THE DISJOINTED AMERICAN EDUCATION SYSTEM STRUGGLES TO FULFILL THE ORIGINAL MISSION OF EDUCATING ALL CHILDREN EQUALLY

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Although many attempts have been made to evenly distribute educational resources to all children in the United States of America, equitable opportunities are not fully realized. Students of color encounter more obstacles on the path to higher education in terms of preparation for and participation in advanced coursework, and access to college bound SAT/ACT test preparation materials, than majority race students. From President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Great Society education component, known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, (ESEA), to President Barack Obama’s Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, (ESSA), attempts have been made to build a sustainable framework to promote equitable educational opportunities for all children in this great nation, particularly children of low-income status, who often enter high school at a deficit. This thesis addresses the failure of federal educational programs and statutes to overcome the educational achievement disparities for African American students. The disparities are reflected in college readiness assessments and actual college performance. The states’ implementation of approved laws to target the educational needs of the underserved with qualitative measures remains unfulfilled. This thesis will synthesize expert explanatory theories about the lack of success of such programs and statutes.
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INTRODUCTION

I am currently a high school teacher in Washington, D.C. My teaching experience encompasses private Christian schools, K-12 charter schools, numerous after school enrichment programs, and now secondary public education. As an educator, I chose to write about federal interventions that promised equitable education results for disadvantaged youth because there is a need to reduce the egregious number of inequitable academic environments across the country.

The same point is made by A. Wade Boykin, Executive Director of Capstone Institute, formerly known as the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk (CRESPR), Howard University:

Indeed, children from the domestic cultural groups that have fared the worse in schools constitute the fastest growing school-age population. The communities from which these students come will not be able to reap the benefits of proportionately large numbers of well-educated citizens.¹

On the heels of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, President Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society featured his “war on poverty” effort to end social injustices. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, (ESEA), was the education component that included the Title I program. Chapter one of this thesis looks at the Title I underpinning of Johnson’s education reform law. The Title I program is the education provision of ESEA that mandates access to low-income families’ need for educational equality. Continuous efforts to improve educational reform under ESEA occurs with each U.S. president, but the integrity of Title I has remained intact.

The education reform law(s) and reauthorizations from 1965 to 2017 have been put in place to provide level-playing field opportunities for all of America’s children. But the results

have not been satisfactory. The 1983 report by The National Commission on Excellence in Education, “A Nation at Risk,” was a wakeup call that explicitly detailed misguided attempts at education equality because the twin goals of equity and high-quality schooling were not extended to the country’s neediest children. The history of education in America is flanked with a series of federally funded education reforms that have logos, or facts, that focus on the issue of a preference to perfectly follow policy but negates the commitment to give young people the chance to “learn and live according to their aspirations and abilities.”

Furthermore a 2005 article in Education Week, “40 Years After ESEA, Federal Role in Schools Is Broader Than Ever,” points to the need to return to the original liberating purpose ESEA represented: “By passing this [ESEA] bill, we bridge the gap between helplessness and hope for more than 5 million educationally deprived children,” President Johnson told the crowd assembled that spring day in his home state. “I believe deeply no law I have signed or will ever sign means more to the future of America.” Civil rights activists had fought for equality, but the fight would not end with this law.

The major components of the most significant education reform, the Elementary Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), have survived, and ESEA has gained reauthorization nine times since the 1960s. Even though the nation’s systematic approach to educating children

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from kindergarten through secondary schooling remains significant in our global society, Diane Ravitch in her article “The Lost Purpose of School Reform” revisits the purpose of ESEA:

This is a useful time to remember that the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act had one purpose: to send additional resources to schools enrolling large numbers of poor children. Over the past two decades, ESEA has become a vehicle for those who believe that standards and testing will cure poverty and low performance, a strategy that has failed to attain its goal after two decades of trying.  

Johnson’s education reform system, dating back to the 1960s, has survived multiple reauthorizations—yet the law alone is incapable of producing consistent achievement in low-income schools across the nation. Academic change for less advantaged students requires more than just strategies like the Common Core Standards being integrated into the classroom. “An Empirical Analysis of ‘Acting White,’” by Harvard University professor of economics Roland Fryer, offers revelation into why the existing reform efforts remain at a disadvantage. “On every subject, at every grade level, there are large achievement differences between blacks and whites.” The reform policies alone will not address problems with “family structure and poverty, racial bias in testing or teachers’ perception.”

The role of cultural platform, or inclusion of diverse best practices, will require clear intentionality to connect people of color with their natural aspiration to succeed. This may perhaps represent a new methodology or a new approach to create the best learning atmospheres. Cultural inclusion can often link vulnerable students to academic achievement and encourage


them to “feel empowered at the secondary level…[where they] are able to resist giving in to differences in peer culture, socialization, or [negative] behavior.” Uncooperative behavior in communities of color can cause a disconnect to developing educationally. With varying learning deficits, the goal for reform to reach struggling students is found in equal educational opportunities for all of America’s young citizens. The diversity approach can help to close the achievement gap. The difference in scholastic achievement in urban cities is also reflected in standardized test scores. It is not clearly understood why some minority children fall behind with academic preparations and obtain poor results in the standardized tests.

This thesis will look a little deeper at some of the major periods of America’s education policy where federal intervention offered funding assistance and guidelines to state and local school districts or local education agencies to impact public education. The allocation of funds met federal government mandates; however, the design and implementation of programming was left up to the state. When the states and local education agencies (LEAs) received the funds, the learning opportunities for the children were not always at the forefront. The past focus of local education agencies tended to be on misguided goals: among others, to meet deadlines to receive funding through actions like submitting paperwork on time and confirming the number of needy children enrolled in a given school, which supports the allotment request from the federal government. The goal of the federal money to help establish equitable education in America’s public schools was part of the 1965 law but has been overlooked. Local governments and school districts moved away from the purpose of the original law, which specifically intended to give to state and school districts accountability to maintain oversight of effective, quality programs that benefit all students under the Constitution of the United States.
CHAPTER ONE
THE CIVIL RIGHTS OF EQUAL EDUCATION

The Great Society, initiated by President Lyndon Johnson in 1964 after a push for Congressional action, in less than 100 days resulted in a move towards social reform. This action became known as Johnson’s hallmark civil rights law. One of The Great Society’s mandates was to attack poverty. Policymakers moved to equalize educational opportunities by improving the quality of education to poor and minority students. Under Johnson’s Great Society’s social agendas, federal aid to education increased from $0.5 billion in 1960 to $3.5 billion in 1970. The increase was $3 billion. Similarly, the number of federal programs jumped from 20 in 1960 to 130 in 1970.¹

For the first time in American history, a federal platform began to extend equal accessibility to educational resources to every low-income child in the country; the reform act is known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965.²

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act began as the first major federal public education law charged with the task of extending equitable educational opportunities to underfunded, low-income, predominantly minority students in grades K–12 that attend public schools. The past several decades have witnessed several reauthorizations of that civil rights law. The numerous reforms build on ESEA’s original language, yet effective changes in the “quality of education” for disadvantaged youth has been undermined by both tangible and intangible


obstacles, which can be defined as a “slippery slope,” according to a Bethany Little, top education advisor under former President Obama. In 2011 Bethany Little worked with Senator Tom Harkin, the chair of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP).

To date, Beth Little has managed ESEA deliberations across political party lines. She said of rewriting the Elementary Secondary Education Act under the Bush administration, “States were not stepping up on student accountability for student achievement in 2000…. They were running from it.” To focus reform solely on low performing schools is in her words the slippery slope where struggling students can fall through the cracks. Little emphasized that simply reporting school results for meeting funding guidelines is “necessary but not sufficient” for effective and inclusive education reform.3

The act of extending equal access to resources and quality teachers to children of color requires additional funding, time, and planning. That was the heart of the Kennedy legislation, and the purpose of Johnson’s legislation in the 1960s. It was believed that when black children are duly educated with the same provisions as white children, the overall nation would benefit. The “War on Poverty” had to include education by default, for the country was at an impasse with the fight for civil liberties, where many leaders in the African-American community demanded equality. Many would say the educational scaffolding for change was and remains the Title I-specific details of that provision.

Looking back at the 1965 law, some called it “The Groundbreaking History of Title I.”

Dr. Monique Chism, Director of the Office of State Support at the U.S. Department of

Education, in a 2015 interview reviewed the important role she had with oversight of the Title I program. Dr. Chism acknowledged the American ideal has “education in our society as the pathway to the American lifestyle, the pursuit of happiness, which allows one to fully engage in citizenship in this country.”

Coming out of the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954, Johnson’s “War on Poverty” initiative paved the way to fair and equal education, through the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965, with Title I Programs at the center. Specifically, ESEA states:

The Congress declares it to be the policy of the United States that a high-quality education for all individuals and a fair and equal opportunity to obtain that education are a societal good, are a moral imperative, and improve the life of every individual, because the quality of our individual lives ultimately depends on the quality of the lives of others.

As an agent of change, Title I supports equal education through supplemental federal funding to assist Local Education Agencies (LEA) to provide a higher quality of education to students who require more services than their counterparts that come from wealthier communities. Title I provides a comprehensive, whole student approach to the education system because of its intent to address factors inside and outside of the classroom that can impair learning. Because Title I is the most notable program comprising up to 80 percent of all ESEA funding, it is important for us to consider the functionality of each component.

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6Ibid.

7Ibid.
Congress declared the amendment of ESEA in 1995, The Improving America’s Schools Act (IASA), as an additional policy for the purpose of expanding the existing provisions authorized in the United States over fiscal years 1996 through 1999. It increased funding by $750,000,000 “over the baseline each fiscal year” with the intent of expanding Title I provisions to serve all eligible low-income children by fiscal year 2004.8 Over the next several years, ESEA’s nine reauthorizations kept the integrity of the Title I provisions in place. The challenge has been to find quantifiable approaches that could effectively combine the provisions under the law, i.e. financial resources; higher level and thoughtful curriculum; qualified teachers; and attention to conditions beyond classrooms to enhance learning, and link them to the intended underserved recipient. In other words, because the funding is available, how can quantifiable results that support student learning in public school be obtained? The goal of any education reauthorization must be to assure government officials, parents, the community, and the students that comprehensive educational opportunities are being met.

By 2017, all minority students in the United States, K–12, should have access to the educational advantages, environmental protection, and protection from mediocrity that derails higher level learning opportunities detailed in the following Title I reauthorization highlights:

(1) “All children can master challenging content and complex problem-solving skills…when expectations are high and all children are given an opportunity to learn challenging material.

(2) Conditions outside the classroom such as hunger, unsafe living conditions, homelessness, unemployment, violence, inadequate health care…can adversely affect children’s academic achievement and must be addressed…in order for the nation to meet the National Education Goals.

8Ibid.
(3) Use of low-level tests that are not aligned with schools’ curricula fails to provide adequate information about what children know and can do and encourages curricula and instruction that focus on the low-level skills measured by such tests.

(4) Resources are more effective when resources are used to ensure children have full access to effective, high-quality, regular programs and receive supplemental help through extended-time activities.

(5) Intensive and sustained professional development for teachers and other school staff, focused…on helping children attain high standards is too often not provided.

(6) Insufficient attention and resources are directed toward the effective use of technology in schools and the role technology can play in professional development and improved teaching and learning.

(7) All parents can contribute to their children’s success by helping at home and becoming partners with teachers so that children can achieve high standards.

(8) Decentralized decision making is a key ingredient of systematic reform. Schools need the resources, flexibility, and authority to design and implement effective strategies for bringing their children to high levels of performance.

(9) Opportunities for students to achieve high standards can be enhanced through a variety of approaches such as public school choice and public charter schools.

(10) Attention to academics alone cannot ensure that all children will reach high standards…thereby necessitating coordination of services [health and other needs] to better meet children’s needs.

(11) Resources provided under this title can be better targeted on the highest-poverty local educational agencies and schools that have children most in need.

(12) Equitable and sufficient resources, particularly as such resources relate to the quality of the teaching force, have an integral relationship to high student achievement.9

For our purpose, given the intent of the secondary level of education groundwork under the ESEA provision, we note appropriations in the 1994 reauthorization to include the following intended provision:

Prevention and Intervention Programs for Youth Who Are Neglected, Delinquent, or at Risk of Dropping Out. For the purpose of carrying out part D, there are authorized to be

9“Improving America’s Schools Act of 1994.”
appropriated $40,000,000 for fiscal year 1995 and such sums as may be necessary for each of the four succeeding fiscal years.\textsuperscript{10}

On the matter of the promise towards equitable educational opportunities, Dr. Monique Chism reminds us of the duality of the law and the intended importance of Title I: “[I]t’s not only significant in the amount of funding that was earmarked and put aside, it was also monumental in helping to change our philosophy and ideologies about the importance of education and what it took to ensure that all students had access to a quality education.”\textsuperscript{11} The provision is available in terms of what the law offers; where the challenge lies is accountability with local school districts to implement unique programs that feature student success in measurable data.

Consistent with students’ accessibility to quality education, the National Institute of Education, detailed in the following section, focuses on synchronizing a system informed by the needs of the student population it serves to devising the commensurate action steps.

**Measurable Educational Approaches**

Success should be measured not by some fixed national norm, but rather by the results achieved in relation to the actual situation of the particular school and the particular set of pupils.

-Richard Nixon, XXXVII President of U.S.

\textsuperscript{10}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{11}Chism, interview.
President Nixon addressed the need for the American people to take a serious look at the education system he called “fragmented and disjointed”; he went on to say that many children were learning far more outside the classroom than they were inside the classroom. This disappointing difference in learning he attributed to “growing evidence that the [educational effectiveness of many special compensatory programs] are not yet measurably improving the success of poor children in school.”

Nixon addressed the premature celebration for widespread, quality education because in the 1970s we “spent nearly as much money on education as the entire rest of the world—$65 billion a year on all levels—” without the educational gains to represent the financial investment.

Reform efforts during the 1960s and 1970s took on a new shape and began to “emphasize civil rights, compensatory, and equal programs.” The National Institute of Education (NIE) was established on June 23, 1972 (86 Stat. 327), and became part of the Education Division of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. On May 4, 1980, the NIE moved to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, United States Department of Education, by the Department of Education Organization Act (3 Stat. 678). The NIE provided leadership in the conduct and support of scientific inquiry into the educational process.

Congress created the NIE to provide a focus for educational research and experimentation. When fully developed, the institute was an important element in the nation's

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13Ibid.


educational system, overseeing the annual expenditure of as much as a quarter of a billion dollars. The purpose of the NIE would be a systematic search for new knowledge needed to make educational opportunity truly equal.\textsuperscript{16}

“The institute would take the lead in developing these new measurements of educational output. In doing so, it should pay as much heed to what are called the ‘immeasurable’ entities of schooling (largely because no one ha[d] yet learned to measure them) such as responsibility, wit and humanity as it does to verbal and mathematical achievement.” The new measurements of educational output would occur under the Assistant Secretary for Education, with a permanent staff of outstanding scholars from such disciplines as psychology, biology and the social sciences, as well as education.\textsuperscript{17} In chapter three we will take a look at social interaction in the family and within the community and the impact those social units have on the learning aspirations of low-income families. Some would argue the traditional path outlined through the past and present education reform laws need an infusion of innovative means to begin to close the achievement gap in this country.

Nixon further established a President's Commission on School Finance to help states and communities analyze the fiscal plight of their public and non-public schools. The commission encouraged new methods of organization and finance, insisting public and non-public schools should together begin to chart the fiscal course of their educational planning for the 1970s.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
The NIE also linked the educational research and experimentation of other federal agencies—the Office of Economic Opportunity, the Department of Labor, the Department of Defense, the National Science Foundation, and others—to the attainment of particular national educational goals. Part of the goal was to redirect and improve our ability to make up for environmental deficiencies among the poor, to have long-range provisions for financial support of underserved schools, to determine efficient use of the dollars spent on equitable education, to plan instructional methods of quality measurable entities, and to enhance learning before and beyond the school day.

