

Realizing the American Dream:  
Parent Involvement and Racial Identity Development as It Correlates to  
Academic Achievement

by

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Specialist in Educational Administration

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at the University of Wisconsin-Superior and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

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A Thesis

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## **ABSTRACT**

Students of color in America are failing to meet state academic standards at historic rates. This issue has recently gained significant attention due to what is being referred to as the achievement gap. Based on the No Child Left Behind Act, the achievement gap is defined as the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. When broken down to certain geographical areas these realities can be examined at a much deeper and personal level. In an effort to positively impact the achievement gap, this research is conducted in a state that has repeatedly failed in educating students of color in America, specifically African American & American Indian boys. Two of the perceived major contributors for the lack of academic success among students of color are researched. It is widely believed that lack of parent involvement and racial identity development awareness are significantly contributing to the achievement gap.

This research is centered in Duluth, Minnesota at East High School. This school has traditionally been a White-American institution. It has become a broad belief that parent involvement creates higher levels of academic success. This research examines the correlation between knowing oneself as it pertains to racial identity development and the need to implement parent involvement programs within schools. A combination of both will undoubtedly result in higher levels of academic success and ultimately help students realize their American dream. This research shows the effects of implementation of racial identity development and parent involvement programs at East High School.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Parent involvement is a critical element for student learning and noticeably affects student academic achievement. George, P., Gordon, L., and Bushnell, D. state that, "Parent involvement is neither a quick fix nor a luxury; it is absolutely fundamental for healthy educational systems" (1998, p. 163). Parent involvement is described by aforementioned authors as parents who are supportive, committed, and actively participating in some ways in their child's education.

Although all students benefit from having parents that actively participate in their education, this is especially vital to students of color who attend schools in predominantly white environments. They tend to find themselves not achieving at the same level as their white peers. Racial identity development tells us how one views themselves ethnically plays a role in the success of the student's academic career. Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum explains in her book *"Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria"* (Tatum, 1997) that there are five stages that students of color go through that can have a profound affect on how they succeed in academia. Racial identity development is essentially described as "the process of moving from internalized racism to a position of empowerment based on a positively affirmed sense of racial identity," (Tatum, B. D., 1997, p. 16). The five stages include Pre-encounter, Encounter, Immersion/Emersion,

Internalization, and Internalization-Commitment. During the Pre-encounter stage an individual internalizes the beliefs and values of the dominant white culture, believing that “it is better to be white.” During the Encounter stage an individual experiences an event or events that force them to recognize impact of racism on them individually. During the Immersion/Emersion stage an individual desires to learn their own history and create an identity based on being a member of their own racial group. During the Internalization stage an individual becomes secure in their own racial identity. Finally, during the Internalization - Commitment stage an individual takes security in their racial identity and begins to apply it to a commitment to addressing the concerns of their racial group as a whole.

The primary objective of education is academic achievement. There are several ways parents can be involved in their student’s academic career that will promote this achievement. Parent involvement alone will not bridge the achievement gap; students of color need equitable services allowing them access to any necessary resources that contribute to academic achievement. Can parent involvement and a basic understanding of racial identity development influence academic achievement? Even further, will parent involvement and understanding racial identity development influence the academic achievement at East High School in Duluth, Minnesota?

***Problem Statement***

Students who have parents that are uninvolved in their school experience are at risk for lower academic performance levels. Their achievement levels in

school also have implications for their future success. Furthermore, students and parents that do not have a grasp on racial identity development are less likely to perform at their highest potential. Parent involvement has been shown to improve achievement levels of students across all ethnicities. Parents must be involved in their student's educational experience in order to assure success. Racial identity development for students of color would likely have positive effects on their achievement as well. It is imperative that student achievement levels improve at East High School among the students of color. The researchers would be remiss, if it wasn't expressed that many students of color have and will continue to be very successful without parent involvement, but parent involvement increases the likelihood of academic success tremendously.

