Chapter 1

The Importance of Understanding the Challenges of African American Male Students: Setting the Foundation for Future Educational Success

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance to scholars, educators, community leaders, and other relevant stakeholders, as it relates to the dilemmas often faced by African American males. In this chapter the authors present foundational information to spark productive dialogue with the hope of balancing the narrative of this often-misrepresented group. This is done through a historical review of issues encountered by African American males, barriers to education, and highlights of the importance of community and connectedness, and creating an awareness and relevance for future generations. The chapter ends with a discussion of future research considerations to prompt further exploration into this topic.

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INTRODUCTION

The struggle continues for African American Males to find equity in their pursuit of a better life for themselves and those that are a part of their domain. In their plot to pursue a high-quality 21st-century education, too often they are met with circumstances, situations, challenges, and environmental issues that have the potential of taking them off the trajectory of achieving their educational goals. Furthermore, there seems to be a transcending theme among the educational goals and objectives of public schools, which is to first recognize and meet the needs of “all kinds of learners” and secondly, to provide rigorous learning opportunities for students in order to ensure college and career readiness. However, African American Males are challenged at every benchmark as they move across the academic continuum. It seems that the “all kinds of learners” cited by many does not apply to all African American Males students (NEA, 2011).

BACKGROUND

African American Males in PK-12 Settings

More than 13.5 million public school-aged children live in poverty-stricken areas across America. Often, these children are exposed to a multitude of risk factors that can impede their opportunities for success (Wyman Center Annual Report, 2014). According to the Schott Foundation’s 50-State Report on Public Education and Black Males (2012), approximately, forty-two percent of African American Male students attend low-performing schools and schools that have the minimal access to the resources necessary to support quality learning outcomes. Additionally, a third of the teachers in these high-poverty schools lack the educational credentials and teaching experience required to provide a high-quality education (Schott Foundation Report, 2012). The literature shows no significant progress in closing the academic gap between African American Males and their White counterpart. African American Males continue to perform lower than their peers on almost every indicator (The National Center for Education Statistics NCES, 2012).

There is a need for a concerted national effort to focus on the educational, and social outcomes of African American Males (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell & Horwitz, 2010). Nearly 80% of the students in special education programs are said to be African American and Hispanic males. Conversely, African American Males are 2.5 times less likely to be participants in gifted and talented programs, even when their academic achievement supports their ability to succeed. The suspension and expulsion rate of African American Males is three times as high of all other groups.
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