Busing students to and from schools outside their environments was intended to promote equality in the classroom and support desegregation, but it raised many unintended issues for the students. As an attempt to support students, however, busing was perceived to accomplish what previous decades of reform had overlooked. In the end, the “forced” environment impaired the impact that the 1970s education reform intended. There was more uproar about how and where students of color attended school, instead of the quality of reform under the law that was due them.

Choice Under Fire

By the mid-1970s, there was an emerging recognition that students were exiting the educational system without adequately developing basic skills. Consequently, educational reform shifted its focus from universal access to an emphasis on basic skills.¹⁹

-Chester E. Finn, Jr., U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education

The issue of busing low-income students to enforce desegregation laws was the focal point of education reform when President Gerald Ford took over from President Richard Nixon. Like Nixon, Ford supported school desegregation, but he did not support forced busing to make that happen. “The unanimous ruling in Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District in April 1971 upheld busing students between white suburban and black inner-city schools to reverse the pre-1954 de jure segregation within the district.”

In his first major legislation, Ford signed H.R. 69, an education amendment.

On June 24, 1976, Ford unveiled the School Desegregation Standards and Assistance Act, which was to uphold the common belief that civil rights for all Americans included a competitive and equal public education for all children. In an effort to provide access to minority students, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 moved to enforce the Brown v. Board of Education decision through Title IV to further litigate school desegregation. This move left President Ford with a tough decision as privately he was a proponent of school choice. Simultaneously, Title VI, through the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), allowed federal funds to be withdrawn from segregated schools.

Desegregation decisions were left largely in the hands of the state, even though there was federal legislation in support of a greater racial mix in schools. The Ford administration supported school desegregation and quality education, upholding court orders, yet Ford said they

\[\text{Lawrence J. McAndrews, “Missing the Bus: Gerald Ford and School Desegregation,”}\]
\[\text{http://www.jstor.org/stable/27551801.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., 798.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., 793.}\]
had gone too far. He told those who had “fought desegregation bitterly that his legislation [would] not affect court orders and litigation in progress.”

Amidst controversy surrounding the effectiveness of busing on quality education, the U.S. Civil Rights Commission concluded in August 1976 that busing had succeeded. The result of the findings supported success because 82 percent of America’s school districts where desegregation operated did so without serious disruption and experienced only a 10 percent decline in the levels of education. While racial integration took place, the effect of placing students of color in sometimes tense school environments was not measured as closely as the success of busing the children.

Education reform, consequently, entered a new phase when the Federal Department of Education was founded in 1979. Until then, the federal government oversight of the nation’s public education was fragmented at best. In response to a steady outcry from a small minority starting in the Reconstruction Period and lasting through the 1960s, the idea of an independent, cabinet-level education department was taking shape. Senator Abraham Ribicoff and the National Education Association had equal involvement in drafting the 130 bills surrounding education to form a single, solitary bill that was passed into a law that created the Department of Education.

Counter to his claim to streamline the federal government, President Jimmy Carter


24 Ibid., 798, 800.

signed the bill for the Department of Education.²⁶ From the inception of the Department of Education on October 17, 1979, the Secretary of Education, nor any member of the federal government, has never been allowed to instruct states on the best practice methods to design and implement programs within their school districts.²⁷

The Honorable Shirley Hufstedler became the first Secretary of Education committed to the task of creating a seamless environment for federal and local government to form a sort of coalition to benefit the nation’s public school students with every opportunity to learn in a fair and equitable school system. It was clear that the federal government’s role was not to supersede that of local, state, and school board decisions; rather Hufstedler’s goal was to make education important to the nation once more through community and parental support. Secretary Hufstedler, therefore, committed some time to “going out on the stump” to meet parents. She also taught community members about the significance of education in order “to elevate the consciousness of Americans about the good work classroom teachers do.”²⁸ Secretary Hufstedler envisioned a department that would “change in response to the changing needs of the country.”²⁹

**Defunding of ESEA**

Under the incoming Reagan administration, Hufstedler was replaced by Terrel Bell. President Reagan made a commitment to the American people and the federal government to

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Stalling, “A Brief History.”

²⁹Ibid.
return the financial and decision-making reins of America’s education to the hands of state and local government officials.

Indeed, under President Reagan, the ESEA, or federal government funding of education programs, saw a significant change. The term “New Federalism” was part of the social agenda during his term in office. Reagan’s form of economic recovery included downsizing the role of the federal government in education in order to put the power back into state and state-run institutions.\(^{30}\)

Through the Economic Recovery Program, Reagan’s New Federalism program resulted in the following:

- Separate programs
- Block grants
- Less financial assistance to states
- Increased state autonomy
- An attempt to dismantle the Department of Education
- Deregulation of education programs/de-emphasis on the role of government\(^{31}\)

The Reagan-era’s plan was to do away with categorical grants and replace those grants with block grants. The benefit of block grants was to amalgamate funding. The plan was to (a)


\(^{31}\)Stallings, “A Brief History,” 678.
eventually eliminate federal grants entirely, and (b) revert the federal role to the 1838
government function of collecting statistics.\textsuperscript{32}

Terrel Bell, Secretary of Education under the Reagan administration, notes that with the
goal to reduce federal involvement in education, he was able to maintain White House support
because of:

- The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965
- Effectiveness of Title I and II of the Higher Education Act

These key programs garnered support to avoid elimination, even though block grants for
special programs saw a 28 percent reduction over Reagan’s eight years in office.\textsuperscript{33} During Bell’s
tenure as Secretary of Education, the Department of Education accomplished President Reagan’s
goals. It also managed to survive and not deteriorate to a level similar to that of the National
Institute of Education (NIE). During the Nixon-era, the NIE had been based on controversial
research programs that produced statistics only. To President Reagan’s credit, a total budget
reduction of $7 billion occurred during the 1980s, which could not have happened without a
reduction in the role of the federal government in education.\textsuperscript{34}

The Reagan era in education, however, proved less favorable for economically and
socially disadvantaged children. Funding that from 1965 onward was targeted to bring fair
learning opportunities to urban communities took a backseat to the President’s brand of
economic recovery. A series of reports in the 1980s revealed shortcomings to the organizational

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{33}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{34}Ibid.
practices found in traditional comprehensive public high schools. In general, researchers found what practitioners had known for years—that is, many “students, teachers, and administrators feel alienated from school,” and classrooms also lacked the warm and welcoming environment for learning.\textsuperscript{35}

Even with the original language in ESEA, to positively improve the learning opportunities and environments for low-income children, federal funding concerns became more of a fiscal balancing act to lessen debts, rather than following through with implementing measurable steps to elevate children who had been historically left out of high-level learning opportunities. The public school curriculum is “fragmented and offers students highly differentiated, unequal learning opportunities.”\textsuperscript{36} The achievement gap between urban and suburban students remained in the 1980s, and it was a reflection of inconsistent social, economic, and educational programming at the state level. In 2010 Educational Testing Service (ETS) reported their analysis of the gap to determine whether it widened, had become stagnant, or possibly reduced in size; ETS conclusively showed disparities in black-white achievement from 1985 through 2000. The link between equitable education and equitable neighborhoods that support education was unmistakable. Paul Baron and Richard Coley report:

Although only 5 percent of White children born between 1955 and 1970 grew up in high-disadvantage neighborhoods, 84 percent of Black children did so. There was very little change for children born between 1985 and 2000. Also, four out of


\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
five Black children who started in the top three income quintiles experienced
downward mobility, compared with two out of five White children.\textsuperscript{37}

Rather than reducing the federal intervention of funds aimed at building equity, attention
to build accountability measures, at the state level, that monitored equal education opportunities
appropriate to individual school communities’ success would have been a decision towards
closing the achievement gap. The decision in the 1980s, however, to reduce the intervention of
federal funds inferred a certain culpable accountability on the children’s behalf to underutilize
the federal money; therefore, funds were redirected. In contrast, as the 1983 Nation’s Report
Card revealed, the country’s education structure was failing all children; the least of these were
the needy children who began by being behind.

Terrel Bell wrote the 1983 “A Nation at Risk.” This publication reported on the status of
the education system in America and its “rising tide of mediocrity.” While Bell’s report did not
yield new legislation, “A Nation at Risk” is credited with raising awareness within states,
resulting in an upsurge of reform attempts. “A Nation at Risk” is sometimes credited with halting
the Reagan administration’s intent to dissolve the Department of Education; the report also made
the House Republicans recognize the importance of their political power when including the
status of education in America in their party’s platform.\textsuperscript{38}

\textbf{The Education Summit}

\textsuperscript{37}P.E. Barton, R.J. Coley, “The Black-White Achievement Gap: When Progress

\textsuperscript{38}Gardner, “A Nation at Risk.”
The Bell report also prompted President George H.W. Bush to hold the first summit with the nation’s governors. Bush can be credited with an open-door policy at the summit to bridge the gap between federal and state lawmakers. The inclusion of state governors with presidential staff to discuss educating all the nation’s children, and further develop the intent of the 1965 law to serve the underserved, underlined the change needed in schools. The 1989 Education Summit included an announcement of six national education goals in 1990 that eventually expanded into eight national goals.  

During the 1989 Education Summit, President Bush met with the U.S. governors, including Bill Clinton. This was the first-ever meeting between the president and governors to establish a set of educational goals to redirect and make educational policy a national priority for the federal, state, and local governments. The result of the summit led to the 1994 reauthorization of ESEA, which is recognized as a significant time of federal involvement in the education and secondary education process.  

Title I was protected with overwhelming support. Many policymakers noted the program as “worthy of reauthorization”; the modest academic gains in poor and minority students was credited to Title I. The Bush reauthorization moved the federal emphasis to concentrate on academic achievement rather than compliance with fiscal and programmatic regulations. The preparation for the reauthorization acknowledged the need for improvement by doing the following:

39 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 25.
42 Ibid.
- Focus on basic skills
- Upgrade to higher-order thinking skills
- Streamline federal funding
- Streamline programs to greater school-wide emphasis

The Hawkins-Stafford Elementary and Secondary School Improvement Amendments of 1988 were incorporated to bridge gaps in the new legislation with major changes in approach and allocation.43 A major inclusion in the reauthorization was to emphasize results in the classroom instead of adherence to an established process:

- Introduction of higher-order thinking skills
- Reworking the allocation formula to concentrate spending on neediest districts
- Increase number of Title I programs because of decrease in school poverty rates (from 75 percent to 65 percent)44

Additionally, the Hawkins-Stafford amendment brought improvement provisions that required school districts to use reliable measurements to determine the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of programs.

A pushback, however, from state and local governments on federally set standards resulted in the watered-down “minimum standard” set by the Department of Education.45 The

43Ibid., 24.
44Ibid.
minimum standard meant that any gains in test scores whatsoever would meet the standard of effectiveness. “By requiring that states meet this minimum requirement, the amendment lowered the number of programs that would be labeled ineffective.” Critics argue the minimum requirement in effect hid underperforming schools from accountability, which resulted in a different, or lower, expectation for Title I students. In order for standards and opportunities to effectively close the achievement gap, urban students must be offered the same opportunities as their counterparts in suburban and wealthy communities. All students, whether they be from poor or wealthy communities, must be valued the same.

The Bush administration tried unsuccessfully to include school choice as a component of ESEA offering a different opportunity to children of color. The provision was to use federal funds and give parents of Title I children the power of choice for their children to attend private schools that are otherwise out of reach. School choice, part of the Bush America 2000 initiative, was defeated in the predominantly Democratic Congress. That defeat was due to the specific language of the ESEA law, but the Title I children and their chance to participate in a more comprehensive classroom setting is not what led to the real defeat. When targeted school-choice, federal funds were caught in partisan bureaucracy, it became clear that indecision triumphed over fulfilling equitable education, which left disadvantaged children in a system that grossly ignores their needs. From 1989 until Bill Clinton’s administration, Congress and the White House attempted to streamline the broad strokes of the Bush administration’s initiative that aimed at forging the Education Summit into legislation. Hence, the Bush defeat paved the way for the next president, Bill Clinton, to urge Congress to agree to keep federal funding—with equitable stipulations towards comprehensive reform—on the table for state and local governments.

\[46\text{Ibid.}\]
Goals 2000 Plus The Opportunity to Learn

Under the administration of President Bill Clinton, “The Goals 2000: Educate America Act: The Federalization and Legalization of Educational Policy” was signed into law, which culminated in a comprehensive federal educational reform act. It was the newest reallocation of educational policymaking roles among the federal, state, and local governments. The augmentation of the federal government’s educational policymaking power was evident in the Goals 2000 Act. The unprecedented increase in the federal role was spurred by the government’s reordering of the education policy priorities.

Goals 2000 would include specific educational policymaking reforms:

- Increase federalization by shifting from state and local governments’ control to federal government
- Increased duties of newly created National Education Standards and Improvements Council (NESIC) will expand federal authority over educational policy, thereby diminishing state and local control
- Further legalization—shift supervision from representative bodies to the judiciary—of educational policymaking and implementation
- Provide an unusual opportunity for the federal government: it can increase its influence over educational policy, yet pass associated costs on to states and local school boards

The predicted consequences of Goals 2000 brought increased federalization and legislation of educational policymaking that distanced and distinguished it from any other reform

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act in past federal educational reform efforts. The federal policymaking rules would “support state and local government efforts to improve education across the board for all students.”

Goals 2000 encouraged state and local governments to link and bridge gaps between different aspects of their educational system(s): “curriculum and instructional materials, assessment practices, and professional development.”

Congress supported Goals 2000’s expansion of the federal role in education for several reasons:

(a) Career work for high school graduates with general skills had become obsolete;
(b) Increasing technology-driven workplaces required higher-order thinking;
(c) Emerging consensus dictated the need for a comprehensive reform of the entire educational system;
(d) Federal government could enable states and local governments to reduce redundant reform acts; and
(e) Federal government could bridge and disseminate information to states and local school boards.

The Goals 2000 Act also included the Opportunity to Learn (OTL) component in order to meet the criteria for and establish the basis of a national assessment of the education system with equitable resources, practices, and assessments at every level of the education program. The OTL standard “provide[s] all students with an opportunity to learn the material in voluntary national

\[48\] Ibid., 357.

\[49\] Ibid.

content standards or state content standards.” The OTL standard offers the best education possible to every child by monitoring how effectively programs backed by federal funds in low-income areas are impacting learning. It is an assessment mechanism of resources, best teaching practices, and necessary requirements of the conditions of schools and local education agencies within each state.

From the 1990s, the advent of OTL standards was part of the potential solution to raise the education stakes in schools providing inferior education. The standard bearer, OTL offered analysis to inform achievement disparities due to faulty learning experiences rather than human capital inferiority. Both Democrats and Republicans, plus House and Senate representatives, produced language about the appropriate role of the national OTL standards. The language was therefore inclusive of all students in the United States, notwithstanding race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, physical impairment, or geographical location.

Andrew Porter is an educational psychologist and psychometrician who published widely on, among other assessments, opportunities for students to learn and achieve indicators. Per Porter, OTL is what is called for in the national education goals, and it is the hallmark of the curriculum reforms of the 1980s.

While OTL standards intended to promote learning and student awareness by equalizing opportunity with state/local direction and federal support, OTL was meant to affect all public schools, not just those in low income communities. This is an important note because unless the


52Ibid.

