to family members with positive news about their child's progress.

### **Community Partnerships**

- Make the most of the resources and assets within the school community, including programming and individual volunteers who value Black and Latino male success and can support culturally responsive approaches. (D, S)
- Create ongoing and effective partnerships with community organizations and groups with an explicit focus on eliminating opportunity and achievement gaps to enhance academic, enrichment, and extracurricular activities for students, such as by offering advisory groups, clubs, and mentoring to support the success of Black and Latino males. (D, S)

In each of the four case studies, we found strong, promising characteristics of high-quality schools. However, while each case study school was selected as a result of their Black and/or Latino male students performing comparatively better than their peers at other BPS schools, their students' outcomes still lagged well behind state averages across multiple indicators. Our research findings suggest that closing opportunity gaps for the increasingly diverse population of Black and Latino males in BPS will require implementing more than the

generic practices found in effective schools. In conjunction with the theoretical and empirical literature about educating Black and Latino males, the case study observations imply that a greater intentionality in adopting a culturally responsive mindset and a systemic, schoolwide and communitywide set of approaches may provide the conditions for Black and Latino males to excel and for the district to move closer to its goal of equity.

Closing the opportunity and achievement gaps for Black and Latino males in BPS will require using the cross-cutting themes and recommendations identified through this research to design a comprehensive, systemic approach that involves all stakeholders. The findings from the case studies and the cross-case analysis strongly imply that (a) shifting to an asset-based paradigm as an approach to educating Black and Latino male students, (b) developing strategies to increase educator and community competency in addressing race, gender, and equity, and (c) developing an intentional, systemic strategy to infuse cultural responsiveness into all aspects of the system will yield even better outcomes for Black and Latino males in these case study schools and in all Boston Public Schools.

## **Appendix: Methods**

### **School-Level Database**

#### *Data Sources*

We constructed a school-level database based on publicly available school-level data and specific student-level data (aggregated up to the school level) to conduct multiple regressions to identify schools that were doing well by Black and Latino male students. The publicly available school-level database for the academic years SY2009 to SY2012 was created using data obtained from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) website and contains school identifiers (i.e., organization code and name) as well as data on school accountability, student enrollment, mobility, demographics, attendance, MCAS results, and teachers. The final dataset that was used to run the regression models included rates for the following publicly available school-level variables: limited English proficiency, students with disabilities, students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, student-teacher ratios, attendance, and out-of-school suspensions.

#### *School Sample*

In order to prepare the school-level database for analysis, we excluded the following types of schools for the accompanying reasons:

- early elementary schools, whose students do not have MCAS scores;
- charter schools, for which we did not receive student-level data from BPS;
- exam schools, due to additional admissions criteria; and
- schools that did not have data for all four years due to their opening or closing during the study period.

After these exclusions, the school-level database included 128 schools. Of these, 54 were pre-K to grade 5 schools (elementary), and 22 were pre-K to grade 8 (elementary/middle). Data from 52 secondary schools were used in the analyses: 32 were high schools (grades 9 to 12); 16 were middle schools (grades 6 to 8); and 4 were middle/high schools (grades 6 to 12).

***Creation of Panel Datasets***

We used select variables from the student-level database from the Phase I study (Miranda et al., 2014) to create a dataset containing only males, which we subsequently split into 32 separate subsets by school level, student race/ethnicity, MCAS ELA and math proficiency, and school year.

Table A1

*Data Used to Create School-Level Dataset*

<b>School Level</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>MCAS Proficiency</b>	<b>School Year</b>
Elementary	Black	ELA	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Black	Math	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Latino	ELA	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Latino	Math	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
Secondary	Black	ELA	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Black	Math	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Latino	ELA	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012
	Latino	Math	2009, 2010, 2011, 2012

Each of the datasets also contained student IDs and school codes. MCAS proficiency status was coded as 0 for not proficient and 1 for proficient. We then aggregated each of the 32

datasets by school code, with MCAS proficiency status used as the summary variable (providing the sum of students who tested at the proficient level), to the school level. Once we created the aggregated school-level datasets, we created variables for proficiency percentages in ELA and math for each school by dividing the number of proficient students by the number of students tested in each of the two subjects.

Datasets for all four years for Black and Latino males were then merged into four datasets: two elementary-level datasets (one for ELA and one for math) and two secondary-level datasets (one for ELA and one for math). Each dataset had two proficiency rates, one for Black males and one for Latino males. These datasets were individually merged with the school-level database.