### *Hypotheses*

#### *Hypothesis 1.*

Students with parents that are active in their education, both at home and in school, will have higher academic achievement levels.

#### *Hypothesis 2.*

Students with fainéant parents who are not involved in their educational career will continue to have lower academic achievement levels.

#### *Hypothesis 3.*

Parents who understand that their children go through stages of racial identity development can provide a foundation built on self-awareness, pride, and meaningful knowledge. The students in these homes will also find higher levels of academic success.

***Null Hypothesis***

It is illogical that parent involvement and understanding racial identity development are correlated to student achievement. Parent involvement and racial identity development are distracters to determining the reasons as to why so many students of color within Duluth Public Schools are failing.

***Rationale***

Duluth schools serve a veritable cornucopia of students that will continue to increase every year. With the recent closing of one of its three high schools, East High School was undergoing some serious demographic changes. East High School is not located in an urban area but has and will continue to undergo major shifts among its student demographics. The student of color population at this school will continue to increase.

At the time of this study eighteen percent of the students at East High School were receiving free and reduced lunch, which was an increase from five percent just three years previous. The school's racial demographics during the 2009 – 2010 school year were:

- **White: 90.61%**
- **Black: 3.11%**
- **Asian: 3.04%**
- **Hispanic: 1.59%**
- **American Indian: 1.66%**

Historically, East High School has been the school with the smallest student of color population in Duluth's public schools, but its future demographic challenges would require a proactive approach to increase all student success.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) data and school report cards indicated the need for improvement in academic achievement for students of color at East High School. Although, at the time of this study, East High School was meeting the requirements for Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), most students of color were performing significantly lower than white students at this school. This was of major concern to Duluth Public School officials, as the academic scores among students of color displayed an area of high risk.

Parent involvement was also a major area of concern; only forty percent of students of color had parents that had contact with the school. Contact included parent-teacher conferences, visits to the school, visits within student homes, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. An increase in parent involvement would result in an increase in student achievement. It was necessary to get parents more involved.

Racial identity development was also thought to be a major factor in the success of the students of color. According to Beverly Daniel Tatum, racial identity development correlates with students' success (Tatum, 1997). Parents who socialize their children to be aware of racially motivated barriers to their future success attain higher grades than students who do not receive positive black socialization messages from their parents (Harper, 2006). In order to assist their child, parents need to have an understanding of the psychological barriers

that students of color may face. Providing racial identity development opportunities within East High School would help students and parents to address some of those barriers and potentially aid in student achievement.

*Purpose*

The purpose of this research was to, first, clearly define the need for parent involvement and racial identity development for the students and the parents of students who attend East High School in Duluth, Minnesota. Another purpose of this research was to summarize the correlation between parent involvement and racial identity development and their effects on student achievement. This research would determine if parent involvement and racial identity development would have a positive effect on academic achievement for students of color at East High School. Finally, the implementation of parent involvement programs and racial identity development programs at East High School would noticeably increase the academic achievement of the students of color who attend this school.

This first project at East High School was to be a stepping-stone for continued research to determine the effects of parent involvement and racial identity development on academic achievement. More studies would be needed to evaluate the longitudinal effects on student growth. Continued efforts in developing effective parent involvement and racial identity development programs at East High School would, in turn, show positive increases in MCA test scores and overall student achievement.

It was also desired that through more parent involvement and racial identity development awareness, both parent and student aspirations for growth would increase communication between the student and parent about education. This would, in turn, transfer to an increase of commitment within the students. This commitment would also support increases in academic achievement. Some of the other anticipated benefits of this study were to include the following: more communication between the school staff and parents, greater parent participation within the school community, and a positive sense of one – self for all students of color at East High School.

#### *Limitations of Study*

One limitation of this study was that parents were not required to return the surveys that were sent home. All parents of students of color would not be represented. It was also impossible to determine whether or not the surveys were completed with absolute honesty. Another limitation was that in order to have academic data to compare, the MCAII proficiency percentages used had to be taken from two different school years. The reading data was from tenth grade students and the math data was from eleventh grade students. Some ethnic groups also did not have MCAII data to compare because of the small number of students represented at East High School.