OTL funding directives came with an addendum to maintain separate ESEA funds targeted to minorities, those children were already behind. If all public schools failed to meet the stringent OTL requirements, equitable distribution of resources and opportunity to learn advantages are not meaningful to all of the nation’s children in public schools.

The demand for annual assessments in public schools had changed the trajectory of the original purpose of education reform for disadvantaged students. Albeit accurate tools that measure progress while closing the achievement gap between the privileged and the needy are necessary, without fair access to current best practices, cutting edge technology, and community based support coming into urban classrooms, underserved children remain without equal preparedness; the achievement gap favors children in more affluent neighborhoods where accessibility is an absolute.

**No Child Left Behind**

Congress, with overwhelming bipartisan support in 2001, passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The new education reform law signed by President George W. Bush on January 8, 2002, made it the most recent reauthorization to the 1965 ESEA law.

In 2002 the updated Elementary and Secondary Education Act effectively scaled up the federal role in holding schools accountable for student outcomes. NCLB was the product of a collaboration between civil rights activists and business groups, both Democrats and Republicans on Capitol Hill during the Bush administration, all of whom sought to advance American
competitiveness while closing the achievement gap between poor and minority students to their advantaged peers.\textsuperscript{54}

The NCLB law grew out of the concern that the American education system was no longer internationally competitive. There was also the need to maintain the integrity of the original 1965 order of federal funding to urban schools where well-deserving students awaited the “funds to resource” transition to impact the classroom learning experience.

The reauthorization offered some improvement:

- Significant increase in the federal role in holding schools responsible for the academic progress of all students
- A special focus on ensuring that states and schools boost the performance of certain groups of students, such as English-language learners, students in special education, and poor and minority children whose achievement, on average, trails their peers\textsuperscript{55}

States did not have to comply with the new requirements, but if they didn’t, they risked losing federal Title I money. From 2002 until 2016, NCLB has had an outsized impact on teaching, learning, and school improvement, and it has become increasingly controversial with educators and the public. The controversy was in part due to the appearance that NCLB offered a new take on an established law, making wide acceptance of the law difficult. State compliance with improved standards occurred in the 1980s following the report “A Nation at Risk.” The effect of that report charged schools, communities, and families to demand more


from the education system. Later, Clinton’s IASA initiated more stringent national testing, even though testing was voluntary. The NCLB controversy included mandatory testing, which garnered pushback from state and local governments due to its punitive action if students did not test well. Educators argued “NCLB test results [should] be disaggregated by sub-groups of students forced [to] force the country to face up to the great disparities in achievement that would continue to be found on the basis of race and income.”

Critics further argued that NCLB placed disadvantaged students at an unfair position as resources promised through ESEA were not consistently available to urban school districts where America’s neediest attended. Without technology, complex text, field trips with educational merit, after-school enhancement programs, and qualified teachers equipped to reach culturally diverse students, the NCLB national test results—for all of America’s children—were skewed at best.

**Every Student Succeeds Act**

The new Every Student Succeeds Act, officially signed into law December 10, 2015, “Rolls back much of the federal government’s big footprint in education policy, on everything from testing and teacher quality to low-performing schools. And it gives new leeway to states in calling the shots.”

-Alyson Klein, assistant editor for *Education Week*

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During the Obama administration, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, White House aides, and members of Congress worked on reforming the 2002 No Child Left Behind law. The plan to reform NCLB, however, was met by Congressional opposition. To the benefit of the reauthorization, the 2009 recession dictated the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which “contained more federal funding for education than had ever been made by Congress.”

Using the Bush administration’s blueprint, the goal was to leave the NCLB mandatory annual state testing of students in place, but continue to report results by race and a number of other categories, because “they want to ensure that school districts pay more attention to the poor, and students of color, and other often-overlooked groups.”

President Obama and his administration’s goal was to maintain the aspects of NCLB that required states to measure how schools increase learning annually as opposed to charting how many students meet state standards. An additional reform of this administration was to target the nation’s weakest schools rather than the function of NCLB strategy to target schools with a single grade underperforming in a single subject. The latter results in a distorted 80 percent failure rate of the nation’s public schools. The accuracy of data to support increased improved learning environments with critical thinking curricular in low-income school districts demanded of lawmakers the creation of comprehensive, measurable components to track progress.

58Ibid., 2098.


60Ibid.
Then Secretary of Education Duncan and his team changed the trajectory of states willing to participate in the Obama administration’s new incentive, Race to the Top (RTT) competition. RTT grant money was available to states that qualified by meeting specific guidelines in conjunction with Duncan’s push to improve the disjointed education system. Duncan later acknowledged the impact the competition had on many states, whether awarded grants or not: states were fast at work to change policies and laws that improved America’s education system. Key to the improvement of the country’s lowest performing schools was not to be overlooked but remain accountable as to not ‘put the cart before the horse’; in other words, mistakes of the past must not be repeated. To be equitable, the nation’s testing policy must be “Aligned with a particular curriculum so that there is symmetry between what students are taught and what they are tested on.”61

Bethany Little, the top education policy advisor on the Senate HELP committee, who helped write the reauthorization of ESEA under the George H.W. Bush presidency, worked with the Obama administration. Little’s and her staff’s priority was still the equitable reauthorization of ESEA because it remains the major federal public education law. She is quick, then, to point out the areas of concern the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) reauthorization will address:

- Overly rigid accountability system[s]
- Favored treatment of “affluent schools”
- Same sanctions imposed on slightly underperforming schools or failing schools
- Ineffective school choice and tutoring programs

• Unintended incentives for states to lower standards\textsuperscript{62}
• Limited “attention to the key issues of teacher quality”\textsuperscript{63}

The new ESSA law, Little argues, will “likely shift to (a) greater flexibility for states; and (b) greater commitment among states…to high standards and school accountability.” She said, “States were not stepping up on accountability for student achievement in 2000. They were running from it; NCLB had to be tough.”\textsuperscript{64}

The tough approach rolled right into the ESSA initiative. The RTT portion of the act questioned conflicts arising from the NCLB. Specifically, core curriculum, states’ leadership roles to advance reform, and quality teachers, all of which “Had been a low priority under the Bush administration….The demand to turn around failing schools brought federal education policy back to the egalitarian roots President Johnson had planted with the original passage of ESEA in 1965:

• For, after all, academic failure was most persistent in poor communities, and those communities had a disproportionate number of African-American and Latino children.\textsuperscript{65}
• “With the nation’s first African American president in the White House, [this] challenged the direction the administration was taking.”\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{62} Toch, “In the Game,” 72-73.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{65} Viteritti, “The Federal Role in School Reform,” 2105.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid., 2106.
The new law could be guilty of aggression towards policy and available funds to drive state involvement and accuracy of implementation above the neediest recipients of the original intended federal funding. The administration was called to task by concerned civil rights leaders wanting to dismantle components of the new law that would automatically disenfranchise lowest performing schools from additional funding. The argument remains from one reauthorization to the next how to equitably establish, implement, and monitor accountability measures. Measurable steps that inform data on the goal to improve the learning experience of all of America’s children are needed.
Arne Duncan, Secretary of Education under President Barack Obama, is noted as saying:

Our children today aren’t competing within a district or within a state for jobs; they are competing with children in India and China. I think our children are as smart, talented, and committed as children anywhere. But our children have been at a competitive disadvantage, and that’s very troubling to me. I want to level the playing field. If our standards can tell us whether our children can compete with anybody in the world, then we could feel very good about where our country is going. If we level the playing field, our students will do just fine; they’ll do us proud.¹

The term “level the playing field” is not new to public thought or opinion. The word “level” in the idiom leaves no room for guesses; there is no ambiguity, or uncertainty, about this uneven slope. In education, uncertainty can become dangerous. Arne Duncan describes the status of the U.S. education system as uncertain and in need of categorical improvement. If substantive changes are made to America’s approach to educating its youth, including accessibility to advanced placement classes via funding, resources, and qualified teachers, plus culturally-relevant standardized tests in urban communities, the educational state of affairs in the nation could improve substantially. Duncan spoke explicitly about the impact that the absence of higher-level learning opportunities in deprived communities will have on the future. The strength of America’s competitiveness with other nations depends on the educational strength of all its people. Paradoxically, the strength of Duncan’s argument for fairness is based on the claim made by public school advocates that every secondary student receives equal college-prep training; yet, when a closer look occurs, the examination reveals the emptiness of that claim. Well-

intended college preparatory essentials like advanced placement classes and standardized tests have negligible impact in low-income areas due to a faulty education system. Duncan acknowledged that America has “smart, talented, and committed children”; however, there is an incongruent reality, which puts our children at a “competitive disadvantage, and that’s troubling to [Duncan],” the highest American-education official in 2010.2

There is research that confirms an overwhelming deficit when it comes to access to these college preparatory essentials for every high school student in America. Nationally, Duncan addressed the need to improve curriculum and resources in all communities, yet the underlying deficit, or deficiency, for disadvantaged students in America not found in wealthier communities tends to be either overlooked or underestimated. Improvements needed in urban student populations are due to either poor resources, lack of prior knowledge, or language barriers. This improvement requires assistance from federally funded programs with state and local school districts designing unique implementation approaches to meet the college preparedness guidelines for the globally competitive future. For secondary education, global competition includes participation in advanced placement classes, passing subsequent tests, and successful participation in nationally standardized tests.

Remarkably, Duncan recalls that many urban high school kids have lived through tough situations he could not imagine, from “being locked up for a while, to being homeless for ten years and living in shelters and cars”; yet, “these are students who are about to graduate from high school and go to some very competitive universities, [and that] cannot be left out of

2Krigman, Arne Duncan's Learning Curve.
competitive plans involving the future of America.”

Duncan comments on the “extraordinary ability” these kids have to “overcome odds,” enough to pursue equitable educational opportunities. These students’ interaction with many of life’s complexities required strategies like those needed to comprehend complex-text reading material across content areas. Likewise, based on Duncan’s interaction with many of these students, they possess a competitive strategy and determination for survival that can, in many instances, mirror a student’s competitive-strategy and determination to successfully interact with formula that is required in the acquisition of problem solving. In fairness, both the complexities of life and of competitive education require higher-level strategies to succeed and survive.

There are “hundreds of thousands of other stories” similar to what Duncan and his team found on their 50-state conversation trail in 2009. The “Duncan” national dialogue was not a planned strategy until the decision was made to conduct the “listening and learning” tour. The purpose of the tour was to “gather feedback on the reauthorization of President Bush’s 2002 No Child Left Behind law, which [at the time was] three years overdue for renewal.”

Subsequently, the team of professionals with a vested interest in learning how to “improve learning” across the country for all children gained empirical knowledge that many deem invaluable.

While Duncan’s research approach reflected congruence with all major actors actively seeking methodology to improve a dysfunctional public school system, Betsy DeVos, current Secretary of Education under the Trump administration, has a different approach to equitable public education. DeVos is “not an educator or an education leader; [however], the DeVos

\(^3\)Ibid.

\(^4\)Ibid.
family has helped commandeer public money that was intended to fulfill the state’s mandate to provide compulsory education.” A firm believer in “School Choice,” Ms. DeVos has a history of implementing mandatory, “top-down” initiatives with no input from everyday Americans whose children attend public schools. In other words, the groups most affected by the failure of public school education to deliver “free” education, under the Trump-DeVos education administration, are not likely to directly benefit from her proposal to resolve a dysfunctional system.

In December 2016, the *Detroit Free Press* published Stephen Henderson’s article “Betsy DeVos and the Twilight of Public Education,” where he noted that Ms. DeVos’s perspectives for continuing to improve the future of education practices and policy are unclear. Henderson, the editorial page editor of the *Free Press*, is concerned that under Betsy DeVos’ leadership, the search by families of modest means for quality public school education for their children (including access to advanced placement course work and mandatory standardized tests) may be crowded out by wealthy families like the DeVos family. As philanthropists, the DeVos family contributed $1.45 million over a two-month period to the Great Lakes Education Project, (GLEP), their family foundation. Betsy DeVos admittedly is an advocate for the rights of families to choose the primary and secondary school(s) their children will attend, whether public, public charter, or private. Moreover, DeVos as United States Secretary of Education heads the most powerful office charged with instituting practice and policy in the realm of education for all of America’s children.

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6Henderson, “Betsy Devos and the twilight of public education.”
At the federal level, if compulsory school choice does not directly impact the quality of education for all children—especially children of color—it is fair to say that such a “top-down” approach may perpetuate a decades-old problem with little or no sign of improvement. A wealthy constituent taking a bird’s-eye view of what happens in urban communities cannot guarantee change. History offers numerous examples of data gathering by outsiders, done through observation rather than interaction, that have yielded failed attempts to bring lasting change to America’s education of its children of diversity. Opening school choice without rigorous monitoring to ensure equitable teacher approach, equitable counseling, equitable availability to advanced coursework, and equitable preparation for standardized tests, simply gives families “school choice” in name only; without the requisite support, school choice will not solve the perceptions many education professionals have of children of color. The Duncan approach to public education reform is to collaborate with community stakeholders in improving public school education, seeking their experiences and expectations. By comparison, Henderson suggests the DeVos approach to education without the necessary investment by all stakeholders will negate the original 1965 “Great Society” mandate of LBJ to provide equitable education in America.

President Johnson’s Great Society was foundational to group activism because of the core movement to bring change to overlooked communities in the 1960s. Similarly, in 2017, there is growing evidence that group advocacy is gaining strength. Groups like Black Lives Matter, National LGBTQ Task Force, and Families for Freedom are examples of the value people place on collaborative work to bring about change, including grassroots advocacy. Such acts of alliance have democracy at their core because of the potential change that can be brought about where people live and work. The time to build relationships based upon a mutual partnership
cannot be overlooked. Henderson compares Betsy DeVos to someone who has “used her extreme wealth to influence the conversation about education reform, and to bend that conversation to her ideological convictions despite the dearth of evidence supporting them.”

The decision of education reform being made primarily by the wealthy through monetary control, rather than requisite equity by grassroots effectiveness involving the neediest stakeholders in the community, may further hinder equitable solutions to the education deficit in America. Stephen Henderson bases his critique of the DeVos education system on its ill effects on the Detroit public school system. The city has the largest constituency of public charter schools in the country, but, despite school choice offerings, Detroit maintains high numbers of failing students and schools.

A forceful and effective solution to equalize educational preparation and accessibility to high-level learning opportunities may require a judicious blend of the Duncan approach with that of DeVos with extensive inputs from the human capital in the middle. To stabilize education and build a better 21st century model of education in America, offering advanced placement courses and properly using standardized test results at the secondary level should factor into the aggressive planning from state and local governments to impact the school district’s implementation of strategic programming.

The student’s ability to maintain competitiveness once they enter college depends on the student’s prior familiarity with the complex language of the complex text materials across content areas. That competitiveness is nurtured when students experientially interact with “close reading” techniques that lead to evidence discovery, which ultimately results in the production of

7Henderson, “Betsy Devos and the twilight of public education.”

8Ibid.
scholarly writing, or interpretation of a given text. Interpretation of complex formula(s) and the acquisition of problem solving skills require the same experiential interaction of higher-level strategies taught using accessible state-of-the-art curriculum and resources. The education in the nation may start to approach equality for all students if substantive changes are made to America’s approach to educating its youth; this improvement would include accessibility to advanced placement (AP) classes via funding, resources, and qualified teachers, plus culturally relevant standardized tests, like the SAT I, SAT II, and the ACT, in urban communities. Dr. Ernest Johnson stated:

As transformational educators teaching African American males, we must decide to teach from a level of high expectation and level of high dedication regardless of student’s current mindset. We must view ourselves as agents of change in the child’s educational process. We are motivator, inspiration, and life coach. We are sage, counselor, mentor, and parent. Just as a sage or counselor or mentor or parent wouldn’t stop expecting the best from the person they counsel, we can never stop expecting the best out of our African American male students.9

Advanced Placement Courses

The advanced placement, or AP, program started in the 1950s to meet the need of budding high school seniors capable of successfully completing academic work at the college level. There was an overlap of class instruction between 12th-grade high school and the freshman year of college. Committees of college and high school teachers formed and later recommended that students take exams in major subjects to test out of entry-level college courses. A conglomerate of high school teachers, university professors, and secondary testing professionals were involved in developing courses that culminated in advanced placement tests.