The merged datasets were then restructured from wide format (i.e., variables pertaining to each academic year presented horizontally) to panel format (i.e., variables for each academic year presented as separate cases).

### ***Variables***

We created eight regression models to select high-performing schools for males—by race/ethnicity, grade level, and MCAS subject. We present the regression models and respective school-level predictor and outcome variables in Table A2.

Table A2

*Regression Models and School-Level Variables*

<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Regression Models</b>	<b>Predictor Variables</b>	<b>Control Variables</b>	<b>Outcome Variables</b>
<b>Elementary</b>	Black males— MCAS ELA proficiency	Advanced Work Class enrollment	Limited English proficient students	ELA proficiency rate for Black males
	Black males— MCAS math proficiency	Student/teach er ratio	Students with special needs	Math proficiency rate for Black males
	Latino males— MCAS ELA proficiency	Attendance	Eligibility for free- or reduced- price lunch	ELA proficiency rate for Latino males
	Latino males— MCAS math proficiency	Out-of-school suspensions		Math proficiency rate for Latino males
<b>Secondary</b>	Black males— MCAS ELA proficiency	Student/teach er ratio	Limited English proficient students	ELA proficiency rate for Black males
	Black males— MCAS math proficiency	Attendance	Students with special needs	Math proficiency rate for Black males
	Latino males— MCAS ELA proficiency	Out-of-school suspensions	Eligibility for free or reduced- price lunch	ELA proficiency rate for Latino males
	Latino males— MCAS math proficiency			Math proficiency rate for Latino males

### ***Exploratory Regression Analyses***

We used the panel datasets to run fixed effects regression models for Black and Latino males using academic year as a dummy variable. We conducted exploratory regression analyses for each of the eight predictive models listed in Table A2. We used the *Enter* variable selection model to enter all control variables into the model at once.<sup>17</sup> Variables were kept in the model if they were explanatory and if their regression coefficient was statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ). Additionally, collinearity diagnostics (i.e., Variance Inflation Factor [VIF] and tolerance) were used to evaluate multicollinearity among predictor variables. None of the collinearity indicators exceeded the recommended parameters for  $VIF > 10$  (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995; Kennedy, 1992; Marquardt, 1970; Neter, Wasserman, & Kutner, 1989) and tolerance  $< 0.10$  (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

### **Regressions to Identify Case Study School Candidates**

#### ***Elementary Schools***

Regression model descriptives and results predicting the MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Black males in elementary schools are presented in Tables A3 and A4.

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<sup>17</sup> A procedure for variable selection in which all variables in a block are entered in a single step.

Table A3

*Descriptive Statistics: MCAS ELA Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Black Males in Elementary Schools (total number of elementary schools across four years, N = 278)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MCAS ELA proficiency rate	24.79	17.01
Limited English proficient students	26.41	17.34
Students with special needs	18.76	6.01
Students in Advanced Work Classes	1.94	4.27

Table A4

*Results: MCAS ELA Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Black Males in Elementary Schools*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
MCAS ELA proficiency rate	22.56***	4.08		5.53
Limited English proficient students	-.25	.06	-.25***	-4.33
Students with special needs	.38	.17	.13*	2.25
Students in Advanced Work Classes	.92	.22	.23***	4.13
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.156			
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	16.84***			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The mean MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Black males in Boston elementary schools was 24.8% ( $SD = 17.01$ ). The predictors of MCAS ELA proficiency for Black males in elementary schools were limited English proficiency, students with special needs, and students in Advanced Work Classes. The predictor variables in the regression model predicted 15.6% of the variance in the MCAS ELA proficiency rate ( $F(3, 274) = 16.84, p < .001$ ).

Descriptives and results for the regression model predicting the MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Latino males in elementary schools are presented in Tables A5 and A6.

