BUILDING BETTER LEARNERS STUDY

RAISING BLACK EXCELLENCE

An Educational Research project on the Impact of Black Adventist Education

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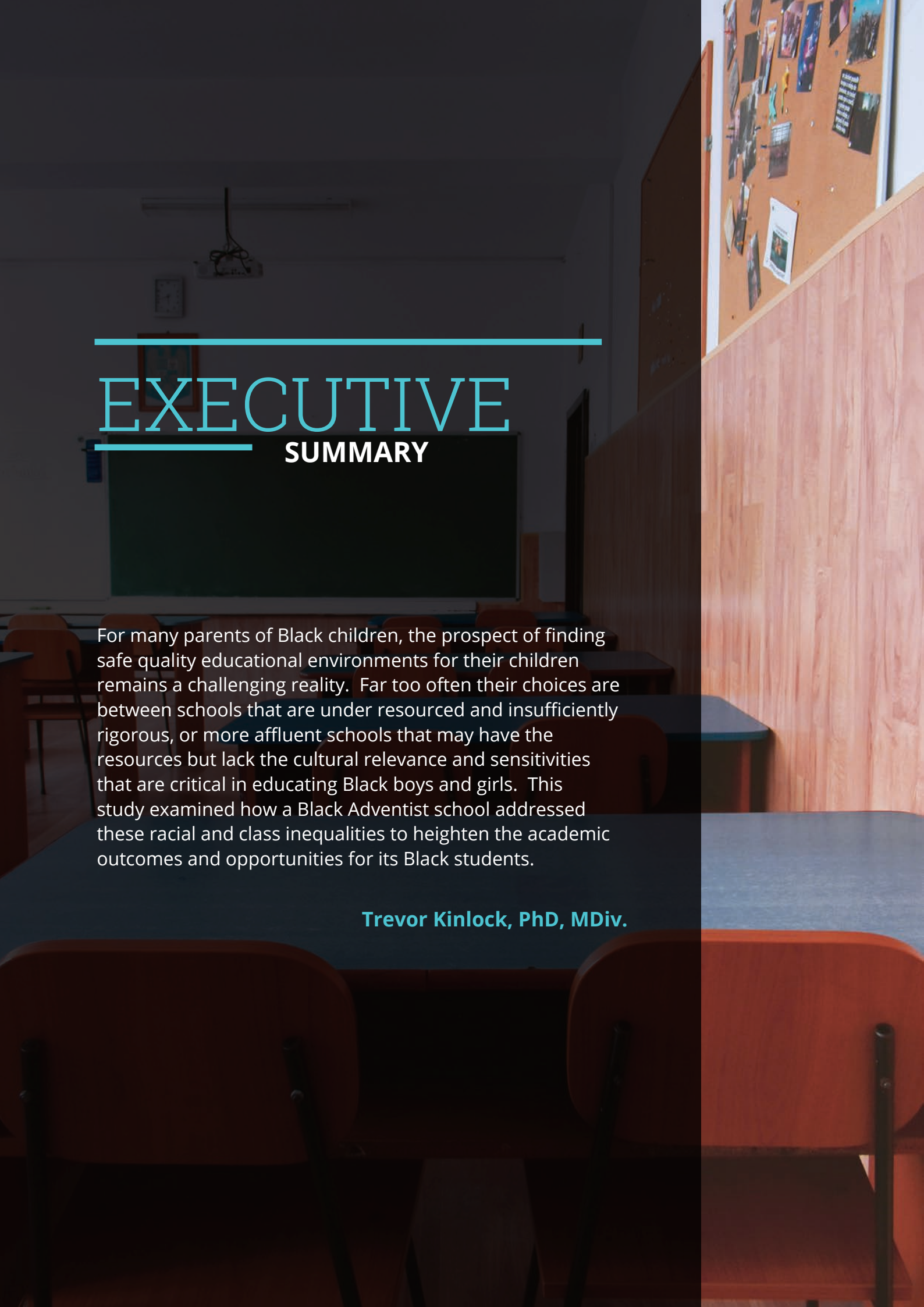

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For many parents of Black children, the prospect of finding safe quality educational environments for their children remains a challenging reality. Far too often their choices are between schools that are under resourced and insufficiently rigorous, or more affluent schools that may have the resources but lack the cultural relevance and sensitivities that are critical in educating Black boys and girls. This study examined how a Black Adventist school addressed these racial and class inequalities to heighten the academic outcomes and opportunities for its Black students.

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BACKGROUND

The Cognitive Genesis Study

A BROAD LOOK AT SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST EDUCATION

From 2006 to 2009, the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists commissioned a longitudinal study of Adventist education—the ***CognitiveGenesis*** study. This research study looked at the academic achievement of over 51,000 students in more than 800 Adventist elementary schools and academies in the U.S. The ***CognitiveGenesis*** study found that students in Adventist schools were outperforming their peers nationally in both public and private schools (Thayer & Kido, 2012). Adventist students scored higher on achievement tests than the national norm group. Additionally, the longer students were in the Adventist system, the higher they achieved compared to the norm group. Educational researchers and authors of the study, Jerome Thayer and Elissa Kido, observed an academic advantage for students within the Adventist school system relative to their norm group peers. Kido has termed this the "Adventist Advantage" (Thayer & Kido, 2012).

What about Black Adventist schools?