The framework for AP classes, since the inception of the program, is based upon “the course syllabi and high course standards [which] were keys to the success of the program…. They provide a standard for achievement, a basis for testing, and a reference for colleges.”10 The opportunity to extend collegiate credit to high-achieving secondary students, which evolved in the 1950s, continues through the advanced placement options prominent in high schools across the country. The trajectory of AP courses and subsequent tests has been on a steady rise in 21st century education within the United States:

- In 1955, 1,229 students took AP exams and results were sent to a few dozen colleges.
- In 2000, 845,000 students took AP exams in 19 subject areas.11
- Over one-half of all U.S. high schools now offer AP courses.12
- In 2005, more than 1 million high school students took AP tests (more than double in 1995), and 70,000 new AP science and math teachers were projected to train.13

The AP phenomenon is popular among students who are capable of handling sophisticated content, and this can energize that segment of the student population to form communities of support in high school and beyond. The natural benefit of grouping people with shared interests could be perpetual growth toward overcoming real-world challenges that are


11College Board, 2000 AP National Summary Report Tables.

12Ibid.

akin to the complexities of the AP environment. D.J. Cocking wrote in “Don’t Throw the Baby Out with the Bathwater” about her approval to group students with the ability to excel, together, and to be separate from the rest. Cocking in her research says, “It is undemocratic not to offer different educational opportunities to fit children’s different needs”; Cocking quotes Thomas Jefferson in saying, “There is nothing more unequal than equal treatment of unequal people.”

There is growing evidence to support unity among teachers who lead students in these advanced areas of study. As some researchers point out, even teachers who lead AP classes tend to be the most qualified, for there is also an enthusiasm in this cohort unlike what researchers have found in the general subject teaching pool. AP teachers typically hold master’s degrees in their subject area:

In a survey of history teachers done in 1989–1990 by the National Center for History in the Schools at UCLA, backgrounds of teachers of general, remedial, and AP history were examined. Sixty percent of those teaching general and remedial U.S. History and World History did not have a major in history. The survey found that AP history teachers were more likely to have majored in history and were more likely to hold master’s degrees in history.

There is, however, a formidable danger in communities of color where their numbers in AP classes offer no competition to their peer groups in wealthier neighborhoods. If the reason for the deficit is inability, that would be one cause for concern, but researchers present other reasons for the shortcoming. Dr. Ernest Johnson and the Champions for Peace Mastermind Institute explain that, “Minority students are also overrepresented in special education programs and

14Santoli, “Is There an Advanced Placement Advantage?”

15Ibid.
underrepresented in honors and advanced placement classes.”\textsuperscript{16} They suggest that this is because of misunderstandings about the presence of black students in the classroom, making teacher offerings of advanced placement classes to these students a moot point. For decades African American students, especially male students, were said to be violent, lazy, and incapable of higher-level thinking. These negative images coming from the majority race community have made their way into classrooms across the country. Johnson et al. contend that until all students are valued equally in the classroom, particularly with an ethnically diverse teaching staff, the unequal practices and policies of the past will repeat.\textsuperscript{17} The culture in a community that nurtures each child’s ability should come from teachers trained from an equitable approach to value diversity as the golden rule.

Dr. Johnson, who has spent time in the classroom, believes that, “Regardless of whether you agree with this idea, a diverse teaching and administrative staff in schools give minority children authority figures that look like them.”\textsuperscript{18} By the time students of color reach the university and college level, they should not enter with an “empty slates and blank vessels” perspective; rather, all students should enter equipped with a higher-level learning ability and critical thinking skills across content areas. In the chapter “Closing the Widest and Whitest Gaps: White Female Teachers and Black Males,” Johnson et al. offer research to support that \textit{Brown v. Board of Education} produced a dysfunctional relationship in the classroom between white teachers and black male students, a relationship “based on fear, guilt, ignorance, and resentment,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{16}Johnson, et al., \textit{The Secrets for Motivating, Educating, and Lifting the Spirit of African American Males}, 1023.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 1033.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{18}Ibid., 1024.}
rather than a learning environment where students are encouraged to thrive."\textsuperscript{19} From that time in history until Arne Duncan’s time as Secretary of Education, the playing field for equal opportunity in education has suffered. 

Johnson and others looked at the disappointingly small number of African-American teachers in public schools, from the primary or foundational years up through high school, and noted the lack of leadership figures in the classroom for children of color to aspire to. Specifically, a 38 percent drop in black teachers from 1954 to 1965 when “cultural illiteracy and racial contempt prevailed and dominated school policy and classroom practices.”\textsuperscript{20} This created dysfunction and confusion among African-American teachers and students; further, between 1975 and 1985, the number of black college students majoring in education declined by 66 percent as a result.\textsuperscript{21} In the midst of an education system that was perhaps attempting to extend “equal” education to all children in the classroom, the Jim Crow practices of separate but equal—in the same classroom—seems to have prevailed. Often, at the secondary level, that separation occurred in the realm of advanced placement course work.

Minority students from struggling families who are doing the right thing by committing to the American education system that promises equal education opportunities for all, also recognize the importance of the successful completion of a competitive education, which includes AP classes, and what impact those classes can have on their college prospects. Successful completion of advanced placement coursework can translate into college acceptance,

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\textsuperscript{19}Johnson, et al., \emph{The Secrets for Motivating, Educating, and Lifting the Spirit of African American Males}, 971.
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\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 973.
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\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 980.
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but students must first obtain access to AP classes. A 1999 lawsuit was filed in California against UC Berkeley, where civil rights lawyers claimed foul play:

Minority students are at a disadvantage in the [college] admissions process because many schools with high minority populations do not provide AP courses.…

A second 1999 lawsuit also filed in California against the state and Los Angeles county school district claim[ed] that students’ constitutional rights were violated by not offering AP courses equally across the state and thereby harming some students who apply to college.

In Washington, D.C., the DCPS school district has total accessibility of AP classes, but their next step with respect to disadvantaged students taking AP classes is controversial. Students in the District’s region are aware of and subsequently mandated to take AP classes. In 2015, DCPS school officials made an all-out effort to ramp-up accessibility and participation in AP classes by deciding to require all high schools to offer at least six AP courses and add two more beginning in 2016. Natalie Wexler, a D.C. education journalist who serves on the Urban Teachers D.C. Regional Leadership Council said, “D.C.’s high poverty neighborhood high schools—the ones that must take all comers rather than selecting students who apply—[where] 70% of the AP tests received the lowest possible score, 1,” are on the right track but should instead encourage participation from students who are motivated to do the work.”

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22 Santoli, “Is there an advanced placement advantage?”

23 Ibid.

According to David Tansey, AP Statistics teacher at Dunbar High School, the difficulty in a high-poverty DCPS school is that the class sizes are too large, and classes are arbitrarily filled with students, many of whom did not request advanced placement course work. This is not the solution. Tansey says that, “[S]tudents are told, ‘You’re taking AP.’ In some cases, it is because it is the ‘only class that fits with a student’s schedule,’ or the other possible options are ‘too crowded.’” Tansey continues, “Kids at Dunbar have been battered by failure.”

For D.C. families, it is a question of to what extent things are equal if students are ill equipped to pass the test. This is unlike the problem in California, where urban schools struggle with extending AP classes equally. Even though the advanced placement coursework has made its way into a majority of Washington, D.C., public schools, thrusting all kids into the AP environment where the class size is too large even for those motivated to conquer the material does not seem to improve the situation.

Another challenge for equitable access to AP is funding for preparation and training, whether for students or teachers. Adequate funding is one of the roadblocks prohibiting more high schools in the U.S. from having advanced placement classes at their campuses. Securing sufficient funds for covering teacher training, AP curriculum, and student cost per test becomes a game changer for communities where parents are working at or below minimum wage. For families with more than one high school aged child, the prospect of student access to AP coursework is dismal at best. Presently, there are groups and organizations that have been established to rectify the inequalities that exist because of funding; one such program is the University of California College Preparatory Initiative. Another group, formed between southern

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25Ibid.
states, is known as the Southern Regional Education Board. In both cases, AP classes are available online: students can take AP coursework where schools are not able to offer the advanced classes on campus for various reasons. While this online offering seems to be a step in the right direction, without a teacher facilitating the learning process, students are not likely to a) successfully complete the course, or b) pass the test at the end, which has college credit implications. High school online classwork, AP or otherwise, is in line with what our global society requires; however, a student’s successful completion of AP classwork and subsequent testing are premised on the combination of equitable classroom resources, quality teachers, financially stable communities, and well-employed parents. Collaborative efforts from all stakeholders builds the promise of more students’ successful completion of AP work and testing.

A more impactful solution to the deficit of AP course work in low-income areas is for schools to work collectively, “seeking funding for teacher training and exam costs, [and] partnering with other schools to share teachers.” There is also an option of working with nearby community colleges willing to open sections for high school students, thereby saving secondary schools from budgeting the attendant costs. The cost for an AP course plus test costs pales in comparison to that same course at college tuition prices. The creators of advanced placement classes may not have had that economic factor in mind at the beginning, but over the past 50 plus years, cutting college costs is as essential to the future as attending university, even in the wealthiest of neighborhoods in America.

26Santoli, “Is There an Advanced Placement Advantage?”
27Ibid.
28Ibid.
A perhaps unforeseen dysfunction in American education is when advanced placement courses become an issue and public schools move away from offering content at that level. The most likely candidates to receive word of a drastic change in college preparation may not be the students whose test scores rank in the bottom percentile. Prep schools, for example, in the northeastern region like Fieldston, Brearley, and Phillips Exeter no longer offer AP classes. Fieldston’s principal said, “They [AP classes] emphasize breadth over depth, and they’re content driven rather than focusing on developing skills like critical inquiry, discourse, [and] ways of approaching texts.”\textsuperscript{29} Children of color, who are at the lower end of accessibility to AP courses, have many concerned lawmakers, educators, business executives, and families looking for ways and means to help them compete in greater numbers through high school programs offering college credit possibilities, only to have the conversation begin to move away from the validity of the AP program maintaining prominence to gain college credit, or college acceptance. What will be the impact on children of color missing the current round of AP courses because of inaccessibility, mandatory participation, or lack of creative funding? If the tests become obsolete, will the knowledge, resources, and accessibility of the next wave of college bound opportunities be spread equitably into disadvantaged areas?

In early 2002, a broad discussion among leading prep schools centered around the content of advanced placement coursework. The audit of AP content over the past 50 years reveals skepticism of programs that teach students to memorize a large body of facts to pass a test, rather than have “students [trained to] have significant control of the learning process …[where] fewer

\textsuperscript{29}Ibid.
topics are studied in greater detail.” Such is the case with AP course work that has become dominant and dwarfs the reform process. High school students in both private and public institutions participate in higher level thinking environments where modern neuroscience supports that effectiveness to train and develop durable understanding. Many private schools are opting out of “such fast-paced, serial coverage of topics” because they can. They do not face the bureaucratic barriers that public schools face. If and when public schools make a mass exodus, will that information disseminate at the same time to urban school districts, or will there be a lag in communication?

**Debatable Standardized Tests**

In 2015, President Obama's initiative “Race to the Top” (RTT) opened up the opportunity for states to incorporate national standards within states’ specific criteria, rather than states being mandated to follow standards metered out by the federal government. While each state maintains authority over the specific tests administered to their student population, many think that national/standardized tests that dissimulate content rather than provide equal assimilation of material creates unnecessary tension.

The Early Awareness Test Preparation Pilot Program, conducted in 2000 by Mary-Beth Muskin and Sharon Cipperley Friedlander, examined not only the relevance of early targeted test preparation (eighth grade to twelfth grade) to promote college entrance, but also considered the origins of tests like the SAT and ACT. Their report suggests that “The acceptance of SAT I


\[\text{Ibid.}\]
results as the leading indicator of one’s overall ability and worth is contrary to College Board and testing services guidelines.”

From the SAT test inception in 1926, several adaptations have been made to clarify whether “a test for colleges and universities to measure aptitude, or innate mental ability, rather than mastery of subjects learned” was fair and objective to the cause of qualifying students to enter college. Post-World War II efforts to improve the reach of the SAT had the goal of expanding college entrance beyond the wealthiest Americans to include students depending on financial aid. In 2016, a fifth of the nation’s leading high school qualifying tests made adjustments to “strongly focus on the core knowledge and skills that evidence shows are the most important to prepare students for the rigors of college and career.”

Testing conducted to ensure college readiness should be monitored for relevance as many suggest “The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), [which] was developed to measure ability or aptitude, not to measure educational achievement,” needs a broader scope to determine college readiness for most millennials. Dr. Boyer, a former Federal Commissioner of Education, among many other notable titles, wrote the report “High School: A Report on Secondary


34Ibid.

Education,” which summarized his interviews of admissions officers. Many of their comments supported that the profile, or status, of the incoming freshmen class at their school was essentially the same with or without SAT scores. Boyer pointed out that some of the pressure to score high on college entrance exams, like the SAT/ACT, may need to be redirected because fewer colleges give the test scores mandatory attention. In fact, Dr. Boyer called the SAT reliance “discouraging” and “intimidating rather than giving guidance to students.”

When Boyer and his team conducted interviews, they found this:

Only 50… certainly no more than 100, colleges... can be considered highly selective, admitting 50 to 100 students who apply. Yet we have created the mystique that the colleges are selecting students, when in fact the students are selecting colleges.

Dr. Boyer’s report was the precursor to and inspiration for the study on the nation’s public school system by officials at the Department of Education, the highly publicized “A Nation at Risk.” Dr. Boyer’s contributions have spanned over several decades and are just as expansive in content. During the 1980s and 1990s, his articles, books, and journals offered insight into reconsidering how education is administered. He has also questioned the practicality of standardized tests.

A 2005 study, “This Test Is Unfair: Urban African American and Latino High School Students’ Perceptions of Standardized College Admission Tests,” offers findings similar to Boyer’s:

Along with a heightened sense of competitiveness, test scores are being perceived as so-called make-or-break factors in admissions decisions, despite the fact that scores really only carry substantial weight in admissions decisions at more selective

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36 Ibid.

37 Ibid.
colleges. Harvard, for example, scrutinized admission by a decrease of 40% based on preferred test scores.\textsuperscript{38}

Another “mystique” unveiled is the presence of cultural bias on tests through the language found predominantly in Caucasian communities; use of generic language is a move towards preparing students fairly. Fairness in ethos, pathos, and logos, or use of language, does not minimize the power of linguistics. “The standards [should be] rigorous, globally competitive, and consistent across states,” said Joseph Viteritti in “The Federal Role in School Reform: Obama’s Race to the Top.” He comments that “many states working against the rigor of standards used to base curriculum… [have] dummed down their academic standards and assessments.”\textsuperscript{39} Whether in language or expectancy, the stereotypical lack of expectation for children of color to perform well on tests further exacerbates the existing achievement gap. Further, pursuant to timely test preparation is the need to close the gap by equipping urban schools with knowledge, training, and the materials relevant to passing the test. The term urban specifies the diverse student population—not just the physical location—which must be reflected in the curriculum development.