Table A5

*Descriptive Statistics: MCAS ELA Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Latino Males in Elementary Schools (total number of elementary schools across four years, N = 278)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MCAS ELA proficiency rate	27.16	14.99
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	68.72	15.03
Students in Advanced Work Classes	1.94	4.27
Student/teacher ratio	13.20	1.83
Attendance rate	94.06	1.563

Table A6

*Results: MCAS ELA Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Latino Males in Elementary Schools*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
MCAS ELA proficiency rate	-145.61**	55.67		-2.62
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	-.29	.06	-.29***	-4.99
Students in Advanced Work Classes	.81	.18	.23***	4.43
Student/teacher ratio	.93	.44	.11*	2.14
Attendance rate	1.90	.58	.20**	3.27
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.271			
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	25.38***			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The mean MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Latino males in Boston elementary schools was 27.2% ( $SD = 14.99$ ). The predictors of MCAS ELA proficiency for Latino males in elementary schools were students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, students in Advanced Work Classes, student/teacher ratio, and attendance rate. The predictor variables in the regression model predicted 27.1% of the variance in the MCAS ELA proficiency rate ( $F(4, 273) = 25.38, p < .001$ ).

Descriptives and results for the regression model predicting the MCAS math proficiency rate for Black males in elementary schools are presented in Tables A7 and A8.

Table A7

*Descriptive Statistics: MCAS Math Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Black Males in Elementary Schools (total number of elementary schools across four years, N = 277)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MCAS math proficiency rate	26.53	17.68
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	68.65	15.01
Students in Advanced Work Classes	1.94	4.27
Attendance rate	94.06	1.56

Table A8

*Results: MCAS Math Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Black Males in Elementary Schools*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
MCAS math proficiency	-97.93	70.03		-1.40
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	-.31	.07	-.26***	-4.20
Students in Advanced Work Classes	.69	.23	.17**	2.96
Attendance rate	1.54	.72	.14*	2.14
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.155			
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	16.65***			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The mean MCAS math proficiency rate for Black males in Boston elementary schools was 26.5% ( $SD = 17.68$ ). The predictors of MCAS math proficiency for Black males in elementary schools were students eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, students in Advanced Work Classes, and attendance rate. The predictor variables in the regression model predicted 15.5% of the variance in the MCAS math proficiency rate ( $F(3, 273) = 16.65, p < .001$ ).

Descriptives and results for the regression model predicting the MCAS math proficiency rate for Latino males in elementary schools are presented in Tables A9 and A10.

Table A9

*Descriptive Statistics: MCAS Math Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Latino Males in Elementary Schools (total number of elementary schools across four years, N = 269)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MCAS math proficiency rate	29.99	14.22
Student/teacher ratio	13.31	1.69
Attendance rate	94.08	1.55

Table A10

*Results: MCAS Math Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Latino Males in Elementary Schools*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
MCAS math proficiency rate	-269.12***	48.68		-5.53
Student/teacher ratio	1.66	.49	.20***	3.42
Attendance rate	2.95	.53	.32***	5.55
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.173			
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	27.91***			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The mean MCAS math proficiency rate for Latino males in Boston elementary schools was 30.0% ( $SD = 14.22$ ). The predictors of MCAS math proficiency for Latino males in elementary schools were student/teacher ratio and attendance rate. The predictor variables in the regression model predicted 17.3% of the variance in the MCAS math proficiency rate ( $F(2, 266) = 27.91, p < .001$ ).

## Secondary Schools

Descriptives and results for the regression model predicting the MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Black males in secondary schools are presented in Tables A11 and A12.

Table A11

*Descriptive Statistics: MCAS ELA Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Black Males in Secondary Schools (total number of secondary schools across four years, N = 153)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Black males in secondary schools	42.92	20.36
Limited English proficient students	19.73	18.02
Students with special needs	24.55	13.94
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	69.17	9.01
Attendance rate	88.36	5.08

Table A12

*Results: MCAS ELA Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Black Males in Secondary Schools*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
MCAS ELA proficiency rate	24.74		0.96	24.74
Limited English proficient students	.08	-.40	-5.60***	.08
Students with special needs	.10	-.33	-4.83***	.10
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	.16	-.35	-5.12***	.16
Attendance rate	.27	.27	3.95***	.27
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.333			
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	24.84***			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The mean MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Black males in Boston secondary schools was 42.9% ( $SD = 20.36$ ). The predictors of MCAS ELA proficiency for Black males in secondary schools were limited English proficiency, students with special needs, students eligible for free

or reduced-price lunch, and attendance rate. The predictor variables in the regression model predicted 33.3% of the variance in the MCAS ELA proficiency rate ( $F(3, 149) = 24.84, p < .001$ ).

Descriptives and results for the regression model to predict the MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Latino males in secondary schools are presented in Tables A13 and A14.