However, though the ***CognitiveGenesis*** project yielded valuable insights on student achievement of all racial groups within the Adventist educational system as a whole, research specific to the performance of Black students within Black operated Seventh-day Adventist school systems is deficient. Educational research into Black Seventh-day Adventist schools is virtually non-existent. This research gap leaves important Black educational spaces unexplored and critical voices unheard in the ongoing quest for educational equity and excellence for marginalized communities.

In partnership with the Allegheny East Conference Office of Education, the Building Better Learners research study was initiated in 2019 to help fill these research gaps in Black Adventist education. This pioneering study explored a Black Seventh-day Adventist school to understand how schools like this influence the academic, social, and cultural development of Black students. Findings from this study illustrate the liberatory roles these schools play in supporting strong achievement and developmental outcomes for Black students. Findings also offer insights into effective pedagogies and best practices for success in urban education. Research findings document a consequential mix of factors that collectively may be termed the "***Black Adventist Advantage***".

CURRENT RESEARCH ON RACE AND EDUCATION

To better understand this study, a brief review of the latest academic research on race and education reveals several important realities Black children face in today's schools.

Achievement Gaps or Opportunity Gaps?

For the past 70 years, research on race and achievement has focused on differences in academic performance between Black and White students. This so called "achievement gap" features Black students scoring behind their White peers on standardized assessments (Alexander and Morgan, 2016; Coleman, 1966; Downey and Condron, 2016; Hill, et al., 2017; Jackson and Moffitt, 2017; Thorson and Gearhart, 2019). However, in the past 20 years, educational researchers have recognized the need to change the terminology and framework used to understand these differences in achievement. A large body of research documents that racial academic differences are systemic in nature and rooted in broader patterns of disinvestment and gaps in opportunity between groups in society (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Evans, 2005; Grodsky, 2008; Hill, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2012, 2013; Rothstein, 2004; Rowley and Wright, 2011). These researchers argue that the term "achievement gap" has led to problematic educational approaches that see deficits in students, their families, and communities rather than the unequal social system. The "achievement gap" framework is a false comparison between groups wherein exists differentials in socio-economic investment. Illustrating this inequality, Kozol highlights how White students in the wealthiest county in NY received $11,000 more educational funding per child per year than Black students in the poorest county (Kozol, 2005). Opportunity gap frameworks, then, focus on raising the socio-economic inputs and investments into marginalized students, their families, and their communities as the means to strengthening Black student achievement.

Culturally Relevant Education

When considering how to educate Black students most effectively, research documents the benefits of incorporating cultural knowledge and cultural sensitivity in the pedagogy and practice of the educator—this is known as Culturally Relevant Education or CRE. Culturally relevant educators use the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them (Gay, 2010:31). Culturally relevant education empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1994:16, 17). Empirical evidence of the benefits of CRE within schools has been documented in research across academic content areas: mathematics, science, history, social studies, and English language arts (Caballero, 2010; Choi, 2013; Dimick, 2012; Epstein, et al., 2011; Hubert, 2013; Martell, 2013). Lomotey explains the benefit of culturally relevant approaches asserting, "Part of enabling students to see themselves in the curriculum is allowing them to observe at work those educators and other professionals who share their cultural background. This has long been shown to have a positive effect on children's self-concept and their sense of their own capacity to be successful" (Lomotey, 1992). Research indicates that culturally relevant pedagogy and practice are academically beneficial for Black students.

> Culturally relevant education empowers students intellectually, socially, culturally, and politically.

Educational Safe Spaces

Within educational contexts, racism often manifests itself through latent or covert means known as microaggressions. Microaggressions are "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults to the target person or group" (Derthick, David, Saw, and Okazaki, 2014; Sue et al., 2007:272). When Black students arrive at school, they face a myriad of racial obstacles and hostilities that negatively influence their ability to achieve. Their academic trajectories are harmed by White teacher implicit bias, low teacher expectations, teacher attitudes and beliefs, and punitive behavior management approaches (Downey and Pribesh, 2004; Keels, Durkee, and Hope, 2017; Love and Kruger, 2005; Lustick, 2017; McGrady and Reynolds, 2013; Moore, 2017; Oates, 2003; van Den Bergh, 2010; Williams, 2011). To affirmatively support Black student learning and development, educators then must directly contend with these pernicious in-school realities. Whereas these racial inequities and microaggressions harm Black student achievement, schools and educators that create equitable and affirming learning environments that both protect and nurture Black students may evidence positive achievement results. The literature demonstrates that Black students need educational safe spaces that empower them to learn, thrive, and achieve.

Faith and Black Achievement

Over the decades, researchers in education have found that religion plays a significant role in academic achievement. The personal religious faith of the student, the student's religious involvement, and the religious faith and involvement of parents have all been evidenced to have a positive influence on student academic performance (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Byfield, 2008; Madyun and Lee, 2010; McCray, Grant, and Beachum, 2010; Toldson and Anderson, 2010). This heightened achievement is especially pronounced for Black and Brown students. The research documents a positive effect size for religious or faith-based schools and student achievement. Jeynes found that student religious commitment reduced the racial achievement gap by 50%, while attending a religious school reduced the gap by 25% (Jeynes, 2010). For African American students of faith with "intact" family structures, the gap disappeared completely (Jeynes, 2010). Barrett concludes "that religious socialization reinforces attitudes, outlooks, behaviors, and practices among students, shaping—particularly through individuals' commitment to and adoption of the goals and expectations of the group—a habitus conducive to positive educational outcomes" (Barrett, 2010).