Any statewide or nationwide assessment must partner with curriculum; the two should complement each other. The foundation for the assessment and the curriculum should rest on a fair set of common core standards developed to include diverse communities whose students populate classrooms across the nation. The student’s perspective, including interpretation of the language, on standardized tests can prove invaluable for greater minority participation. Cultural


\textsuperscript{39}Viteritti, “The federal role in school reform.”
bias refers to a person’s constitution becoming homogenized; communication is used to display knowledge. When “test questions that require specific, often upper-middle-class White cultural knowledge affect Latinos’ and African American test scores,” equity is called into question.\textsuperscript{40}

The following illustrations demonstrate the difference between equality and equity in standardized test preparation and administration. The first frame displays remnants of Jim Crow laws that dominated the south known as the \textit{de jure} racial segregation laws, or “consistently inferior [treatment of] people of color,” including barriers of underfunded public educational institutions; in the north, \textit{de facto} segregation similarly was carried out with housing and industry discrimination.\textsuperscript{41} The second frame is perhaps a solution towards ignoring the presence of the barrier which research supports can help to move beyond the blockade and yield a commitment to the achievement gap between White and non-White Americans. The third frame, however, seems to show a solution with sustainability. To remove all barriers, thus allowing each child fair opportunities to learn with all the necessary resources available to her or him, is the foundation of an equitable education system.

\textsuperscript{40}Marybeth Walpole, et al. “This Test Is Unfair: Urban African American and Latino High School Students’ Perspective of Standardized College Admissions Test.” 323-324.

In 2012, Craig Froehle, Professor of Business, University of Cincinnati, designed the first MeMe illustrating that “equal opportunity” by itself was not enough, but how equality actualizes should be inclusive of “fairness and equity.”

The significance of testing needs to be communicated according to understanding of cultural biases. Questions like these need to be answered: What are the SAT I, SAT II, and ACT? How do students prepare for the tests? How often should students take the tests? Why? What are the specific benefits of passing test scores? What happens to students with low scores? And finally, do all colleges and universities value the tests equally? For some communities, the answers to the above questions are discussed frequently, starting early in high school, if not in

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junior high school; however, studies prove that not all secondary students know the specificities of the testing world they must compete in to qualify for college acceptance.

The 2005 study that involved interviews of 227 African American and Latino high school students in southern California yielded useful results. The research of Marybeth Walpole and Patricia McDonough, of UCLA; Constance J. Bauer, of Gloucester P.S. District; Carolyn Gibson, Kamau Kanyi, and Rita Toliver, of Rowan University, produced empirical data from the human capital, the students:

Despite scholarly attention and concern over the barriers test scores present for African American and Latino college aspirants, particularly from urban areas, few researchers have asked students about these tests…. The current research addresses questions of how African Americans and Latino high school juniors and seniors from several urban districts perceive, gather information on, and prepare for standardized college admissions tests…. The voices of African American and Latino youth, particularly from urban areas, have been conspicuously absent from educational debates about their achievement and experiences.43

A “bird’s-eye” view does not allow lawmakers to benefit from the perspective of culturally diverse student groups on what real challenges prevent them, particularly in low socioeconomic environments, from successfully competing in standardized testing. The way to “lasting change” and “closing in on the gap” with white and Asian students that exists among African American and Latino students may not be the usual “existential hero” approach where the hero enters on a white horse to save the day. Rather, a key to fostering sustained solutions lies in a hardline approach mindful of the cultural capital, or first-hand knowledge from those most affected. This is what the ongoing conversation on the need for culturally diverse public school reforms has missed for the past several decades. Certainly, there are more education and

socioeconomic professionals, who are also people of color, researching on the frontline, looking for solutions within their own communities.

Based on research, high test scores from low socioeconomic or disadvantaged children are not common occurrences. Walpole et al. report findings from what their study called “a new line of research.” Among many challenges for teenagers, it is no secret that peer pressure is often at the top. Teens, especially in competitive high school environments, want to be in “the know” about things that matter. Based upon one-on-one interviews with teenagers in California, which this paper discusses, the student’s propensity, or tendency, was to want to accomplish what their peers from other local schools accomplished, but, the researchers also observed that a “stereotype threat” may prevent achievement:

These researchers found that simply perceiving a testing situation as one that threatened to reinforce negative stereotypes regarding test performance was enough to lower test scores…. Test scores become another obstacle for African American and Latino college aspirants because of society’s negative expectations and beliefs regarding the ability of these groups.

Key inquiries into the understanding of why the achievement gap exists and what concretely can be done to close that gap highlight the usefulness of undertaking pragmatic steps. The counties of Los Angeles, Riverside, and Orange, for example, all have high numbers of urban students, and at the time of the 2005 study, the students accounted for .5 percent of all African American and Latino populations in public schools in the entire state of California. The students who participated in the solo and/or group interviews met the college preparatory

44Ibid.


46Ibid., 331.
enrollment criteria at their urban campus, but somehow, they remained ineligible for acceptance to the University of California (UC):

A male senior, when asked specifics about the SAT and ACT test, revealed confusion and inadequate preparation:

He said, “[SAT] helps you get into college…. You have to do them, right?”

Another male Latino senior, in the fall of his senior year, said the same of his classmates:

“They [asked] me ‘Are you taking the SAT’s?’ and I said, ‘What’s that?’ …They already knew everything and had taken them four times.”

School officials responsible for leading the charge with planned strategies of inclusion for all students, especially those in need of assistance whether for test preparation, planning, or sponsorship, left students to fend for themselves:

One student said, The college counselor… tries to get it out there, [to] let students know this is the deadline for the… SAT and you need to take this. Another student told the interviewer, “Our counselor [said] you need to prepare and study hard.”

Parents and older siblings were mentioned as sources of encouragement, but they were not able to offer time and pragmatic help with preparation that the high school students needed to meet the challenges of these standardized tests geared toward college acceptance. The test preparedness of the junior and senior students in this study was left unattended; the students were not adequately informed and coached by the adults who were meant to lead, guard, and protect:

So, the African American and Latino students in these urban public schools struggled with getting basic, timely information about admission tests, understanding the tests’

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47 Ibid., 333.

48 Ibid., 334.

importance, when and how often to take them. Moreover… most did not have college-educated parents…. [They] were dependent on their schools for test information…. [They] serendipitously received information from older siblings or outreach programs…. Counselors and teachers [provided] little systematic school-based information.50

A small percentage of students (21 or 9 percent), had access to outside test preparation from area churches or outreaches at universities; however, those outside helps tended to be ad hoc, based on convenience, and did not offer long-term, hardcore preparation. The students lacked knowledge and accessibility to systematic preparation to ready themselves for SAT I/II or ACT tests, nor was there any “evidence of equity in the coaching efforts that existed.”51

Accessibility to Global Preparedness

The involvement of the federal government in the future of public school education should not be limited to promoting equitable learning opportunities for children and teenagers across the country, but the government’s responsibility should extend to ensuring that curriculum content—plus the standards—are equitable and globally competitive across the states. Global-education competition, according to Arne Duncan, is when “Our children today aren’t competing within a district or within a state for jobs; they are competing with children in India and China.”52 The acceptance of inequality in public schools, due to the privileged class’ perception of superiority between the races in America, is an outdated practice that could cost huge dividends to the future of this country and America’s ability to lead, fight, and effectively participate in the global society.

50Ibid., 335.

51Ibid., 336.

52Krigman, “Arne Duncan's Learning Curve.”
When standards are not consistently competitive, but instead are below what the forecast of what global-leader readiness requires, some of our students will be ill equipped. This type of educational malnourishment occurs when state officials, in the realm of academics, mislead students and parents into thinking that secondary training and knowledge make all students competitively college ready. Research supports that all standards and approaches are not equitably competitive. As noted above, when Arne Duncan served as education secretary, he and his team visited communities across the country to learn first-hand what the education needs are for our children. This time-consuming effort was not easy, but the rewards, Duncan and his team admit, were irreplaceable.

There is no replacement for time in the field, a hands-on approach to pursue solutions that matter. Similarly, a time-consuming approach from state and local governments to learn and to devise improved educational opportunities for children of disadvantaged socioeconomic status (SES) may help rectify partiality in academics. The white community is also concerned as graduating seniors from their community are showing a decline in college bound readiness. An egalitarian approach across communities to fix what is not working is good for the future of all Americans. The future holds uncertainly that high-level education can change with solutions. That lofty resolve, however, should include all future leaders, of diverse ethnicities, to lead the charge.

It is important to note that if education leaders like Arne Duncan are concerned about global preparedness through education for all of America’s children, the impact of that concern on children of color, especially from low-income neighborhoods, is much greater. For many urban high school students, the question of college readiness looms ahead. If, however, resources for secondary education are equally distributed in cities and suburbs across America, the
The equitable intent of LBJ’s 1965 education law will materialize—regardless of the academic measuring tool. Educators, lawmakers, and concerned citizens can expect confidence to build in children of color, which will translate into a greater number of college admissions and a higher percentage of college graduates.

A commitment is needed to build safeguards that protect targeted federal funds for America’s neediest schools, competitive standards that inform and monitor curriculum development, productive programming that raises academic proficiency, equal access to advanced placement courses, and equitably written standardized assessments. Admittedly, there are no “quick-fix” solutions for the decades-long-awaited education resolution; however, when concerned parties can agree to commit the time needed to reach goals of fair and equitable learning opportunities for all children, outside of any biased barriers like race and income-bracket deterrents, effective educational change is not only possible, it becomes probable.
Chapter three of my thesis does not postulate that there is a “one-size-fits-all” solution to the establishment of an equitable education system in America where intellectual input from all its citizens has equal value. Chapter three instead highlights a small sample of evidence-based, pragmatic methods implemented to close the achievement gap that persists in different school districts around the country. It describes proven programs, methodology, and developments—inside and outside of school—motivated by the need to close the academic achievement gap between the majority race and people of color.

Concerned stakeholders like parents, school administrators, state and federal officials, and community leaders support student learning by ensuring that a range of resources are made available for high-level achievement. Even where disadvantaged neighborhoods lack the financial resources needed to overcome the victimization of poverty, “Such schools, however, [should]… not [be] totally without resources,” because “caring adults in [and out of] these adolescents’ families and communities can work with teachers and other school personnel to support and guide these youth(s).”¹ White House administrations in recent years have continued to urge Americans to once more invest in the future all of our children. Successful approaches to reform America’s present-day school system that are believed to work use organic and culturally specific practices, which must be “supported and continually evaluated and improved to ensure that all students are appropriately served by schools.”² More of a concerted effort to establish


²Sanders, ed., et al., Schooling Students Placed at Risk, 81.
people of color in decision-making positions within education could close the academic achievement gap. The achievement gap has eluded significant and sustainable solutions since the 1965 Johnson-Great Society laws were enacted.

The Unexpected Cycle

Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) gave a closing address at the Center for American Progress’ 2017 “Ideas” Conference where he touched on his cultural upbringing in New Jersey. The senator shared the power of “struggle” that helped to shape his destiny. For many young children of color, their story is much like the senator’s experience where risk-taking is of great value.

There is tension in families and neighborhoods that can only be tamed when elders in that family, and stakeholders from that community, advocate for young people to move “progress” forward. Senator Booker talked about the impact his elders made in his life when they told the “story of America that...was not the simple story of glory and abundance; no, it was a story of profound struggle. Pain and hardship.”

Even as he spoke those words, the accomplishments of Booker resounded louder in the chronicles of Black History. Although he addressed political leaders and legislators at the May 2017 conference about the plight of the country during one of the most embattled political terms in its history, Booker could have been speaking directly to struggling secondary students who are “feeling like [they’re] fighting out there...when [their] very government is supporting things that are working against [them], [their] liberty, and [their] justice.”

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4 Booker, “CAP speech, closing keynote.”
Booker did not leave the audience without hope. However, he admonished the listeners to hold on to groundbreaking levels already achieved, while committing to try new, different, and innovative approaches. Such new approaches, admittedly, may not be popular, but if it helps advance an old problem towards real change, then the effort is worth the risk. In his speech, Booker referred to author James Baldwin’s writings as “the brutal truth…[because] he talks with infringing realism about the problems of America[,] … he strikes a note of hope… calling to the conscious of our country.”

About America’s education system and how children of color should respond, he noted James Baldwin would say, “I know what I am asking you is impossible, but in our time, as in every time, the impossible is the least we can demand, and what is after all emboldened by the spectacle of human history in general, and American negro history in particular for it testifies to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible.”

Restated, black American achievement is the achievement of the impossible. Blacks can choose to see greater numbers of achievers in AP classes and tests, four-year degree graduates, master’s degree holders, and doctorate holders as conquering what history called the impossible.

History seems to repeat itself in the words of President Andrew Johnson who sought to undermine the progress of the “negro.” Mr. Johnson, vice president to Abraham Lincoln, became the 17th president following Lincoln’s assassination. What many blacks hoped was the beginning of a lasting reconstruction of the entire country after the Union victory over slavery and the southern way of life was instead plagued with controversy from the start. The Reconstruction of the South and “freedom” of the African-American people were not the goal for

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5Ibid.

6Ibid.
many in powerful political positions in the America. Reconstruction led to “the Jim Crow [laws that] dominated the lives of black people in America from 1890 well into the twentieth century.”

The Jim Crow laws dictated the impossible: separate but equal. The prospect of equitable education for people of color, at its core, was the prime target of what some might call venomous attacks on reconstruction gains in our nation. This attack was launched against American people, who fought alongside slave owners in the Civil War; they were now the target of a “new” form of enslavement, just a different branding. President Andrew Johnson declared that African-Americans were to buy their own land and build their own schools—void of governmental assistance; “It is earnestly hoped that instead of wasting away, they will, by their own efforts, establish for themselves a condition of respectability and prosperity,” Johnson declared. Many in the black community realized lawmakers like Johnson would continue to resist equality at its core; therefore, organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP, were vital to progressive movements.

From the nineteenth century through the 1960s, groups like the NAACP did not readily accede to the “separate but equal” carrot that dangled before them; rather, they held to their convictions through lawsuits, which spurred even stronger opposition from white nationalists like Senator James O. Eastland (D-MS) “to protect and maintain white supremacy throughout eternity.” Eastland, a wealthy Mississippi cotton plantation owner, was best known nationally as a symbol of “Southern resistance” to any form of racial equality while he served in the Senate.

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8Ibid., 25.

His obituary claimed, “Indeed, the major civil rights bills enacted by Congress, principally in the 1960s, became law only by various maneuvers that bypassed the Senate Judiciary Committee, which he ruled with an iron hand before his retirement from Congress in 1978.”

Southern resistance to desegregation was still the rule while I was in high school during the early 1970s.

In 2017, less than half a century, 39 years, after Eastland’s death, there is no magic pill for generational oppositionists like him to accept racial equality. Instead, it is evident that white supremacy is deeply entrenched in modern society. It is heard in the voices of Paul Gottfried, Richard Spencer, and Steve Bannon, the White House Strategist under the Donald Trump administration, all of whom have connection to the Alternative Right (alt-right). The group is known to specifically focus on “the development within America [of] right-wing politics.” The political support of many present-day Republican leaders questions the Trump administration's call to “Make America Great Again,” especially since many alt-right conservatives—known to vehemently oppose ethnic equity—voted for Donald Trump. The Trump administration’s call to greatness statement implies that the racial progress made since the 1960s, the progressive movement to make all things equal, is the subject of attack from white nationalists. An appeal for clarity from concerned citizens, however, is often unsatisfactorily met because the alt-right would rather live unquestioned by their belief system of an assumed superior position. Their posture allows for no further discussion; in fact they say “that some races are inherently superior

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to others....There are genetic differences in race that make some races more ethical and intelligent than others....That’s what the alt right is all about.”