Table A13

*Descriptive Statistics: MCAS ELA Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Latino Males in Secondary Schools (total number of secondary schools across four years, N = 152)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MCAS ELA proficiency rate	49.00	23.06
Limited English proficient students	19.55	17.93
Students with special needs	24.61	13.97
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	69.13	9.03

Table A14

*Results: MCAS ELA Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Latino Males in Secondary Schools*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
MCAS ELA proficiency rate	132.89***	12.05		11.03
Limited English proficient students	-.54	.09	-.42***	-5.94
Students with special needs	-.61	.11	-.37***	-5.52
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	-.84	.17	-.33***	-4.88
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.391			
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	31.73***			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The mean MCAS ELA proficiency rate for Latino males in Boston secondary schools was 49.0% ( $SD = 23.06$ ). The predictors of MCAS ELA proficiency for Latino males in secondary schools were limited English proficiency, students with special needs, and students

eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. The predictor variables in the regression model predicted 39.1% of the variance in the MCAS ELA proficiency rate ( $F(3, 148) = 31.73, p < .001$ ).

Descriptives and results for the regression model predicting the MCAS math proficiency rate for Black males in secondary schools are presented in Tables A15 and A16.

Table A15

*Descriptive Statistics: MCAS Math Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Black Males in Secondary Schools (total number of secondary schools across four years,  $N = 155$ )*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MCAS math proficiency rate	35.67	22.57
Students with special needs	26.63	18.02
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	69.54	9.07

Table A16

*Results: MCAS Math Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Black Males in Secondary Schools*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
MCAS math proficiency rate	132.68***	10.96		12.11
Students with special needs	-.51	.08	-.40***	-6.49
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	-1.20	.16	-.48***	-7.76
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.413			
<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	53.51***			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The mean MCAS math proficiency rate for Black males in Boston secondary schools was 35.7% ( $SD = 22.57$ ). The predictors of the MCAS math proficiency rate for Black males in secondary schools were students with special needs and students eligible for free or reduced-

price lunch. The predictor variables in the regression model predicted 41.3% of the variance in the MCAS math proficiency rate ( $F(2, 152) = 53.51, p < .001$ ).

Descriptives and results for the regression model predicting the MCAS math proficiency rate for Latino males in secondary schools are presented in Tables A17 and A18.

Table A17

*Descriptive Statistics: MCAS Math Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Latino Males in Secondary Schools (total number of secondary schools across four years,  $N = 154$ )*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
MCAS math proficiency rate	41.78	25.70
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	69.52	9.10
Students with special needs	26.16	17.07
Student/teacher ratio	12.49	3.54

Table A18

*Results: MCAS Math Proficiency Predictive Regression Model for Latino Males in Secondary Schools*

Variables	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
MCAS math proficiency rate	130.98***	14.90		8.79
Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch	-1.33	.18	-.47***	-7.44
Students with special needs	-.45	.10	-.30***	-4.45
Student/teacher ratio	1.23	.49	.17*	2.51
$R^2$	.399			
<i>F</i> for change in $R^2$	33.20***			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The mean MCAS math proficiency rate for Latino males in Boston secondary schools was 41.8% ( $SD = 25.70$ ). The predictors of the MCAS math proficiency rate for Latino males in secondary schools were students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, students with special

needs, and student/teacher ratio. The predictor variables in the regression model predicted 39.9% of the variance in the MCAS math proficiency rate ( $F(3, 150) = 33.20, p < .001$ ).

### **Case Study School Selection**

Once the strongest regression models were identified, we reran each of the models and saved the standardized residuals, which represent the difference between the actual and predicted outcomes. Because we used panel datasets, four residual values were saved for each outcome variable—one for each school year. Initially, we used the selection criterion recommended in the literature: each school in the pool of high-performing candidates should have a minimum standardized residual of 0.75 for each year of data (Crone & Teddlie, 1995). All schools within the -0.75 to 0.75 standardized residual range for each year were performing within the expected range, given their student populations.

Because no schools in the database met that criterion, the sum of the four standardized residuals were used to create a composite residual for each school. Composite residuals were sorted from highest to lowest to identify the highest-performing schools (based on ELA and math proficiency) for Black and Latino males at the elementary and secondary school levels.