STUDENT RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT REDUCED THE RACIAL ACHIEVEMENT GAP BY 50%

METHODOLOGY

Using the qualitative case study tradition, this research explored a Black Seventh-day Adventist k-8 school (given the pseudonym "Franklin SDA School") to understand the nature and quality of this school and its influence on Black student achievement and development. Quantitative data sources included six years of school longitudinal achievement data from two standardized assessments (Iowa and Star),

four years of eighth grade GPA data to provide a measure of students' achievement in their final year at Franklin, and Iowa Assessment scores from a cohort of students matriculating through 3rd to 8th grade to provide insights on achievement levels of students completing six or more consecutive years at Franklin.

Qualitative data sources included over 200 pages of transcripts from key informant interviews with the conference superintendent, school principals, school board representatives, teachers, a parent focus group, and historical informants. Additionally, the North American Division (NAD) curriculum standards, teacher classroom resources, and other school documents were reviewed to understand the nature of the school's academic program. The following research findings emerged from an in-depth exploration of these multiple data sources.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Achievement and Affordability

National and State achievement data

National and state data from the U.S. Dept of Education's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were reviewed to provide context for student achievement at the national and state levels. National NAEP data represents both public and private schools nationwide. National NAEP data for 2017 and 2019 reveal that 4th and 8th grade students across the nation ranged between ***34-41% proficiency levels in math and reading*** (Table 1).

State NAEP data was reviewed from the state where Franklin school is located (the name of the state is omitted to maintain anonymity of location). State NAEP data represents public schools within the state. State NAEP data for years 2015, 2017, and 2019 reveal that 4th and 8th grade students ranged between ***32-42% proficiency levels in math and reading*** (Table 2).

Black student achievement in the State

State NAEP data was also reviewed by racial group for reading and math. State NAEP data for 2017 reveal that Black 4th and 8th grade students ranged between ***19-27% proficiency in reading*** (Table 3). State NAEP data for 2019 reveal that Black 4th and 8th grade students ranged between ***14-23% proficiency in math*** (Table 4).

The broad snapshot of national and state NAEP data reveals that a minority of students across the nation are performing at high levels of achievement. Notably, NAEP achievement levels for Black students are at the very bottom.

Franklin Adventist school achievement

On multiple measures using school achievement data, Franklin students' achievement compares favorably to national and state data. It must be underscored that because of variations in standards, assessments, and proficiency designations across states, direct one to one comparisons of assessment data are inappropriate (Rosenberg, 2004; Smith, 2008). Rather, the above NAEP data is useful in simply providing a broad and general snapshot of national and state student performance.

By comparison, longitudinal achievement data reveal that students at Franklin are achieving at high levels relative to their peers in public and private schools both nationally and within their state (Tables 5-12). Three years of Franklin's Iowa Assessment scores, three years of Star Assessment scores, and four years of eighth grade GPA data reveal the following:

Proficiency

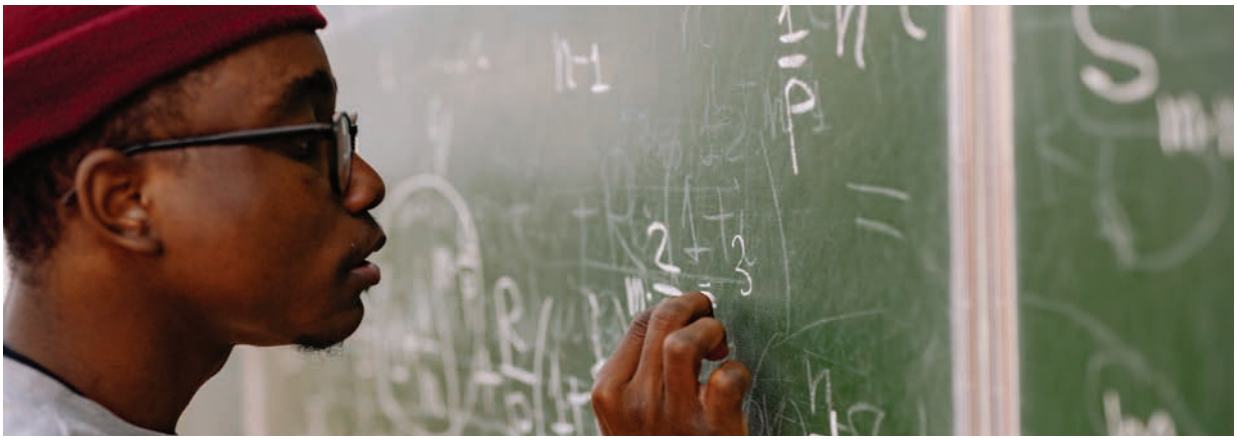
On the Iowa Assessment's reading proficiency measure, Franklin's three-year longitudinal data reveals that 252 out of 252 third through eighth grade students or **100%** were in grades testing proficient in reading (Table 5). On the Iowa Assessment's math proficiency measure, Franklin's three-year longitudinal data reveals that 242 out of 252 third through eighth grade students or ***96% were in grades testing proficient in math*** (Table 5).

National Percentile Ranking

By a more stringent measure, on the Iowa Assessment's national percentile ranking, 349 out of 447 Franklin kindergarten through eighth grade students or ***78% were in grades testing at or above the national norm*** (Table 6).

Grade equivalent

Using the most stringent measure (grade equivalence), the Iowa Assessment's grade equivalent measure revealed 333 out of 447 Franklin kindergartners through eighth grade students or ***74.4% were in grades testing at or above grade level*** (Table 7).