Naysayers to lingering white nationalism/privilege/supremacy in America need only conduct an analysis of the negative employment trends and limited career opportunities, run-down and suffering neighborhoods, lack of funding for diverse entrepreneurs, and inequality in the classrooms in certain school districts to conclude that there is a lack of equality. After the victory won by the North at the end of the Civil War, it became apparent that equality does not come easy.

The solution to a situation plagued with drama seems to only come with a struggle; the constant fight for equality is especially the case for this group of people who have no other recourse for resolution other than conflict. Even when tremendous economic growth for black Americans is evident in business, athletics, and entertainment, people of color bear centuries-old problems. Having equal access to highly competitive post-secondary education can provide the means that black Americans need to be competitive in once monopolized career opportunities enjoyed by the majority race for centuries past. Because careers in law, government, congressional politics, and corporate executive-level positions bring civil growth to communities, the coveted monopoly should shift towards equal representation.

In 2017, the reality of Andrew Johnson’s words echoes in communities of color that have to seize fair education opportunities for themselves, in spite of the systemic blockades that impede equality. Unconventional “in-reach” methods in highly vulnerable school districts are

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tried in the hopes of “change” that is sustainable. Similarly, traditional approaches with merit continue to inform new ways of tackling an old problem. Both old and new pathways to educational freedom can juxtapose and merge to produce equitable education with liberty and justice for all. Consider this vocabulary as a lens in which to view what pursuit of higher learning resembles for all children in the U.S.:

- **Innovation**: the introduction of new things or methods
- **Variation**: a different form of something; amount, rate, extent, or degree of change
- **Vicissitude**: a change or variation occurring in the course of something; interchange or alteration, as of states or things

Change that lasts takes on the form of compromise, or meeting in the middle; change has to have an origin before alternatives or enhancements can be applied. Today, it can be said that change that had seemed completely out of reach a decade ago has made its way to the forefront in the face of opposition. The change, when enacted, gives reason to continue the struggle. To continue civil rights activism can inform a more favorable education opportunity (racially) in this country.

Certainly, “the unthinkable happened in 2008 in the history of America” when “an African American was elected president.” President Barack Obama would serve two terms leading a nation that once declared that black people were only three-fifths of a person. The path

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to Obama’s unthinkable victory can date back to “1865, when President Lincoln agonized then ushered in real change, stubborn growth occurred, through the carnage of civil war, to [the] Emancipation Proclamation, [and] three separate constitutional amendments.”15 Although it took almost 150 years, the impossible and the unthinkable happened. Obama’s campaign and presidency are credited with innovation and variation that gained support from many Americans who were tired of the status quo. The vicissitude needed to alter a political system so entrenched with systemic obstacles against people of color opened the door to history loosening its grip on an old way of thinking.

The sections that follow address programs and methods currently getting results that show promise in closing the divide, even if it is one student at a time. The first section will look at what some progressive Americans might support: “Acting White,” One Community Unity, and the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women. The final section in this chapter reviews traditions that we know work: Teacher Investment in Student Achievement, African-American Teachers in the Classroom, and Community Supports.

**Millennials: Social and Cultural Significance**

The purpose of chapter three is to look at measurable actions that yield academic advancement in communities historically known to suffer economically, politically, and socially due to the lack of higher education. In other words, awareness and concrete evidence strengthens the resolve that lasting change is probable. “An Empirical Analysis of ‘Acting White,’” a practical study by Harvard professors, offers proof, conceptual and concrete, for a new direction. Without attempting to reproduce the data and subsequent hypothesis in the study, I outline the groundbreaking result, which posits the reemergence of segregated schools as a solution. After

15Ibid.
careful consideration of the survey evidence, people can come to their own conclusions. The findings of Professors Roland Fryer, Jr., and Robert M. Beren, Harvard University, implies that high-achieving, diverse ethnicities are better fostered in “segregated” school environments.

While their findings may have merit, many community members might consider the proposal too extreme, that it has the danger of moving education in the minority communities in the wrong direction, backwards. Fryer and Beren’s findings, however, do support solutions to the ongoing search for equitable educational opportunities in America; their findings suggest various pedagogic and instructional methodologies that do not solely mirror mainstream American thought. If the study unveils possible reasons to support why these students, when given equal opportunity to succeed, are still not closing the elusive academic gap, substantive change must be sought. The question becomes, at what cost? Or, what price is paid when the solution appears to reverse the direction that many in society have fought for decades to achieve?

Fryer and Beren’s research possibly substantiates at least one reason why children of color, capable of excelling academically, do not allow themselves that option. For much of the research, the Harvard professors looked at students attending high schools that have a vetting process for acceptance, via testing and subsequent placement. Even though the students of color had promising academic futures, there was a “novel measure of social status [where] potential racial differences between social status and academic achievement” was catalytic to producing mediocrity.\(^1\) In other words, what the research suggests is that for many of the high school

seniors in the study, a conscious decision not to excel to full potential impacted their academic future.

Many of the historically recognized factors undermining prohibiting high achievement among minorities are acknowledged in the study, and if a host of background factors are accounted for, “the achievement gap remains essentially unchanged.” For example, test scores one standard below whites are possibly due to 1) family structure and poverty, 2) difference in school quality, 3) racial bias in testing or teachers’ perception, 4) differences in peer culture/socialization, and 5) students’ behavior. Austen-Smith and Fryer in 2005, Steele and Aronson in 1998, Cook and Ludwig in 1997, and Fordham and Ogbu in 1986 have all discussed these actors; now Fryer and Beren are adding that, “The appropriate public policy choice to address the achievement gap may depend critically on its underlying source.”

Fryer and Beren have begun to focus on what they refer to as a “well-publicized aspect of black peer interaction,” an external phenomenon known as “acting white” to account for a percentage of students who make the choice not to aspire to the highest standards of academic achievement within their reach. This is not a new phenomenon; however, the covariates used in this study were not part of the equation used in previous studies seeking evidence of this mental stranglehold among young people of color. In prior years, there was a lack of quantitative measures, which, according to Fryer and Beren, prevented a more accurate analysis of the existence of such a phenomenon. Using the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), they constructed an index of social status that they deemed “ideal for

17Ibid.
18Ibid.
19Ibid., 3.
understanding the existence of ‘acting white.’” They were looking for measurable data to consider the relationship between social status and academic achievement within the black community to determine where the culpability lies that prevents a greater number of high achievers from reaching their potential.

The research includes 90,000+ junior high and high school students from 175 schools within 80 communities in the country. Their empirical research revealed what previous literature from the 1990s on the same subject had not taken into account. There are “racial differences in the relationship between social status and academic achievement.” Among blacks, in contrast to whites, high academic achievement is associated with a modestly high social status. Those high-achieving students of color are almost chastised, according to Fryer et al., for their achievement, instead of being celebrated by their same-race peers.

The empirical patterns discovered support the existence of racial differences between same-race groups in diverse or minority communities. The findings support the existence of minority students who do not experience the academic excellence of a 3.5-or-better GPA condemning same-race peers for their achievement. They called it a “two-audience signaling quandary” that produced anxiety among those high-achieving students when they interacted with their own communities.

There was a wide range of data used, including samples from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health from three different points in time: 1995, 1996, and 2002. The

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21 Ibid., 3.

22 Ibid.
controversial point of the Fryer-Beren study is to consider whether racial differences inform self-inflicted decisions about whether to choose higher-learning academic achievement, or not. How far do today’s social affiliations threaten the success of their economic, social, and political future? Most students thought to be in this quandary are on the low socioeconomic tier. In context, the study used “variables in [their] core specifications…displayed by race.” In their analysis, “Most important of these covariates is a composite measure of grade point average (GPA) [they] constructed.” Students were asked what their GPA was in English, Math, History, and Science; each grade was given on a 4.0 scale (A=4, D or lower =1). Relative to whites, “blacks and Hispanics have lower grades (3.0 grade point average relative to 2.5).” The professors were careful to include external controls like parental education, parental occupation, various school activities, and social characteristics. The latter variables are important as many black and Hispanic students are from low socioeconomic families where parents are not likely to have attended college; consequently, high paying careers were not an option.

Their hypothesis is based on this framework to support the conclusion that there is a “Sabotage model: it has both a majority community and a minority community; the individuals come in two flavors: high-ability and low-ability. Individuals within the community observe their own ability type and make a dichotomous human capital decision.” The same people are observed by others to determine career options. When there are high achievers in interracial school environments, the tendency for children of color is to “dumb down” their progress to stave off “being outed” from peer groups in their same race.

24 Ibid., 3.
25 Ibid., 22.
The society can be either discriminatory or fair. When the society is discriminatory, minorities are left out. They are not hired. If the society is fair, minorities are hired only if they have invested in human capital. If they see themselves as low-ability, “there is no incentive to acquire human capital.”26 In this framework, low-ability agents have incentive to “hold back” individuals with high ability when the cost of doing so is less than the net benefit, which will not hold when the society has a high enough chance of being fair:

The two-audience signaling model has two clear predictions—racial differences in the relationships between social status and academic achievement will exist and these differences will tend to be exacerbated in environments with more interracial contact and increased mobility—both of which are consistent with the empirical evidence [as] presented in Section IV [below].27

While it is not probable that most school districts in America would resort to modern-day segregation, a more pragmatic approach is to mandate—and monitor with scrutiny—all local and federal lawmakers to uphold equitable education laws, practices, and policy currently on the books. More importantly, the correct approach should also be to courageously unearth, uproot,


27Ibid.
and emasculate twenty-first century systemic Jim Crow laws that operate in clandestine forms through curriculum and classroom practices designed to thwart equal education opportunities.

Chapter four will entreat all interested parties to collaborate and consider the value in answers to the following questions: What diversified-penetrable pedagogy works across content areas? What classroom practices encourage the inclusion of cultural diversity? Finally, how effective is the prospect of having a national database that collects equitable, proven practices from around the country that can be implemented in school districts with low socioeconomic growth?

When student expectations are met with the fulfillment of goals that have been set by education laws and lawmakers, the achievement gap will narrow. Trust can be the bridge towards fulfillment of that goal. In the Washington, D.C., area, as in other parts of the country, there are organizations that target disadvantaged youth with the primary goal of restoring confidence. Restoring trust in a broken education system by confidence-building in troubled, disadvantaged young people is often tried but is not always successful with mainstream, traditional methods.

One Common Unity (OCU) is a non-profit organization that has been in operation since 2001. The organization’s purpose is to “diligently…create communities which honor and respect one another and understand [African Americans’] inherent equality and interdependence.”28 Organizations like OCU help repair bruised souls once thought to be without hope for a future. Through their impact with young people, self-respect is restored so that the importance of education can be received and appreciated. The group works with area youth in the District of Columbia during after school and out-of-school hours, including overnight activities, and what they find is that many young people of diverse culture have a low self-worth perception. One

main goal, then, of OCU is to provide disadvantaged youth with ways to cope through a process known as “peace education,” which can lead them to pursue a higher overall thought life.

OCU’s Peace Education is particularly interesting because their outreach for many inner-city youth is through unconventional methods. For example, participants learn the following:

For Students:

1. To provide students with a greater awareness of how their mind and body interact, and hands-on skills to maintain emotional wellness, optimal mental health, and means to circumvent addictive behavior and substance abuse
2. To teach students how to utilize visualization, deep breathing, and meditation to gain greater focus, relieve stress (which often results in making impulsive decisions), and be more calm and relaxed, especially while getting angry
3. To expose students to dialogue and communication skills that will assist them to proactively deal with potentially volatile situations
4. To help students heal relationships that have been broken and let go of hatred they may have towards others
5. To instill within students a sense of value and worth, which involves replacing victim consciousness with the power of personal responsibility through positive thinking
6. To creatively and tangibly allow students to more effectively engage in social justice organizing by exposure to non-violence theory and practice

For Teachers:

1. To increase each teacher’s understanding of non-violent pedagogies and imparting strategies for creating learning environments (i.e. peaceable classrooms) based on caring, supportive, and power-sharing relationships
2. To show teachers how to manage their own emotions while teaching
3. To give teachers practice in asking poignant questions that utilize reactions and emotions of students as learning opportunities

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29 Kasat, “Our Mission.”
4. To impart teaching strategies that encourage students to pursue learning for their own enjoyment and benefit, rather than to avoid punishment or gain reward (fear-based vs. desire-based learning)

5. To have teachers make the time to plan and present ideas for implementing these teaching pedagogies at their school

Hawah Kasat, executive director of OCU, among his many achievements, is an educator who has traveled extensively in over 35 countries to facilitate interactive workshops and host conversations with those interested in “creating a caring, sustainable, and equitable world.” In Washington, D.C., historically, many young people come from families that have experienced unrealized potential, whether their progress has been impeded in the home or in the classroom environment. The mission of OCU aligns with the definition of a necessary support system that demonstrates how out-of-school programs, especially those led by people of color, are paramount to the overall progress of teenagers from diverse backgrounds, even in academics.

OCU, and groups like it, brings awareness to young people that they and their academic achievements matter to society. Through a short program, followed by opportunities to reconnect, the students who complete the OCU program learn to “make” time to rediscover their own value and how to enforce changes within their own community. To embrace education is essential to any change in American society. They begin to learn to embrace “learning.”

The mission of One Common Unity brings to “the nation…alternatives to violence and [also brings] peaceful solutions. Youth from the majority community would likewise benefit from this experience to learn to let go of biases that may have tradition in their communities. Innovation and variation, when appropriate, are vital to lasting change. OCU provides

\[\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
workshops, trainings, retreats, and curriculum for schools, organizations, and private institutions that immerse youth and/or adults in the principles of peace building through art and media.”

Available on DVD, *Fly By Light: The Movie—One Common Unity* is an award-winning documentary that chronicles the lives of District teenagers who are learning to beat the odds against them. They leave the streets of D.C. and go to the mountains of West Virginia “to participate in an ambitious peace education program” designed to help them overcome cyclical habits that lead to hopelessness.

*Fly by Light* is a beautiful movie that shows the trauma that young people of color face in America, while also [showing] the power of coming together, facing your demons and an unkind society, and achieving your dreams, aided by One Common Unity. I recommend this film for everyone curious about what so many urban youth are struggling with, and how to help people move forward in their lives.

– James Eldridge, Massachusetts State Senator

In April of 2015, civil unrest broke out in Baltimore, Maryland, following the death of 25-year-old Freddie Gray, an African-American male who died while in police custody resulting from a conflict with the police that continues to raise questions. At the same time, across town in Baltimore, an all-girl college preparatory public charter school was making a positive difference in the lives of underserved young women residing in Baltimore, Maryland.

Founded by Brenda Brown Rever, film maker and philanthropist, The Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women (BLSYW), a successful and thriving middle through high school, is intended to “focus on leadership, college preparation, strong academics, and best

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32Kasat, “Our Mission.”

33Ibid.
practices for girls and young women.”

Rever, who is a lifelong advocate for women’s rights, says that her desire to help struggling female students in Baltimore led to her decision to try to make a difference earlier in their lives. Although a lottery is used in the admissions process at the school, there is no discrimination based on family structure, background, or academic performance.

In 2009, the school’s inception, 120 sixth-grade students blazed a trail for 300 female students to light the path of academic discovery in one of the most challenging cities in the country. The school now serves students in grades six through twelve. Last year, June 3, 2016, BLSYW graduated its first class of high school seniors. The school’s leaders acknowledge that the school continues to evolve and fulfill its promise of offering a rigorous college preparatory program with a focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The public charter school now boasts the following accomplishments:

- 98% of the Class of 2016 graduated and received a high school diploma.
- The average SAT score of members of the Class of 2016 was more than 200 points above the Baltimore city average.
- 100% of graduating students were accepted to a college or university, ranging from Johns Hopkins; New York University; the University of Maryland, College Park; Hampton University (VA); Coppin State University; Potomac State College (WV); to Rosemont College (PA).
- 80% of alumnae enrolled in 2- or 4-year institutions, and another 8% enrolled in a post-secondary program that corresponds to their career aspirations.