We set a minimum composite, four-year sum of standardized residuals of 3.0 (an average of 0.75 standard deviations above the mean) for each of the four academic years for both ELA and math. Important to note is that when school size was taken into account, the selection of schools did not change.

### ***Case Study Schools for Black and Latino Males***

Three elementary schools had composite standardized residuals of 3.0 or higher in both ELA and math for Black males. Two elementary schools had composite standardized residuals of 3.0 or higher in both ELA and math for Latino males. One elementary school emerged for both

Black and Latino males. Two secondary schools emerged with composite standardized residuals of 3.0 or higher in both ELA and math for Latino males. No secondary schools had composite standardized residuals of 3.0 or higher in both ELA and math for Black males. Because no secondary schools emerged for Black males, we chose the high school that was closest to meeting this criterion in both ELA and math, with a composite standardized residual slightly lower than 3.0 for math.

In order to narrow the candidate schools down to four schools for case studies, we used the following criteria to vet schools and to ensure representative diversity:

- no schools that had too few Black and Latino male students;
- no schools that had previously been profiled in other studies;
- no schools that require an application separate from the BPS admission lottery;
- two schools doing well by Black males and two schools doing well by Latino males;
- schools representing different grade levels;
- regional subgroup diversity (more than North American subgroup);
- school type diversity (at least one autonomous school);
- size diversity (at least one large school); and
- neighborhood diversity.

Due to the ongoing nature of sharing among the research partners, the outcomes of the regression were shared with BPS senior leaders, who brought with them contextual knowledge of each school, including recent leadership or programmatic changes. This information assisted in the final selection of the four case study schools according to the criteria above.

The selected elementary school was exemplary for its success with Black male and Latino male students, the preK–8 school for Black males, one high school for Latino males, and one high school for Black males.

Table A19

*Standardized Residuals for Case Study Schools*

<b>School Pseudonym</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Composite Standardized Residual ELA</b>	<b>Composite Standardized Residual Math</b>
<b>Tallmadge ES</b>	Black males and Latino males	PK–5	6.43 & 4.19	5.70 & 6.06
<b>Fairview K–8</b>	Black males	PK–8	5.90	3.91
<b>Bruin HS</b>	Latino males	9–12	3.13	3.75
<b>Hilltop HS</b>	Black males	9–12	4.65	2.70

*Limitations of Site Selection Methods*

- MCAS proficiency rates are the sole outcome measure.
- A separate middle school sample was not possible due to small numbers of middle schools.
- Some BPS schools were not included in our data for site selection because they served special populations, early childhood grades, they had few consistent performance measures to use as dependent variables, or they had very few Black and Latino male students. However, it should be acknowledged that their Black and Latino male students, though few in numbers, may have been performing well.
- We did not identify or select any comparison schools to study (i.e., schools that were low-performing or performing as expected) because of the sensitive nature of identifying a school as low performing. Therefore we do not know if the practices and themes identified in the case studies are also present in low-performing/average schools.

- We were limited by the availability of student-level variables to create school-level variables. Some student-level variables include generation number, age at immigration, and amount of schooling in country of origin. Some family-level variables include family education level, labor force status of family members, where families live, family housing status (e.g., home ownership), and family health insurance coverage or lack thereof.

## **Case Studies**

### ***Building a Case Study Research Team***

The case study research team included Black and Latino lead researchers unaffiliated with AISR and CCE who had expertise in qualitative research focused on Black and/or Latino students in schools. These lead researchers were each paired with an AISR or CCE staff researcher so that at least two researchers conducted data collection in each school. All site visit researchers self-identified as Black or Latin@ except one.

The first meeting of the case study research team was an in-person, all-day meeting, and subsequent meetings were 90 minutes every two weeks by video. Meeting agendas were co-constructed, and content varied according to the activities of the research. At different points during the course of the research, meeting discussions were about individual understandings of theoretical lenses, drafts of interview and observation protocols, initial learnings from preliminary meetings in each school, coding scheme, and emerging themes. Each case study research team (of two or three people) also met weekly to discuss its own planning, data collection, analysis, and writing.

To facilitate communication between meetings, a listserv was created for sharing resources, answering questions of general concern, and continuing discussions. A cloud folder

and subfolders were created for ease of sharing and accessing common documents such as the Indicator Framework, interview and observation protocols, articles, and drafts.