ELA and Math

On the Iowa Assessment's ELA measure, 434 out of 447 Franklin kindergarten through eighth grade students or **97%** were in grades testing at or above grade level in ELA (Table 8). On the Iowa Assessment's Math measure, 219 out of 447 Franklin kindergarten through eighth grade students or **48.9%** were in grades testing at or above grade level in math (Table 8). On the Star Reading Assessment, 166 out of 235 Franklin students (**70.6%**) in grades 1-8 tested at or above benchmark (Table 9). And on the Star Math Assessment, 154 out of 235 Franklin students (**65.5%**) tested at or above benchmark (Table 10).

Eighth grade GPA data

Four years of **GPA data** reveals that 75% of Franklin students graduate with a 3.0 or higher, 57% graduate with a 3.5 or higher, and 0% graduate with a GPA below 2.0 (Table 11).

Cohort data

To get an ending measure of achievement from students who matriculated through Franklin, eighth grade Iowa test scores were reviewed for a cohort of students continuously enrolled in Franklin from at least grades three through eight. Cohort data reveals that 60% of students tested on the college level (13+) in ELA or Math. All students were above grade level in ELA with 80% testing at the 10th grade level or higher. Similarly, math scores reveal that 80% of students tested on the 10th grade level or higher. ***All*** students or 100% tested above grade level on the complete composite (Table 12). These heightened scores suggest that the longer students attend Franklin school, the better they perform academically—findings similar to those from the Cognitive Genesis study (Thayer and Kido, 2012).

STUDENTS ARE PERFORMING AT HIGHER LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT ON MULTIPLE MEASURES COMPARED TO THEIR PEERS

The broad snapshot reveals that large majorities of Franklin students are performing at higher levels of achievement on multiple measures compared to their peers in other public and private schools nationally.

National and State Data

Table 1: NAEP National Math and Reading Proficiency*
4th and 8th Grades 2017 & 2019**

	4TH GRADE		8TH GRADE	
	2017	2019	2017	2019
Math	40	41	34	34
Reading	37	35	36	34

*scores represent percentage of students nationwide scoring at/above proficiency level
**SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1990-2019 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

Table 2: NAEP National Math and Reading Proficiency*
4th and 8th Grades 2017 & 2019**

	4TH GRADE			8TH GRADE		
MATH	% at/ above Basic	% at/ above Proficient	at Advanced	% at/ above Basic	% at/ above Proficient	at Advanced
2019	75.78	**39.11**	10.99	65.02	**32.59**	11.81
2017	78.17	**42.34**	11.05	66.33	**32.62**	10.72
2015	78.94	**40.15**	7.86	70.70	**34.69**	9.87
READING						
2019	64.22	**35.09**	11.05	72.83	**35.99**	5.20
2017	68.92	**40.17**	12.12	74.33	**37.59**	6.57
2015	67.59	**36.53**	9.50	76.22	**37.37**	5.27

*scores represent percentage of students nationwide scoring at/above proficiency level
**SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1990-2019 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

Table 3: NAEP State Reading Proficiency for Student Groups*
4th and 8th Grades 2017**

4th Grade	%	% at/above Basic	% at/above Proficient	at Advanced
All	100	69	40	12
White	38	83	55	19
Black	32	57	**27**	5
Hispanic	19	53	22	5
Asian	7	87	65	25
8th Grade				
All	100	74	38	7
White	40	86	52	10
Black	34	60	**19**	2
Hispanic	14	64	26	3
Asian	7	91	67	20

Table 4: NAEP State Math Proficiency for Student Groups*
4th and 8th Grades 2019**

4th Grade	%	% at/above Basic	% at/above Proficient	at Advanced
All	100	76	39	11
White	33	88	54	17
Black	34	63	**23**	3
Hispanic	20	69	27	4
Asian	7	96	80	40
8th Grade				
All	100	65	33	12
White	36	85	50	19
Black	34	46	**14**	3
Hispanic	17	48	18	4
Asian	8	88	62	35

*scores represent percentage of students nationwide scoring at/above proficiency level
**SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), various years, 1990-2019 Mathematics and Reading Assessments.

Franklin School Achievement

Table 5: Iowa Assessment Proficiency Levels in Standard Scores (SS)
Franklin School Grades 3-8 (YearOne - Year Three)

Grade	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year 1-3	Standard Score (SS) Reading & Math PROFICIENCY RANGE
3	(14) SSR- 186.9 P	(16) SSR- 180.9 P	(20) SSR- 197.9 P		R: 175-217
	SSM- 182.9 P	SSM- 181.9 P	SSM- 186 P		M: 177-204
4	(14) SSR- 203 P	(15) SSR- 200.9 P	(13) SSR- 194.6 P		R: 189-235
	SSM- 190.8 P	SSM- 192.7 P	SSM- 189.2 P		M: 189-223
5	(16) SSR- 211.3 P	(17) SSR- 226.3 P	(16) SSR- 224.9 P		R: 202-253
	SSSM- 202.8 P	SSM- 213.9 P	SSM- 211.4 P		M: 200-242
6	(10) SSR- 242.5 P	(17) SSR- 226.3 P	(16) SSR- 226.7 P		R: 213-264
	SSM- 216.8 P	SSM- 213.9 P	SSM- 234.1 P		M: 212-257
7	(10) SSR- 235.2 P	(10) SSR- 248.8 P	(17) SSR- 276.5 P		R: 226-287
	SSM- 218.7 NP	SSM- 228.5 P	SSM- 234.1 P		M: 222-276
8	(18) SSR- 265.6 P	(10) SSR- 256.8 P	(8) SSR- 276.5 P		R: 239-303
	SSM- 236.7 P	SSM- 243.6 P	SSM- 253.4 P		M: 236-290
Total Students Tested	82	80	90	252	
Total students in grades testing Proficient in Reading	82	80	90	252	
Total Students in grades testing Proficient in Math	72	80	90	242	
% of students in grades testing Proficient in Reading	100	100	100	**100%**	
% of students in grades testing Proficient in Math	87.8	100	100	**96%**	