#### *Delimitations of Study*

Participants consisted only of parents and students from East High School in Duluth. One-hundred percent of the participants were parents and students identified as American Indian/ Alaskan Native, Asian/ Pacific Islander, African

American/Black or Hispanic/Latino. Therefore, researchers were not able to make any generalizations about parent involvement and racial identity development in other schools or at other grade levels.

*Definition of Terms*

Parent Involvement: Parents who are supportive, committed, and actively participating in some way in their child's education.

Annual Yearly Progress: An individual state's measure of yearly progress toward achieving state academic standards. Annual yearly progress is the minimum level of improvement that states, school districts, and schools must achieve each year, according to Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation. AYP is defined as at least 57% of students meeting or exceeding State Standards.

Racial Identity Development: A series of stages one goes through when they realize racism exists.

Achievement Gap: Disparity on a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Free and Reduced Lunch: A student's family income must fall below \$29,965 in 2012 to qualify for free lunch or between \$29,965 - \$42,643 to qualify for reduced lunch.

Students of Color: Term used to refer to any student other than Caucasian.

*Summary*

Students of color within East High School are struggling to meet State Standards. They need extra support and guidance from parents. The old African proverb says it best, "It takes a village to raise a child." The home and school communities must work together in order to cultivate the minds and help each student realize their American dream at East High School.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Parents can be involved in a student's academic life in a multitude of ways. This same involvement can promote academic success, which is the ultimate goal of education. Parent involvement is optional, however, it should become mandatory. There have been many studies completed by researchers looking at the effects of parent involvement on student achievement. The studies reviewed in preparation for this project confirmed my assumption that an increase in parent involvement and racial identity development awareness will exponentially positively influence academic achievement.

#### *Types of Parent Involvement*

Sheldon and Epstein noted that there are six types of involvement in a comprehensive program of school, family, and community partnerships (2005). They include the following types: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with the community. There are many ways for parents to become involved in their child's education, but educators cannot assume that one of these types of involvement isolated by itself will have an affect on all areas of student learning. For example, parents need to assess the areas their student has deficiencies and determine what types of parent assistance would be most beneficial for their student. It is important to incorporate all forms of parent involvement at some point during the school

year. Many parents don't feel comfortable contacting the school in an effort to help their child. Parents of students of color may not fully understand the dynamics and politics of education. Many times they believe it is the sole responsibility of the school to educate their child.

Sheldon and Epstein (2005) noted, "homework assignments can also be used to guide and strengthen home-school partnerships" (2005, p.197).

Homework serves as a means of communication between the home and school, and it offers an opportunity for increased family involvement. Most importantly, it can help improve academic achievement. Many times, when homework is challenging, it forces children to rely on their parents' involvement as a means of completing the tasks successfully. Homework is intended to be an extension of the school experience, designed to enrich and reinforce learning and contribute toward the development of responsibility. On the other hand, fully adopting this philosophy is making an assumption that all parents graduated from high school, and if so, they are still familiar with the concepts they learned from years past.

### ***Racial Identity Development***

There is another aspect at play regarding academic achievement when working with students of color, especially African American students. Racial identity development plays a major role in how students of color achieve in school; this is especially true in predominately white communities. Racial identity development avows that there are certain stages of identity that people go through during their lifetime. These stages play a major role in how people

appear in the world and react to their environment around them. Not until recently have researchers begun to understand how dramatically this process can affect a student's achievement (Tatum, 1997). Dr. Beverly Daniel Tatum breaks down the five stages of black identity development in her book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* However, the idea of racial identity development was created from the workings of William E. Cross *Nigrescence* originally written in 1971 and then revised in 1991.