### ***Literature Review and Development of a Theory and Practice Framework***

Prior to developing data collection protocols for the case studies, we conducted an extensive literature review to identify theory, empirical studies, and policy writing about what works for Black and Latino males in public education. We found many theories that provide a foundation for developing programs, practices, interventions, and policies for educating Black and Latino males, and few rigorous studies of the impact of schools, programs, practices, interventions, and policies on the outcomes of Black and Latino males.

Thus, we expanded our literature review to cover a wider range of fields—not specifically focused on Black and Latino males—including multicultural education, critical race theory and pedagogy, social and cultural capital, and gender studies. Similarly here, we found writing on theory and practice, but little empirical support for the use of these theories and their corresponding practices in schools and classrooms.

Finally, we reasoned that the effective-schools literature could also inform our data collection. In this literature, a greater number of studies exist that show correlations between certain practices and student outcomes.

In order to organize the literature review into a format that could guide the case study data collection and analysis, we grouped our supporting articles into domains of effective practices and named indicators for each: (a) mission and vision; (b) curriculum and instruction; (c) school culture and climate; (d) school leadership and organizational policies; (e) family engagement; and (f) community partnerships. Many researchers and practitioners at different

administrative levels (local, district, state, federal) use these six domains to both design and evaluate school quality and results, including School Quality Reviews for Boston Pilot schools, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Walkthrough protocols, and the Department of Justice collection of evidence (Buttram, 2007; Office of Educational Quality and Accountability and University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute, 2007; Office of English Language Learners, 2010; Rennie Center, 2008; Shields & Miles, 2008; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000; The Education Trust, 2005). We uploaded each reference into a shared, web-based reference library, Zotero, so that all members of the case study team would have access to each article.

### ***Case Study Methods***

We chose case studies to capture each school's story of success with Black and Latino males. Case studies allowed us not only to portray each school's uniqueness, but also to analyze themes across schools. Case studies of schools are not meant to be generalized to other schools or student groups; rather, these examples may lead the researchers and the readers to new questions and understandings of students' experiences in similar settings (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

#### *Timing of the case study data collection*

The period for which the schools were identified as doing well by Black and Latino male students was SY2009–SY2012. Due to the time required to receive the data and create the databases necessary to conduct the statistical analyses, data collection for the case studies occurred during SY2014. In the lives of schools, many changes in staffing, policies, and programming can occur in two years. During that time, not only did the district experience a superintendent retirement, but also, three of the four schools experienced leadership changes at the principal level.

Because case studies ideally focus on contemporary rather than past phenomena (Yin, 2009), we reminded interviewees to discuss not only current practices, but also what was going on in the school from SY2009 through SY2012. We used the following strategies to address the data collection time lag and to elicit accurate depictions of the schools during the study period:

- We interviewed the departed principals at the schools that had experienced leadership changes. During interviews, researchers noted which school staff members had been in the school during the study years.
- Interviewers reminded interviewees about the time period in question and to focus the discussion on what was happening then rather than only in the present.
- Given the short nature of the site visit, classroom observation data were used to corroborate rather than identify best practices for Black and Latino male students. We interpreted classroom observation data conservatively. If interviews and documentation focused on a particular practice from the study period that was seen in multiple observations, we concluded that it was an institutionalized practice from that period rather than a practice that had been introduced more recently. No classroom observation data were included in the case studies unless they were confirmed by interviews and/or documentation.
- We requested documentation from the study period rather than from the data collection period. The availability of this documentation was uneven. Similar to our approach with the interviews, if documentation from after the study period was submitted, we asked whether or not the documentation reflected what was going on during the study period.
- Key school leaders reviewed the case studies for accuracy.

Despite these efforts, recall bias and uneven availability of archival materials from SY2009 to SY2012 was still an issue. For example, one school had experimented with single-gender classes in one grade, but interviewees were uncertain of the years in which this occurred, and records as to its outcomes were not available.

A second challenge the study confronted was that, although the school was the unit of analysis, the focus of this study was Black and Latino male students. These schools' male populations were predominantly Black and Latino, and many practices that are effective with all students are also effective with Black and Latino males. The distinction of quality educational practices and intentionality of educational practices for Black and Latino males emerged in the Indicator Framework and in analysis.