()=#of students in grade **SSR**= Standard Soore Reading **SSM**= Standard Soore Math **P**=Proficient
NP= Not Proficient **R**= Reading **M**= Math

Table 6: Iowa Assessment 50th Percentile National Percentile Ranking (PR)
Franklin School Grades K-8 (Year One - Year Three)

Grade	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year One-Three
K	(28) PR-88	(20) PR- 94	(17) PR- 82	
1	(17) PR-75	(27) PR- 69	(23) PR- 75	
2	(18) PR-50	(21) PR- 92	(24) PR- 84	
3	(14) PR-50	(16) PR- 45 B	(20) PR-57	
4	(14) PR-48 B	(15) PR- 55	(13) PR- 41 B	
5	(16) PR-40 B	(12) PR- 41 B	(16) PR- 59	
6	(10) PR-50	(17) PR- 48 B	(16) PR- 50	
7	(10) PR-44 B	(10) PR- 54	(17) PR- 54	
8	(18) PR-51	(10) PR- 51	(8) PR- 61	
Total students in grades at/above 50PR	105	103	141	349
Total Students Tested	145	148	154	447
% of students in grades at/above 50PR	72.4	69.5	91.5	**78%**

( )=#of students in grade **PR**= national percentile ranking **B**=below 50PR

Table 7: Iowa Assessment Grade Equivalent (GE)
Franklin School Grades K-8 (Year One -Year Three)

Grade	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year One-Three
K	(28) 1.4	(20) 1.6	(17) 1.3	
1	(17) 2.4	(27) 2.2	(23) 2.4	
2	(18) 2.8	(21)4.1	(24) 3.7	
3	(14) 3.8	(16) 3.6 B	(20)4.0	
4	(14) 4.7 B	(15) 5.1	(13) 4.4 B	
5	(16) 5.4 B	(12) 5.4 B	(16) 6.4	
6	(10) 6.9	(17) 6.7 B	(16) 6.8 B	
7	(10) 7.3 B	(10) 8.2	(17)8.2	
8	(18)9.0	(10) 8.9	(8) 10.2	
Total students in grades at/above Grade level	105	103	125	333
Total students Tested	145	148	154	**447**
% of students in grades at/above Grade level	72.4	69.5	81.1	**74.4%**

( )=#of students in grade **B**= below grade level

Table 8: Iowa Assessment ELA and Math Scores
Franklin School Grades K-8 (Year One -Year Three)

Grade	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year One-Three
K	(28) E 1.5	(20) E 1.7	(17) E 1.3	
	Ml.4	M 1.6	Ml.3	
1	(17) E 2.5	(27) E 2.2	(23) E 2.4	
	M 2.1	M 2.2	M 2.2	
2	(18) E 2.8	(21) E 4.2	(24) E 4.0	
	M3.0	M4.0	M3.7	
3	(14) E 4.2	(16) E 3.9	(20) E 4.6	
	M 3.5 B	M 3.7 B	M 3.8 B	
4	(14) E 5.2	(15) E 5.3	(13) E4.6 B	
	M 4.3 B	M4.4 B	M4.2 B	
5	(16) E 5.9	(12) E 5.8	(16) E 6.7	
	M 5.1 B	M4.7 B	M5.9	
6	(10) E 8.2	(17) E 7.4	(16) E 7.6	
	M 5.7 B	M 6.1 B	M 6.3 B	
7	(10) E 7.8	(10) E 9.0	(17)E9.1	
	M 6.3 B	M 7.3 B	M 7.7 B	
8	(18) E 10.8	(10) E 9.8	(8) E 12.1	
	M 7.6 B	M 8.7 B	M9.0	
Total in grades at/ above Grade level ELA	145	148	141	434
Total in grades at/above Grade level Math	63	68	88	219
Total students Tested	145	148	154	447
% in grades at/ above Grade level ELA	100	100	91.5	**97%**
% in grades at/ above Grade level Math	43.4	45.94	57.1	**48.9%**

()=#of students in grade **B**= Below grade level **E**=ELA (English Language Arts) **M**=Math

Table 9: Star Reading Assessment Franklin Grades 1-8 40th Percentile Benchmark totals

Grade Level	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year One-Three
1	n/a	n/a	14t-(14)-100%	
2	n/a	6t-(6)-100%	8t-(6)-75%	
3	10t-(10)-100%	10t-(8)-800/4	10t-(7)-700/4	
4	12t-(9)-75%	13t-(10)-77%	15t-(12)-80%	
5	16t-(9)-56%	17t-(13)-76%	19t-(8)-42%	
6	10t-(5)-500/4	11t-(7)-64%	11t-(9)-82%	
7	8t-(6)-75%	10t-(6)-600/4	11t-(6)-55%	
8	6t-(4)-67%	8t-(5)-63%	10t-(6)-60%	
Total Students Tested	62	75	98	235
# at/above benchmark	43	55	68	166
% at/above benchmark	69.3	73.3	69.3	**70.6%**

n/a= not available **t**= total students tested **( )**= students at/above benchmark