Tatum asserts that around the fourth and fifth grade, students of color begin to identify themselves as belonging to a certain culture and ethnic group. Many would say that within the African American culture education has not been identified as an essential cultural construct. While parent involvement is crucial, so too is how students view themselves ethnically and culturally. If one comes from an environment that does not value education openly, the assumption is that the child will be socialized to absorb the same values and ideas laid out before them, thus continuing the cycle. If a child has the luxury of living with a mother and a father that understand racial identity development in the same home, that understanding can undoubtedly contribute to the success of the student.

Many African American students are struggling simultaneously with issues of racial identity and academic achievement (Harper, 2007). This has become an epidemic throughout United States, but has been more evident in Minnesota where students of color suffer the second largest achievement gap just behind the District of Columbia. Not only are schools becoming widely

segregated, reminiscent of *Brown v. Board of Education*, but students of color are intentionally segregating themselves from the white population. This wouldn't necessarily be an issue if the achievement gap wasn't so parallel to separation of the students within the schools. In these situations parent involvement plays a significant role, in concert with other factors like racial identity development, in the academic success of student of color. Changes are needed in the curriculum and programming offered to impact racial identity development within the nation's schools. As Dr. Tatum expounds, academic excellence can be included in the adolescent definition of what it means to be African American (Tatum, 2004).

### *Dimensions of Parent Involvement*

Yan and Lin (2005) list "three common elements that are present when conceptualizing parent involvement: family obligation, parent information network, and family norm" (2005, p.116). The family obligation to student learning involves such things as Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and attending school programs and discussions of school topics. Examples of parent information networks include contact with school regarding students' performance and knowledge of schoolwork. Family norms can be explained as being educational expectations of family members, parent-child relationships, and family rules. When parents do not require their children to abide by rules or hold high expectations for their children, there can be a lack of determination or goal setting. This, in turn, has a negative affect on academic achievement. If parents have positive relationships with their children and they are required to

abide by school guidelines and expectations, student achievement would increase.

### *Challenges of Parent Involvement in Mathematics*

According to Sheldon and Epstein (2005) there are “at least three reasons why parents might not be involved in their children’s mathematics education” (2005, p.198). They include: math gets more complex as students age, the way that math is taught changes over the years, and teachers are not trained to teach other adults on how to work with their children on mathematics at home. Math is a subject, for many people, where if it is not practiced on a consistent basis, a person can have a hard time remembering formulas or steps required to solve many problems. As years pass parents become used to “old-fashion” ways of thinking, whereas current trends force teachers to teach math differently than it has been taught in the past. For example, students do not just learn the simple step of adding two numbers, rather, they are accustomed to drawing a picture to explain the steps that one would take to complete a simple problem. In addition, students complete extended response answers to explain their math knowledge and process in writing. For this reason many parents are intimidated by their child’s homework and may not feel comfortable working with their child in this subject. Due to this shift in education, more parent development should be implemented in schools, in order to educate parents on the new methods of learning.

### *Parent Involvement as Policy*

Educators also need to acknowledge that students of color need to be educated on the barriers they face and how their race has and does play a role on their immediate and future success. Students of color need to be taught how racial identity development influences their lives and that assimilation and conforming is not necessary for success. A proud sense of one's heritage can be maintained while achieving academic success.

Desimone (1999) states, "in the quest to understand, explain, and remediate the inequalities of schooling outcomes in the United States, parent involvement has become a critical element of school reform" (1999, p.12). It is a common belief that the primary responsibility for children's well being is that of the parents. Desimone believes that educators need to increase their understanding of how parent involvement can be employed for those who are at risk of educational failure. Students whose social economic status is considered low-income are students that are at-risk of failing. The current parent involvement tactics in use are not conducive to this family structure. There is a need to show improvement and find methods that will aid all parents to help their students find academic success.