#### *Data collection*

**Preparatory interviews.** The superintendent and respective network superintendents sent congratulatory letters to the four schools, introducing the study and each respective research team. Each lead researcher followed up the letter by asking the school principal for an initial meeting to familiarize the researchers with the background of the school's identification, to discuss the selection of interviewees, and to share scheduling and logistical needs for the site visits. Researchers also used this initial meeting to clarify that the period under study was SY2009–SY2012 and that they needed to interview individuals who could speak about changes leading to success that took place at the school in those years. A list of requested site visit activities and parameters was shared with the principals. During the preliminary meeting, who would be interviewed and the scheduling of interviews were discussed, including arranging class coverage during interviews so as to maximize the research team's time on site and to reduce

disruption to classes. There was some variation in the site visit schedules at each school. Site visits typically included the following:

- interview and debrief with principal;
- interview with other administrators;
- interview with Instructional Leadership Team;
- interviews or focus group with teachers;
- interviews with other staff members, such as guidance counselors;
- focus group with family members of Black and Latino male students; and
- classroom and other observations.

We wanted to ensure that each case study included the experiences and perceptions of multiple stakeholders, including families, administrators, and staff members who had been at the schools during SY2009 to SY2012. Because some principals who had led the schools before and during the SY2009–SY2012 period had left their positions at the schools, one of the first steps in data collection was to identify, contact, and interview these former school leaders. We also determined that interviewing teachers who had been in each school before and during the study period was important. Thus, we used a combination of convenience and purposeful sampling to identify our interviewees.

**Site visits.** The principals or their designees developed a two-day site visit schedule based on these guidelines and the background meeting. They also notified their respective staff members about the site visits and the block of time during which they would be interviewed and observed.

Each interview began with a brief description of the study and the reasons why the school had been selected. After that, interviewees were encouraged to tell their story of success or

improvement in educating Black and Latino male students. Rather than following structured protocols, interviews were semistructured, with participants guided to address each domain of the theory and practice framework, if relevant. However, interview questions did not probe for specific practices that populated the framework; rather, they asked the interviewees to describe any practices related to each domain (e.g., Mission and Vision, Curriculum and Instruction, etc.).

Interviews had either a one-on-one or a focus-group format that lasted 45–60 minutes. Principals were interviewed independently. Teachers were mostly interviewed in groups at times that caused the least disruption in their teaching schedules, such as during common planning time or lunch. The ILT was interviewed in a focus group. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

During classroom observations, the researchers attended the classes alone and took notes. The researchers filled out the observation protocols after each observation rather than during it so as not to distract the teachers and students. The researchers entered the rooms quietly and sat behind or to the side of the students to be as unobtrusive as possible. Table A20 summarizes the data collected at each site. The guidelines and interview and observation protocols are available upon request.

Table A20

*Site Visit Data Collection*

	<b>Number of Class Observations</b>	<b>Number of Staff Members Interviewed</b>	<b>Number of Parents and Alumni Interviewed</b>	<b>Number of Students Interviewed</b>	<b>Number of Community Partners Interviewed</b>
<b>Tallmadge K–5</b>	7	14	4	2	7
<b>Fairview K–8</b>	12	18	2	5	1
<b>Bruin HS</b>	24	18	1	8	N/A
<b>Hilltop HS</b>	13	6	N/A	15	N/A
<b>TOTAL</b>	56	56	7	30	8

While retrospective case studies are challenging, in the interviews, we asked specifically about events and activities during the study period. We interpreted classroom and other school observations conservatively. If instructional strategies were consistently observed in multiple classrooms, we concluded that they had reached a level of sustainability over time. If the data from observations aligned with the interviews and documentation, we assumed that the work from the study period had carried over to the present day.

**Case study analysis.** Yin recommends using a “theoretical replication” logic that treats each case study as a separate “experiment” leading to its own findings (Yin, 2009). For each case study, researchers used primarily inductive approaches to data analysis. At each biweekly full-team meeting during and after the four site visits, the researchers shared their salient observations about practices and stances with each other. Discussions involved the sharing of emerging categories, patterns, and themes from interviews and observations in each school. Researchers used Dedoose software for qualitative analysis to code interview transcripts and observation field notes. Codes documented the teachers’, administrators’, and other interviewees’ beliefs and practices. We used open coding to extract key “themes” from the data, especially themes that explained the “how” and “why” of a school’s success.