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100% of the Class of 2017 participated in pre-college summer programs as rising seniors.\textsuperscript{35}

In *The Baltimore Sun* article covering the school’s inaugural graduation, reporter Barbara Haddock Taylor captured the essence of the school’s mission. She wrote about the students learning to trust their instincts and believe they add value to society; they learn that growth is painful and not to quit after the first round.\textsuperscript{36} Although the school is young, the mission has history. Since the 1960s, education in disadvantaged districts has had to strike a balance between the lack of prior knowledge and systemic oppression. It has had to bridge the gap between the emotionally deficient and low socioeconomic youth with more privileged students. Educated blacks have had to encourage a handful of supporters to take what little they have, and turn it into much more, to extend a competitive learning experience to needy students. The Baltimore charter school boasts a successful path to academic freedom for children that may have been termed at risk but now are known to be of promise children:

“It was total pressure on us from the sixth grade up because we were the guinea pigs for everything,” said Blessin Giraldo, who will attend a specialized first-year program, BridgeEdU, through the University of Baltimore next year. “This was a risk. But now I feel fearless….We made it. We’re survivors. That’s the legacy we leave for little BLSYW sisters.”\textsuperscript{37}

\textsuperscript{35}“About the Founder: Brenda Brown Rever,”

\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{37}“About the Founder: Brenda Brown Rever,”
Amanda Lipitz, a Tony nominated Broadway producer, directed a documentary titled *STEP*. The film features Blessin Giraldo, one of three seniors on the dance team whose story from struggle to triumph is narrated by the film. It is a documentary that shows the real-life struggles these young women endured to achieve first-generation college acceptance. What makes the school and their stories exceptional is not just the location, Baltimore, Maryland, but also the academic fortitude they have developed to achieve higher education in this country. The movie was acquired by Fox Searchlight at the Sundance Festival and opened in theaters in July, 2017.

**Traditional: The Village Concept**

The Fourteenth Amendment/The Equal Protection Clause, particularly its first section, is one of the most litigated parts of the Constitution, forming the basis for landmark decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) regarding racial segregation, the Supreme Court decision that helped to dismantle racial segregation, and also the basis for many other decisions rejecting discrimination against people belonging to various groups.38

Chapter three introduces a different approach to closing the achievement gap, highlighting what may be considered innovative methods while reiterating tried methods that get results. The value that teacher-student relationships have in influencing individual student investments in their own academic achievement remains unmatched. Through panel data gathered from the National Education Longitudinal Survey of 1988, Mavis G. Sanders, editor, and Will J. Jordan, contributor to *Schooling Students Placed at Risk*, remind us of the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship. The relationship is measured through “student conduct,

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classroom preparation, and avoidance of maladaptive, or inadequate behaviors.”

The ethnic background and characteristics of students in the sample play a vital role, as seen in the research conducted by Fryer and Beren. With white students as the reference category, both black and female students were coded as dummy variables; the socioeconomic status (SES) took account of household income and parents’ education and occupation in order to include students from single parent (female-headed) or other non-traditional families. The SES composite put together in the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) was then placed on the NELS:88 data files, an extensive U.S. Department of Education adolescent report. “The contextual variables in this study” Sanders and Jordan report, “were meant not to provide an exhaustive account of social organizational influences, but instead to control the effects of two key aspects of the school environment.”

The study supports findings that if the teacher-student relationship is not fueled by positive expectations from the teacher, the results can be the student deciding to make little effort to succeed academically. There are national statistics available to substantiate that children of color, particularly, who decide not to work hard in school or pursue higher education do so because the expectation communicated to them in classrooms early in their academic career was they could not meet the set academic standard. This academic standard is established and sustained by the majority race in America.

According to Sanders and Jordan, researchers have found a connection for many young people between a declining self-esteem/perception and lower academic achievement;

39 Sanders, ed., et al. Schooling Students Placed at Risk, 71.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 72.
consequently, school dropout rates increase due to students’ inability to adapt. What they suggest is that the element of promise many of these young people possess can be nurtured in classroom environments. When teachers promote engagement in higher-level thinking in the classroom, and choose to see the value each student brings to that environment regardless of socioeconomic standing or zip-code, inequities become an unnecessary distraction of the past. Research from the 1970s backs “fostering supportive relationships…among students, teachers, and other caring adults. It is [also] well documented in the social psychology literature that social relationships with non-parental adults influence the social and cognitive development of children and adolescents, and, in many cases, their success or failure in societal institutions such as school.”

The Sanders and Jordan study explored to what degree positive relationships between teachers and high school students dominates academic performance. This would be measured through the lens of students’ perception of high support and expectations among teachers, and personal investment by the student, duly measured as student conduct, classroom preparation, and avoidance of intentionally maladaptive behavior. One finding they report is of a group of low-income, adult African-Americans (ages 18-34) who cited characteristics of teachers that influenced them the most were those who had good social and interpersonal skills and an affective temperament because the teachers were approachable, pleasant, accepting, tolerant, concerned, and sensitive to the needs of their students:

Regardless of their ethnicity, adolescents seek out teachers who care about and support them, and view them as being good students. Sizemore concluded [in the 1980s] that it is

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43 Ibid.

44 Ibid., 68.
necessary for teachers to remain conscious of the importance of developing supportive relationships with students to foster their cognitive and social growth. He further argued that without caring and supportive teachers many students might not benefit from even the most sophisticated instructional techniques.\textsuperscript{45}

It was critical that academic preparation at grade 12 be considered in this study. There are two distinguishable measures utilized: the first is standardized test scores (least subjective) used in the United States to establish the quantifiable magnitude of student achievement. In other countries, however, like Finland, where student academic achievement is said to exceed that of the United States, standardized tests are considered irrelevant in comparison to empirical-relational learning, whether with humans or with nature.\textsuperscript{46} Nonetheless, this writing is based on a study of the American education system, which includes standardized tests plus the second measure of twelfth-grade GPA(s) at a “self-reported average in English, mathematics, science, and social studies.”\textsuperscript{47} The two variables added independent and cumulative data, which were found to be sufficient in the study:

In addition, although considerable variability in grading procedures within and across schools exists, GPA served as a good measure of teachers’ ratings of students’ academic efforts and productivity as compared to their classmates. Taken together, standardized achievements and cumulative GPA complemented each other and provided a clearer picture of academic achievement in high school than either variable could do alone.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{45}\textit{Ibid.}


\textsuperscript{47}Sanders, ed., et al., \textit{Schooling Students Placed at Risk}, 72.

\textsuperscript{48}\textit{Ibid.}
Table 4.5, among other findings, supports student achievement at lower grades impacting twelfth-grade African-American male and female students. The personal achievement becomes the student investment. The table suggests the significance of positive teacher-student relationships and the student benefit that can follow. The student perception of how he or she is valued by the teacher is not a factor at this grade level, due to the investment made by confident

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**TABLE 4.5: Effects of Student Perceptions or Teacher-Student Relations and Student Investment on Cumulative Grade Point Average at Grade 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variables</th>
<th>Equation I</th>
<th>Equation II</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher-student relations at Grade 12</strong></td>
<td>β</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High teacher expectations</td>
<td>.11***</td>
<td>16.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High teacher supportiveness</td>
<td>.05***</td>
<td>7.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher-student relations at Grade 10</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High teacher expectations</td>
<td>.04 ***</td>
<td>6.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High teacher supportiveness</td>
<td>.12***</td>
<td>16.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background characteristics</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>-.03***</td>
<td>-4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>-.09***</td>
<td>-12.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>.10***</td>
<td>15.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SES</td>
<td>.16***</td>
<td>21.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior achievement (Grade 8)</td>
<td>.36***</td>
<td>49.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent household</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>-5.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>School context</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College preparatory track</td>
<td>.12***</td>
<td>17.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public sector</td>
<td>.01*</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Investments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student conduct</td>
<td></td>
<td>.18***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student preparation for class</td>
<td></td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maladaptive behavior</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.07***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degrees of freedom/residual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[β = regression analysis or standard deviation-score form; T = difference between population mean and hypothesized value]^{49}
students who have good support systems in place. The study reports, “This reduction may be explained by the effects of teacher supportiveness on the student investments measured, specifically student school conduct and involvement in maladaptive behavior.”

Children enter schools to learn. All children come with expectations that should be met by their teachers who are invested in creating equal education opportunities in classroom learning, test preparation, out-of-school coordinating, etc. With the best support system structured around all children, student investment can be fostered; “among the student investment variables themselves (from the table), student conduct had a strong, positive effect on grades ($\beta = .18; T = 25.50$).

Conversely, maladaptive behavior among twelfth-grade students reduces their GPA ($\beta = -.07; T = -10.20$).

While teachers unfamiliar with diverse cultures must train to appreciate multiculturalism, we need a unified approach to encouraging more black and brown people to pursue teaching as a career. The optimism fueled by the civil rights movements in the 1960s included the belief in education as one way to attain freedom from oppressive racism. An important component was the diverse leadership present in the classroom, especially the black teachers. The tradition of black teachers developed in segregated schools in the 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ centuries has been lost and needs to be revived.

The presence of African-American teachers in public school classrooms can have an impact on closing the achievement gap between students of color and the majority race. The previous section discussed how supportive and effective teacher-student relationships improve the likelihood of disadvantaged students recognizing their value to the world through education.

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50 Sanders, ed., et al., *Schooling Students Placed at Risk*. 79.

51 Ibid.
In a rigorous classroom environment where learning is encouraged, it is critically important that each child knows that their teacher believes in their capacity for higher-level thinking. High expectations will counter the discontinuity that hinders low socioeconomic students from high-achievement; they are often those children that eagerly entered kindergarten, triumphed through grade school (not always without struggle), and then hit a wall in high school. Many of these students leave their foundational years in the classroom with a disdain for education.

While this example does not represent every failed education attempt within troubled communities, it typifies the post-secondary posture of many students in this country. Attention to motivate “learning” from all students—equally—translates into non-maladaptive behavior, appropriate effort to learn, and respect for the teacher leading the class. If “It has been identified as a key factor in theories explaining the resilience of at-risk students, and the high achievement of students who excel in academic and other settings,” how do we pursue the goal of positioning more teachers of color in urban, public schools? Some theorists posit that minority teachers are particularly adept at motivating and engaging minority students because they often bring a certain knowledge of student backgrounds to the classroom that enhance their educational experience. The term *culturally relevant pedagogy* implies that teachers are empirically equipped to facilitate academics for students of color, especially those considered “at risk.” Teachers should understand that poor living conditions and limited access to proper resources do not automatically mean that the intellectual ability of low socioeconomic students pales in comparison to students from privileged neighborhoods. An increased number of black and Hispanic educators can create classroom environments characterized by equality where

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52 Sanders, ed., et al., *Schooling Students Placed at Risk*, 164.
economically “at-risk” students can bridge the gap more equitably. During the 1990s, in urban cities, roughly 30% of students in public schools were African American, while only 15% of teachers were black.\(^{53}\) That low percentage of black educators was concerning; it is believed that greater numbers of black career professionals, especially in education, could serve as effective role models. They would be leaders representing what oppressors once called an impossible reality. The oppressors led the charge to establish systemic inequality that ultimately created the misconception that black intellectuals was an impossibility.

In higher education, the number of African Americans with four-year degrees in 2007 was at an index of 72.4; those with master’s degrees show an increase from 5 percent in 1985 to 8.9 percent at the time of the study.\(^{54}\) A look at the percentage of blacks working as university professors is growing, but the numbers still show significant underrepresentation when compared to the academic achievement of whites. Like secondary teachers, university professors have direct impact on and access to growing and developing minds. Although neither position has tremendous influence on curriculum content and resources in the classroom, they shape young minds and build the future of the nation. Full-time black faculty in institutions of higher learning stood below a mere 5.2 percent, reported a 2007 study published in *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*.\(^{55}\) Accolades nonetheless are given to civil rights activists like Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, the Little Rock Nine, Ruby Bridges, and James Meredith, whose tenacity

\(^{53}\)Ibid., 165

\(^{54}\)Ibid.

opened doors for deserving blacks to pursue higher-academic achievement. Benjamin Masters states the following:

But while this headway was made [since]…the 1960s, and while schools are no longer segregated in today’s society, the underrepresentation of African Americans in America’s system of higher education is still prominent. One of the most important areas within the realm of representation of blacks in higher education is their positioning and ability to make decisions about education. Because while the presence of blacks in secondary education is important, if there is no representation with regards to decision making power, blacks are again subservient to commonly white ideals.\(^\text{56}\)

In search of answers to help facilitate closure of the achievement gap, Mavis G. Sanders, John Hopkins University, and Jerald R. Herting, University of Michigan, conducted a study examining 828 black students: males (378), females (443), and missing (7) adolescents in the southeastern United States.\(^\text{57}\) Through a regression analysis, or determining the relationship between specific dependent and independent variables, the professors found that all three variables—school, family, and church—concurrently influence how students approach academics. An interview analysis that bore the same response about the result of the three working simultaneously factored into the findings. The contribution of the firsthand response from the human capital was effective. Sanders and Herting found that these young people develop a sustained “academic self-concept” and function with positive school behavior when all three supports operate, communicate, and work together. A variation, however, between the male and female students’ approach to learning was found to exist based upon the strength of prior supports for female students already in place. Unlike male African-American students, black


\(^\text{57}\)Sanders, ed., et al., *Schooling Students Placed at Risk*, 144.
females tend to have stronger parental and church support systems that impact their academic achievement.

Female students who were above the poverty line in this study respond favorably to school environments due to strong bonds between them and parental support, and they often have a direct link to strong religious communities. The necessary mechanism(s) that the girls need to center and focus on academic study are available to them because these black female students have a village concept to draw from. These supports produce “more positive achievement ideologies and academic self-concepts, and higher grades.”58 Male students in this study, whether above the poverty line or not, lagged behind the female students in these supports. The male students showed lower numbers of positive academic self-concepts, according to the study, because both parental or family support plus church agencies do not always co-exist for the participants. Consistent family (parental) bonding with African-American male students, which church or religious communities foster, may improve these male students’ academic self-concept. For the male students, maladaptive behavior was redirected through teacher support:

Only teacher support ($b = .325$, $\beta = .333$ for males, $p < .01$ and $b = .183$, $\beta = .234$ for females, $p < .001$) has significant effect on the school behavior of the African-American eighth-grade students in the study when looking at each gender group separately. Interestingly, the male coefficient ($b = .325$) for teacher support is significantly larger than the female coefficient ($b = .183$), which indicates a much stronger positive response by males to teacher support.59

The achievement ideology for both male and female students is directly affected by parental and teacher support:

58 Sanders, ed., et al., Schooling Students Placed at Risk, 146.

59 Ibid., 149.
Whereas parental support ($\beta = .330$) appears to play a slightly stronger role relative to teacher support ($\beta = .253$) for males, both factors basically are of equal strength for females ($\beta = .292$ and .294, respectively).\textsuperscript{60}

Academic achievement for male and female African-American students, but particularly male students, is greatly influenced by school behavior (teacher support) [$b = .142$, $\beta = .139$, $p < .01$] and academic self-concept (parental and church support) [$b = .605$, $\beta = .41$, $p < .001$].\textsuperscript{61}

When the variables are working simultaneously, the successful performance of African-American male students can improve exponentially. Epstein’s theory of overlapping spheres of influence is significantly clear in this study. When black male and female students, below poverty or not, have support systems in the home, community, and school working to ensure they have equitable opportunities to learn, the achievement gap can lessen.