Table 10: Star Math Assessment Franklin Grades 1-8 40th Percentile Benchmark totals

Grade Level	Year One	Year Two	Year Three	Year One-Three
1	n/a	n/a	14t-(14)-100%	
2	n/a	6t-(6)-100%	8t-(7)-88%	
3	10t-(9)-90%	10t-(8)-80%	10t-(8)-80%	
4	12t-(10)-83%	13t-(8)-62%	15t-(7)-47%	
5	16t-(9)-56%	17t-(13)-76%	19t-(8)-42%	
6	10t-(4)-40%	11t-(5)-45%	11t-(7)-64%	
7	8t-(4)-50%	10t-(4)-40%	11t-(6)-55%	
8	6t-(4)-67%	8t-(5)-63%	10t-(8)-80%	
Total Students Tested	62	75	98	235
# at/above benchmark	40	49	65	154
% at/above benchmark	64.5	65.3	66.3	**65.5%**

n/a= not available **t**= total students tested **( )**= students at/above benchmark

Table 11: Franklin Eighth Grade GPA scores

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
1	3.5	3.11	3.56	3.8
2	2.7	3.64	3.82	2.2
3	4.0	3.81	4.0	3.8
4	3.7	3.76	3.78	3.1
5	2.0	3.76	2.78	3.89
6	4.0	3.17	3.95	4.0
7	3.8	2.12	3.3	3.2
8	3.6	2.94	2.82	3.11
9	3.5		2.3	2.94
10	4.0		4.0	4.0
11			2.65	3.99
12			3.2	3.96
13			3.4	3.24
14			3.6	3.84
15			2.73	3.53
16			2.5	

n=49

Table 12: Franklin Eighth grade Cohort data

	ELA total	Math total	Complete Composite
Student 1	11.6	10	10.8
Student 2	13+	12.6	13+
Student 3	13+	13+	13+
Student 4	13+	8.1	10.6
Student 5	9.1	10.4	9.6

Furthermore, findings from Franklin cohort data (table 12) suggest that the longer students attend Franklin school, the better they perform academically—a finding similar to that from the Adventist commissioned CognitiveGenesis study (Thayer and Kido, 2012). Whereas the CognitiveGenesis study documented the positive impact of longevity on student achievement in Adventist schools, cohort data from Franklin school similarly identified the long-term positive impact of Adventist education on student achievement. As Franklin serves predominantly Black students within an urban metropolitan community, these findings are compelling and underscore the strength of its academic program and its positive impact on Black student achievement. Additional qualitative findings provide detailed descriptions of the characteristics and elements within Franklin school that may be driving such achievement.

> the longer students attend Franklin school, the better they perform academically

Affordability

Franklin's denominational tuition rate is less than half the national average costs for educating U.S. elementary students[1]. Standard tuition at Franklin school starts at $8,400 per year per child in grades 1-8. Varying discounts received by Franklin's students with Adventist church membership can bring that cost down to as low as $6,100 per year. This widely contrasts with average per child education costs in the U.S. The National Center for Education Statistics in 2017 calculated the average costs to educate an elementary child in the U.S. at $14,100 per student per year[2]. Franklin's relatively low tuition cost is enabled by annual subsidies from its sponsor churches. This allows Franklin to offer a low-cost educational program to families from its predominantly Black and Brown community. ***Hence, Franklin school is realizing high achievement outcomes for Black students compared to national norms at less than half the national average costs.*** This finding demonstrates that particular communities are capable of accomplishing better educational outcomes for Black students, at lower costs, and without a

1 National Center for Education Statistics NCES 2017. "Annual Report on Education Expenditures: International Comparisons." Washington, D.C. Retrieved June 1, 2021 (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cmd).

2 NCES 2017

dime of federal support. That large majorities of Black children across the nation are anchored to low achievement outcomes is an indictment of the social and educational systems to which they are subject and not a failure intrinsic to Black students themselves.

Franklin Tuition Schedule 2020-21

Grade	Standard Rate		Non-Constituent Adventist Discount Rate		Constituent Adventist Discount Rate	
	Monthly	Annually	Monthly	Annually	Monthly	Annually
K	$840	$8,400	$660	$6,600	$ 660	$6,600
Grades 1-8	$840	$8,400	$740	$7,400	$610	$6,100

SIX QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

Six themes emerged from participants and provide context for the academic, social, and cultural factors influencing students at Franklin school. These qualitative factors provide rich and detailed description of the school and its impact on Black students. Broadly, they highlight how a Black Adventist school approaches education for its predominantly Black population.

1 The Need for Black Space

Participants expressed the ongoing need for Black space for Black children and viewed Franklin school as the embodiment of that space. Parents shared stories of racial bias and exclusion that negatively impacted the confidence and opportunity of their Black children in other local area schools. The history of the school reveals how parents and church leaders, organized to create a safe and affirming space for their children, leading to the founding of Franklin SDA school. In light of the ongoing hostile racial climate within the nation, they viewed this space as still being necessary today.

PARENTS AND CHURCH LEADERS ORGANIZED TO CREATE A SAFE AND AFFIRMING SPACE FOR THEIR CHILDREN

These micro experiences represent ongoing realities that Black parents and students face with White teachers within predominantly White schools and comport with the literature which identifies unconscious teacher bias, low expectations, teacher attitudes and beliefs, punitive behavioral approaches, cultural exclusion, and microaggressions as factors that create racially harmful educational contexts for Black children (Downey and Pribesh, 2004; Keels, Durkee, and Hope, 2017; Lustick, 2017; McGrady and Reynolds, 2013; Moore, 2017; Oates, 2003; Peterson, 2016; Sue et al., 2007; van Den Bergh, 2010).