The team also incorporated a deductive approach to coding, in that when data reflected practices in the Indicator Framework, supported by the literature, they were coded accordingly. This approach did not exclude the coding of practices that emerged that were not reflected in the framework. Rather, they expanded the research team’s findings about practices present in and across case study schools. We used the literature base to analyze our findings, but we also allowed findings to modify the evidence base. In this way, we recognized the important

contribution that experienced practitioners, in this case the staff members from the case study schools, made to our understanding of best practices for Black and Latino male students.

We triangulated data from multiple stakeholders about the same topics in order to synthesize findings. In addition, because site visits involved pairs of researchers, triangulation occurred by comparing findings between the two researchers. To a lesser extent, the use of documentation from the study period further confirmed our findings.

The codes and themes in the reports were shared and revised multiple times in the full researcher team to ensure a level of consistency in “grain size” across the four case studies. Draft case studies were shared with each principal, former principal, and primary case study contact for feedback and factual corrections before the case studies were finalized.

### ***Synthesis Across Case Studies***

Once we had coded each case study inductively, we proceeded to conduct comparisons across cases using two strategies. First, we analyzed findings deductively to compare them to the Indicator Framework. The codes and findings from each case study were reviewed using the expectation that some or all of the best practices in the framework would have been found in the case study schools. Data from each school were mapped onto the Indicator Framework to identify which of the four schools exhibited each indicator and to what extent. We created charts of shared practices among the schools, using the framework to identify practices for which there is strong empirical support in the literature, while allowing space for emerging practices that were not in the framework.

Cross-cutting themes were identified as ones in which the majority of the schools showed evidence of the indicator. Pockets of best practice were identified as ones in which only one school, or only one or more informants in a school, showed evidence of an indicator.

### *Limitations of the Case Study Approach*

As mentioned previously, the data used to identify the case study schools was from SY2009 to SY2012, while the data for the case studies was collected in SY2014. This time difference means that the schools underwent natural staffing and programmatic changes in the interim. Recall bias was also a limitation. Therefore, during interviews and document collection, we focused on the events and activities during SY2009–SY2012. We also interpreted classroom and other school observations conservatively. If instructional strategies were consistently observed in multiple classrooms, we concluded that they had reached a level of sustainability over time. If the data from observations aligned with the interviews and documentation, we assumed that the work from SY2009 to SY2012 had carried over to the present day. With this level of triangulation, despite not having observations and interviews from the study period, we deduced that the school’s investment during the study period was implemented and sustained. Other limitations to the case study methods included the following:

- One potential limitation of using an evidence-based framework is that it may produce a purely confirmatory study rather than one that highlights new best practices not grounded in the literature. To address this limitation, our interview protocols asked open-ended questions, and our interviewees were from a range of roles, allowing us to triangulate our data.
- The case study researchers did not always reflect the ethnicity or culture of the Black and Latino groups in each school.
- Due to resource constraints, schools were visited for only two days—thus, the visits yielded a snapshot of a particular point in time rather than an illustration across time.

Additional data collection for each school was gained through email, phone calls, and in-person interviews with key individuals.

- Given the brief nature of the site visits, the timing of the data collection relative to the study period (discussed previously), and the small amount of time spent in classrooms, we cannot draw conclusions about the nature of classroom instructional approaches.
- In three of the case study schools, there had been one or more changes in leadership during and after the study period (SY2009–SY2012). Thus, even though two of those former principals were interviewed, some of the practices that were implemented during the study period had not been sustained and could not be observed during data collection.
- Given the difference between the study period for which these schools were identified and the data collection period, even staff members who were present in the school for the duration may have had memories that were not entirely accurate, or perceptions of their own practices that were different from reality due to the context of the school and the district. This sort of recall bias could lead a study participant to report practices in hindsight that might have been less well developed or implemented than they reported. To minimize possible recall bias, we ensured we were given the same information by more than one person in separate interviews, phone calls, or emails.
- Comparison schools, such as those that were performing as predicted or lower than predicted, were not studied. Thus, some of the practices that emerged in the case study schools might also be found in those schools.
- Four case studies is a limited sample of schools. The study of more schools, or of schools with similar demographic profiles but with predicted or lower than predicted outcomes, would strengthen this study.

- The Indicator Framework for Black and Latino males was developed with a focus on empirical studies. Therefore, many expert recommendations and theories in articles from researchers, practitioners, and policy makers were not included. Many studies describing the education of Black and Latino males but not focused on academic or socioemotional outcomes were not included in the framework.

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