For the male students, the effects of positive school behavior and academic self-concept can “weaken the effects of poverty and age on the academic achievement” of black students.\textsuperscript{62}

The study included a number of older black males who had fallen prey to retention, or repeating grades (2/3 were between the ages of 15 and 17 in the eighth grade); “This finding has important implications for the way we educate and provide academic and social support for African-American male students in particular, especially those who live below the poverty level.”

When disadvantaged children believe they can achieve, then they will achieve. Success stories regarding how minorities are positively approaching academic achievement in urban school districts should be consistently studied and the methodology duplicated. Details of these

\textsuperscript{60}Sanders, ed., et al., \textit{Schooling Students Placed at Risk}. 151.

\textsuperscript{61}Ibid., 153.

\textsuperscript{62}Ibid., 154.
often-non-traditional approaches that transform suffering secondary students are not widespread.
Pilot programs in urban areas, like One Common Unity, and funding for pilot programs in urban schools like the BLSYW step-team, remain distant dreams; they should be respected as viable solutions and duplicated because the children experience internal change that sustains. Investing in the social-emotional status of the human capital, the whole child, is a major part of the solution. Finding solutions to help close the academic achievement gap is one that, sadly, has eluded this country for decades. Antwan Wilson, Superintendent for the Washington, D.C., public schools has mandated a social and emotional developmental approach, coupled with academics, to reach the whole child. Chapter four will discuss how solutions, like Antwan Wilson’s developmental approach, can become accessible to other low achieving school districts.
The concluding chapter summarizes the thesis and highlights, chapter by chapter, the findings based on historical data. It also suggests in detail the two effective types of contributors to change. In response to the lack of an equitable education system in America, chapter four includes a convincing approach that maximizes the use of a national database. The recognition and interpretation of the methods and practices useful in improving secondary school attendance, grade point average, test scores, and college graduation has been demonstrated in segments of the country; consequently, school districts should be mandated to acquire and implement these convincing and workable practices. Finally, the chapter concludes with a suggested outline for empirical future research and resultant call to action.

Further research should be considered to discover the viability of a national database that allows pragmatic methodology for narrowing the achievement gap. The successful acquisition and impact of such database use must be monitored by local districts to track its frequent application nationwide. The database should allow a more aggressive approach to expanding the awareness of empirical research and the subsequent publication of those findings from African-American professionals. Because children of color respond well to black leaders due to kindred relationships, and living proof of a pathway to economic freedom, more African-American professors, scholars, business people, and clergy should be encouraged to become stakeholders in the professional education community.

The concluding chapter is divided into four main sections. Section one is a summary of the thesis. Section two highlights the findings of each chapter as well as the limitations of the current work. Section three restates the significance of innovative and traditional methodology.
Section four suggests the kind of resources to help close the achievement gap. Finally, section five encourages future research with a diversified spectrum of experts. The last paragraph concludes the thesis.

Section One – Summary

As an educator for over 20 years, I saw an opportunity to research on a problem that impacts all our children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. It is a problem that hinders their path to a successful future. Given the opportunity, I seized the chance to take an empirical approach to researching the history of how the inequitable education system in American classrooms persists. I was intrigued to review what many experts and scholars have recorded from studies conducted about how inequality impacts students of color versus majority race students, especially at the critical secondary level. I appreciate the opportunity to synthesize my findings with my own knowledge and experience garnered in the teaching profession.

I approached my research and writing through the stratum of higher-level thinking invigorated during my graduate studies at Georgetown University. The past three years have challenged me to look beyond what is on the surface of societal concerns and to use research and comparative analysis to unwrap what is concealed. This thesis is the culminating product of my liberal studies experience as a graduate student. My goal in writing it is to join the academic discussion about the core issues surrounding systemic racism in education in this country.

For over two decades, I have had the chance to work with African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Caucasian students. It has been a privilege teaching in private Christian, parochial, charter, and public-school institutions of learning. More than once, I witnessed students in the majority race struggle in higher-level learning environments and receive measured methods to assist them towards individual success. I often wondered what I would find, in terms of
assessment and subsequent resources, in predominantly low-income schools. If not the same support, why? And, what can be done to improve that situation?

My curiosity about the state of educational affairs that historically have negatively impacted the progress of minority students—compared to white students— informs the research for my thesis. The fact that communities of color often lack positive self-image and fail to embrace the fourteenth amendment right to pursue higher education is also a component to the unleveled playing field that we call the American education institution. While research and subsequent studies designed to close the achievement gap span several decades since the 1960s reconstruction, sustainable increase in the number of people of color, particularly in urban communities, succeeding in higher institutions of learning is disappointing at best.

The state of education in black neighborhoods, however, will continue to improve with dedication from all concerned actors, stakeholders, and concerned citizens. Concerted effort to combine new methods with what traditionally works can bridge the gap, especially when society demands bold steps be taken by the decision makers who have been voted into office and have been given the power to legislate equal-education opportunities for all our children.

Section Two – Chapter Review

Chapter One

I began to review America’s history, especially the post-Civil War period when blacks were thought to have initial access to fair education practices. Through close review, however, the opposite of a fair system was in place almost from the beginning of freedom from slavery. Chapter one outlines the course equal education would take with different interpretations of what
needed to be fixed, from one political party’s time in office and understanding of the problem compared to their predecessors.

Each new presidential administration included reauthorization of the original 1965 law that maintained its importance as the base for future political platforms to build on. It was easy for this age-old initiative intended to address disparities to remain in place because the academic achievement of black students continued to lag behind white students. The black-white gap continued to define itself even though equitable laws existed from President Lyndon Johnson to President Barack Obama.

Chapter one also highlights improvements and addendums that were proposed and then legislated, yet they have managed to fall short of President Lyndon Baines Johnson’s good intention to equally educate the country’s underrepresented. The ensuing decades introduced more opportunities meant to help turn the tide, like the Second Reconstruction Period of the 1960s; establishing the Department of Education in 1979; and the 1983 A Nation at Risk, the nation’s report card on the status of education overall. The series of political-platform prominence afforded by each president seemed to magnify the problem of educational inequity; in fact, political platforms helped to effectively label African Americans as academically second-class citizens. That conundrum led the way to a closer study of modern political influence.

Chapter Two

Under the nation’s first African-American president, equitable education became more important. Often opposing viewpoints of democrat and republican politicians about helping to close the gap rendered ineffective policy and changes that countered closure of the systemic educational divide. The reauthorization of education bills and laws are eagerly anticipated and
will impact the academic course for future generations. The juxtaposition of ideas and plans from the former (democrat) and current (republican) secretary of education is an important approach to advancing minority access to equal education.

It was important to conduct a comparative analysis of the legislative proposals from both sides of the political aisle as neither side has put forth an agenda with sustained follow-through that has undone what 50+ years of unfair treatment has wrought. The former (democrat) and current (republican) secretaries of education encouraged deeper review; my research needed to inform the question of why relentless partisanship is unproductive when trying to find a solution to equitable education.

Equal and improved access to advanced placement coursework and tests is not occurring through traditional channels. The prevailing perception of many in academia is not to include low-income students in consideration for advanced classwork; this explains the persistent lack of advanced curriculum on campuses attended predominantly by children of color. That imbalance is reflected as well when it comes to SAT/ACT standardized test preparation. It is a fact that ethnically diverse material for learning by every student is not incorporated in mainstream American education. Systemically, public school curriculum taught in AP classes and standardized test preparation material are composed of language, experiences, and a narrow history, all of which are more common in majority race communities; the result is a lopsided situation that minority children cannot level. Culturally diverse teaching material requiring that all ethnicities learn about “the other” should be reflected in classroom environments and subsequently included on assessments.
Chapter Three

In this chapter, we revisited modern day and historic views on the plight of African Americans in America—especially in the schoolhouse. Under President Andrew Johnson, southern successor to Abraham Lincoln, the Emancipation Proclamation became handicapped from its inception. My findings reveal how the entrenched Southern way of life—slavery—reentered societal acceptance under Johnson. Many former slave owners became members of Congress and local governments, affording them the opportunity to establish new “chains and shackles” for black people.

Chapter three showed that with systemic oppression, people of color must continue to pursue equitable education creatively. That creativity includes new ways to build confidence in self-perception and confidence in the land they call home. While many groups and organizations exist that are perpetuating self-help on the way to academic success, two groups in the nation’s capital reveal marked success. The area of notable success is not new to mankind, but the methodology is different. Further developments in this arena are possible because of the traditional methods that remain in place.

Qualified and informed teachers, a staple in facilitating fair education in the classroom, are vital to the twenty-first century secondary school experience. My research, however, insists that teachers outside of the minority community must be trained on how to approach each student equitably. Equally necessary is encouragement to a larger percentage of African-American college students to return to the classroom as teachers. Reconciling the value college students of color have to impact the malleable profession of teaching is an important next step. For many of them, confidence-building strategies to believe in themselves might be the key.
Section Three – Innovative and Traditional Contributors

One Community Unity is a local nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., that extends opportunity to underserved youth, giving them a chance to redefine themselves. My discovery of OCU informed me of the need to duplicate successful programs like this, which are designed to maximize human potential rather than to capitalize on historic deficits. At OCU, the benefit of diversity is seen through the leadership team that also reaches into the community to build trust and hope with disadvantaged young people.

Similarly, the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women, a public charter for minority females, is in the socially challenged city of Baltimore, Maryland, where the crime rate is high. Yet, the school’s ethnically defined culture is an incubator to advance education among some of America’s forgotten black females. The contrast revealed through the BLSYW’s success ratio against the backdrop of controversial police activity in that city defines the determination necessary for children of color to persevere through adversity. The existence and success of OCU and the BLSYW shows the power of education.

What makes both OCU and BLSYW innovative is their approach to this decades-old problem of inequality. The result of the progressive path that both groups take is evident through student testimonials, which are now permanently accessible through film. Each story on film can incentivize the development of similar groups across the country with life-changing dynamics. They can also encourage the creation of missions-driven charters that allow programming to facilitate sustainable change in public schools that can be measured for decades to come. What is working to close the gap, whether new or established, deserves respect and furtherance.
Teachers are commissioned to facilitate an atmosphere that incites students’ curiosity to explore learning. Learning is relational, and trust is key to furthering the process of learning. When preconceived notions interfere with basic trust either from teacher to student or student to teacher, advancement becomes hindered. Students who come to class having experienced oppression and resistance to equality must be trained by teachers who are qualified and committed to culturally developed methodology. The creators of professional development for teacher training and the curriculum development for the classroom must be informed of the lingering high-percentages of low GPAs, low test scores, and low college completion numbers in urban neighborhoods. Then equity for all students can be properly addressed by all educators.

African-American teachers are missing from most classrooms across the country. The absence of a diverse teacher cohort in struggling schools is key to a lingering achievement gap. At the same time, these schools are underfunded by the federal dollars meant to facilitate equality through qualified teachers and equal resources. In an attempt to improve communication of what happens with federal dollars and programming at the local and national level, greater access to the facts is crucial to change.

**Section Four – Suggested Method**

Chapter three suggests a solution, at the national level, that documents successful pathways to improved academic performance, especially at the secondary level, around the country. The gap that I discovered in my research I refer to as a national database. The suggested database helps create pathways that have effectively assisted growth in disadvantaged schools evident in improved GPAs, participation in advanced placement coursework, and higher standardized test scores. The caveat to the successful database compilation depends on the cooperation of officials at the state level, school district administrations, and qualified teacher-
classroom accountability. This database should be updated annually, highlighting successful methods and practices that produce student engagement in higher-level education that is measurable through improved grade point averages and subsequent competitive test scores. The database should be legislated as part of the lawful education practice in this country.

Teams of professional “watch dogs” who are qualified and trained to monitor the use of the database by struggling school districts must be responsible to document and report the annual use of the data to congressional leadership. The teams must be bipartisan with the sole purpose of monitoring input, usage, and recorded evidence of productivity.

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, there is no such thing as a “magic pill” that 14,000+ public school districts can take and see immediate growth. Growth is a process that requires a diverse combination of ingredients that are monitored, at times changed, and improved upon to produce the desired result. The introduction of a national database may bring a needed step in the growth process for children of color to be respected in and to respect the higher-education arena in America.

Evidence exists that informs and supports segments of diverse communities that have actualized improvement in secondary education achievement using specific practices and methodology. Many of those student scholars from oppressed communities are successfully entering college; for many, they become first-generation college graduates. While countless articles and journals have been written and multiple books have been published, national accessibility to “achievement gap” closing strategies is far too segregated. There are many predominantly black and Hispanic neighborhoods with children of promise, currently labeled as children at risk, that need successful methods and practices that are working elsewhere to be tried in their own home district.
A national database, instituted, updated, manned, and marketed by the Department of Education, could be a tremendous piece of the puzzle that, once in place, can help realize a marked advancement towards lessening the achievement gap. The existing evidence must become easily accessible to hurting school districts, community partners, families, and human capital—the students themselves.

The problem with fairness in equal education historically carries an unusual amount of prejudice against people of color aligning their intellect with the majority race. Activity that supports racial equality seems to be one of the most feared accomplishments for this country; for that reason, oppressors who would malign the intent of a national database to promote equality in academics must be scrutinized by the “watch dogs” to disarm them. The socially entrenched, systemic mechanisms in place from the inception of the Emancipation Proclamation must be unapologetically removed. That removal must be led by greater numbers of African Americans.

**Section Five – Future Research**

I found that there is a limited amount of research from diverse stakeholders, which prohibits a more accurate analysis on the progress for closing the achievement gap. Often the limitations that were implied seemed to come from an almost cold and external opinion. Well intended research analysis concluded from a purely clinical observation limits the potential of the smallest degree of improvement. The future of all academic studies and analysis around equitable education with subsequent publications must include equally, if not predominantly, research conducted and evidence gathered from black Americans empirically vetted in improving their own communities. At the core of an inequitable American education system, urban youth are affected the most by an unfair, imbalanced, and biased ideology propagated against their ability to perform.
History is destined to repeat itself when we see low numbers of black sociologists and psychologists, for example, involved in the research and successive studies that are later used in publications. Greater numbers of African-American professionals involved with finding untapped but workable solutions from inception to implementation will pay dividends. Removing limitations by improving equal access to education will provide the pathway to a more diverse population of leadership determined to close the achievement gap in this country.

When the number of African-American teachers, school administrators, city council members, state and congressional representatives, business owners and professionals, and pastors of megachurches are competitive with those in majority communities, equal opportunities will present themselves. When more people of color—empirical stakeholders—are advancing professionally, especially at the legislative level, there will be less tampering with the pathway that is meant to improve learning for all students. In turn, the benefit of diverse leadership working to legislate and monitor proven strategies that nurture academic achievement for all children strengthens the United States of America.
CONCLUSION

I set out to advance historic and ingenious knowledge of this centuries-old problem that plagues public school classrooms well into the twenty-first century. While the biased and incomplete statistics that show the achievement gap between urban students and white students are accessible for public knowledge, the small successes that are often reached in neighborhoods of color are either overlooked, or just go widely unknown. New approaches and refreshing methods that work must receive equal time and attention. Even in the halls of academia, the approach to discuss humanity and attempt to solve its ailing fate must include input from those most impacted by the sickness, for it is that group of people who will commit to finding a cure. It is my goal by writing this thesis to begin to join my experience, my time, and my dedication to support the number of professionals who have made searching for solutions to educational inequality their life’s work.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