The realities of racism, discrimination, cultural exclusion, and unconscious bias within many U.S. schools mean that Black and Brown students remain vulnerable and need safe educational spaces. Schools like Franklin will not be necessary when the humanity of Black children is recognized, affirmed, protected, and uplifted by educators and administrators in every school.

2 It Takes a Village:
STRONG SOCIAL NETWORKS OF SCHOOL, HOME, AND CHURCH

Participants described a strong communal network within Franklin school characterized by an integration of school, home, and church—a village. Within this village, teachers help create a familial atmosphere with their students in the classroom and plan school programs that bring parents, students, and teachers together. Students spend a significant amount of time with their peers during school hours, after school activities, and weekend church activities. Parents are highly involved with the teachers and school community and develop their own parental networks of social support. Parent involvement in the education of their children is consistently documented as a key variable impacting the academic success of students (Hayes, 2012; Lee and Bowen, 2006; Roscigno, 1998). Black men are visibly present on the school campus and involved in multiple areas of school life. Altogether, participants depicted a vibrant community of parents, teachers, and church life that converge to create a durable band of support around their children. The academic literature suggests that such networks positively influence student achievement, provide needed social investments into Black students, and narrow opportunity gaps (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hill, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Madyun and Lee, 2010; Milner, 2013; Toldson and Anderson, 2010).

3 The Mission is Possible:
MISSIONAL PEDAGOGY AND HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS

A core component of this strong communal network at Franklin school is its team of educators. Participants expressed how the pedagogical approach and practice of Franklin's teachers heighten student engagement and academic success. Participants shared how teachers lead with an intense sense of mission toward their students. The researcher has termed this teaching approach "missional pedagogy" to describe Franklin teachers' framework and approach noted by the following characteristics: a) is centered around the needs and gifts of the student, b) features high-commitment, high-investment, and high-expectations, c) is culturally relevant, and d) facilitates critical thinking. Researchers note that culturally relevant pedagogies like Franklin's support students of diverse backgrounds (Aronson and Laughter, 2016; Dover, 2013; Gay, 2013; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006; Love and Kruger, 2005). In addition to this particular pedagogy, the educational staff is highly qualified and diverse. Small class sizes enable one on one attention and individualization with students. Also, teachers utilize a denominational curriculum but are not limited by it, frequently bringing in other resources to enhance learning. Finally, teachers collaborate in teams sharing practices, techniques, and challenges in a way that strengthens the overall learning program at Franklin school.

The positive impact of religious socialization on Black student achievement is well documented

4 The Intersection of Race, Class, and Faith:
BLACK EXCELLENCE, GOD AND MOBILITY

At Franklin school the convergence of race, class, and faith create an impactful experience that supports the achievement and development of its students. As a predominantly Black school with diverse educators and administrators, the school emphasizes racial pride or "Black excellence" integrating Black historical and cultural knowledge within the learning in a manner that bolsters students' confidence, esteem, self-concept, and achievement. Students and teachers at Franklin also come from a variety of diverse cultural backgrounds. This diversity is emphasized and celebrated within the school creating an environment of awareness, tolerance, and acceptance of cultural difference and similarity.

Faith is used by educators at Franklin to instill confidence in students' ability and to provide a framework for them to understand their world. The positive impact of religious socialization on Black student achievement is well documented (Barrett, 2009, 2010; Byfield, 2008; Jeynes, 2010, 2014, 2015; Madyun and Lee, 2010; Thayer and Kido, 2012; Toldson and Anderson, 2010).

Finally, families from varying socio-economic classes converge at Franklin to create an educational program that supports their children's social mobility through college and career readiness and facilitates

the development of their characters. Research documents how Black families hold stronger beliefs in the value of schooling as a vehicle for social mobility (Harris, 2008; Browman, 2019). This convergence of racial affirmation, religious socialization, and class-based high educational beliefs may constitute a consequential blend with positive cumulative effects on Black student achievement and development.

5 Leadership Development and Social Consciousness

Franklin school is a stimulating environment where students are invested with opportunities and experiences that enhance their social learning and consciousness. Participants described how students are given the opportunity to engage with their peers and demonstrate their own gifts and abilities. They are provided with opportunities for leadership development and gain confidence speaking and standing in front of others. Students are given opportunities to share in creating their classroom learning experience through the intentional elevation of their voices by teachers. The classroom instruction they receive gives students an opportunity to develop social consciousness and awareness of the histories, identities, and contributions of Black people, thereby enabling them to view the world from their own perspective. Educational researchers suggest the particular importance of these socio-political conversations within marginalized communities (Dantley, 2010; Dover, 2013; Freire, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995, 2006). Teachers provide this knowledge and help students understand their agency to bring about change. Finally, a distinct part of the school culture promotes opportunities for students to engage in service toward their community. These opportunities build students' confidence and consciousness and helps them develop into leaders who are prepared to impact their world.

6 School Administration and Behavior Management

The reflections of participants provided detailed insights into the administrative operation and behavioral management approach of Franklin school. They described Franklin at its best when teachers are both supported and held accountable to a high standard of professional practice. When school board, principal, and teachers work collaboratively, it leads to successful outcomes with students. Principals and teachers use positive intervention strategies to redeem students and create a culture of expectation and excellence that effectively manages student behavior and challenges students to exhibit their best. The impact of this approach is seen in the school's exceptionally low suspension and expulsion rate. School staff forego punitive management models in a deliberate effort to not reproduce racial discipline disparities present within many US schools (Lustick, 2017; Schiff, 2018; Quimby, 2021). Parent-teacher partnerships are intentionally formed to ensure student success and administrators build meaningful relationships with students and their families that engender care and trust. These reflections portrayed Franklin school as an environment of authentic relationships and genuine support.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

Findings of this research lend to several recommendations for policy and practice within the system of Black Adventist schools. These recommendations are briefly summarized here:

1. Whereas the positive impact of culturally relevant educational approaches on the academic performance of Black students is well documented in the literature, culturally relevant curricula should be standardized across the system of Black Adventist schools. Local conferences should design supplementary curriculum guides outlining culturally relevant content, standards, and resources across all subject areas that teachers can utilize in the classroom.

2. Highlight and disseminate the findings of empirical research that point to best practices for Black student achievement in an effort to educate parents, families, and churches. This includes the importance of teacher pedagogy, the role of faith in supporting Black student achievement, the critical impact of parent involvement, and the benefits of strong networks of social support (church, home, and school—the village).

3. Ensure greater bureaucratic efficiency and cooperation between all governance levels (conference, local school board, and local church). Improved inter-organizational collaboration is needed in the development and implementation of policy to better support school operation and growth. To do this, the local conference must develop strategic partnerships with stakeholders. Conflicts between the local conference, local schools, principals, and teachers pose the greatest threats to the viability and growth of Black Adventist schools.

4. School administrators, teachers, and home and school leaders should plan activities/programming that build cooperative relationships between parents and local schools. These leaders must especially create multiple opportunities for Black men/fathers to engage with the school to build supportive networks around students.

5 Whereas the research documented declining math scores in the transition from elementary grades to middle school grades (grades 4-7), improving students' competencies and skills in math should be an area of focus. Administrators and teachers should identify areas of challenge and develop supportive strategies to raise math achievement scores in these grades. Such strategies should include hiring a math instructional specialist to provide additional support to students.

6 Findings of this research demonstrate the need for Black educational space. Whereas Franklin school facilitates Black student success at the elementary level, such success should be extended to Black students at the secondary educational level. Inasmuch as a Black Adventist secondary institution does not exist within the local community where Franklin serves, the expansion of Franklin school into a secondary education program would continue its mission of supporting the educational needs of diversity minded families from grades k-12.

7 Provide ongoing, high-quality professional development opportunities to strengthen teacher knowledge, pedagogy, and practice. Continued teacher investments on the local conference and local school levels will support teachers and ensure the ongoing quality of education.

8 Local principal, teachers, and school board should develop a two-to-three-year strategic plan with the goal of raising aggregate test scores in ELA and Math across all grades.

9 Identify additional funding sources to support schools. Much funding for Black Adventist schools comes from the local constituent church(es). However, fundraising across local area conference churches remains an untapped area of resource. Annual area fundraising goals across the six geographic areas could yield additional funding for local area schools. In addition to this, the local conference, principals, and school boards should identify funding partnerships with local business.

10 Successful Black Adventist schools are led by effective principals. Therefore, the local conference should establish a mentoring/intern program to identify, recruit, and train the next generation of Black Adventist school principals. The creation of a leadership pool of assistant principals should be built into the conference organizational model to ensure leadership continuity and stability of operations across all conference schools.

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to this study. The first limitation is the small sample size of the subject school. This small sample size precludes the generalizability of findings, but as is the case with qualitative inquiry, findings may be transferrable to other contexts (Creswell and Poth, 2018). This study makes no claim to the precise representativeness of interview data to the Franklin population, but instead samples a broad variety of stakeholders to provide important perspectives within the Franklin school community.

Additionally, Franklin's student composition is not comprised of students from predominantly low-

income family backgrounds. Students come from a diverse mix of lower class, working class, and middle-class families. Such a composition that includes middle class families may be positively impacting school achievement scores. However, inasmuch as middle-class families have more social and economic capital to invest in their children (Peterson and Llaudet, 2007), this essentially underscores the central tenet of the opportunity gap framework—that students with greater social and economic investments are afforded opportunities that positively influence academic performance (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Hill, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013). Franklin's diverse class composition and its possible positive academic impact is then a reaffirmation of the opportunity gap framework and not an argument against it.

CONCLUSION

The problems in American education are historical, systemic, persistent, and deeply stratified along racial and class lines. Whereas broad scale social and economic investments and reform must be enacted to ensure universal quality, equity, and access, solutions for educational reform may not lay solely in top-down policy prescriptions. Some solutions for educational reform may arise from the bottom up. Where communities are experiencing success in urban education, it is the responsibility of scientific research to both uncover and uplift it. Such is the impetus for this study. Faith-based communities hold untold stories of educational success and achievement for students from marginalized families. These stories reveal efforts of resistance against intransigent social forces and liberation from culturally exclusive ideological frameworks. Franklin Adventist school, like so many others, fulfills a critical role for Black families living in urban spaces. It is the product of an educational activism that remains alive within the ethos of Black religion. This educational activism remains grounded in the core belief of the humanity of all communities and the birth right to knowledge and opportunity for their families. Such activism is essential and empowering and creates spaces of protection and support that leave Black children free to pursue their excellence.

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