In the early stages of education, the early childhood and primary stages, there is a higher percentage of parent involvement. However, as the student continues to get older parent involvement dwindles and is no longer a high priority or major concern. As students get older, parents are not making themselves available due to many factors. One thought is that parents assume

that students can become responsible for their own educational experience the older they get. Rather than remaining involved, parents leave students to fend for themselves unless the student requests additional support from the parent. In many cases, students will not ask parents for additional help for the simple fact that they are afraid to ask. They may state that, "my mom said she's too busy," or "my mom said not to bother her, she was busy doing something." Simply put, many parents of color tend to not have a basic understanding of what the educational needs of their children are. Many parents who want to be involved are simply are not capable of helping their children for many other reasons. One reason is that many parents may not be academically able to help. Another reason is that parents may not be able to find time due to pending circumstances.

Another factor that has been recently found is that students of color learn better as a cohort rather than individuals. This information could allow schools to create student-based projects that require more collaboration. This strategy would also increase student engagement. This may also be a way to get families involved in projects outside of school.

### ***Methods/Procedures/Results***

The study, *Linking Parent Involvement With Student Achievement: Do Race and Income Matter?* (Desimone, 1999) used parent and student surveys from the restricted-use panel data of the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 to collect data to determine how parent involvement affects student achievement on reading and math standardized test scores. The methods were also used to

determine the effects of different forms of parent involvement on school achievement of children from diverse racial-ethnic and economic backgrounds. The students included in this study were all eighth grade students. Their parents participated in surveys that collected information about parent involvement, student achievement, race/ethnicity, and family income level.

From the results twelve measures were constructed, which included seven composites and five single indicators. All of the measures were taken from survey questions that asked about parent behavior and practices rather than school actions, because the focus of the study was on parent actions. The measures were also categorized using Epstein's typology. Desimone tested models that included interaction terms created by multiplying the income and racial-ethnic variables by the independent variables in the model. Desimone stated that the F-test indicated that the model with the interaction terms was significantly different from the main effects model, (Desimone, 1999).

Desimone noted an F-test indicated that when comparing parent involvement and test scores between the middle- and high-income models they were not significantly different from each other, so only the middle- and low-income models were interpreted (Desimone, 1999). For white students the F-test predicted significant .20, .18, and .11 standard deviation decreases in mathematics scores, reading levels, and overall grades from the middle- to the low-income models based on different levels of parent involvement. For this population of students income predicted the level of parent involvement and how it affected student achievement.

These were no significant variances within any of the Black and Hispanic testing models. Concluding that there was no reason to believe that parent involvement changed significantly based on family income within the African or Hispanic populations. Thus student test scores within these populations remained consistent.

It was determined during this study that school volunteering was a good predictor of academic success for white middle class students and lack of homework help negatively affected student achievement across all ethnicities. It can also be concluded from this study that parent-school involvement is more predictive of student grades than test scores for children of all racial-ethnic and income groups (Desimone, 1999).

The study, *Involvement Counts: Family and Community Partnerships and Mathematics Achievement* (Epstein, & Sheldon, 2005) used longitudinal data from elementary and secondary schools from eighteen inner city, urban, suburban, and rural areas. These schools have been a part of an ongoing project to measure the ongoing effects of school, family, and community partnerships on students in schools across the country. The name of the project is called "Focus on Results in Math." Variables in the research included school characteristics, school practices, proficiency on mathematics achievement tests, and student report card grades. The researchers used surveys to gather data. From the surveys the researchers discovered that school characteristics were related to mathematics outcomes and students' mathematics report card grades. The researchers noted that in schools that served more poor students there were smaller percentages of students that

earned A's or B's in mathematics and greater percentages of students that earned C's, than there were in other schools with less poverty. One important finding from the research indicated that only one type of involvement, learning-at-home-activities, consistently related to improvements in students' performance on mathematics achievement tests.

Another study *Parent Involvement and Mathematics Achievement: Contrast across Racial and Ethnic Groups* (Yan & Lin, 2005) gathered data using the National Education Longitudinal Study: (1988). Longitudinal data was taken from parent and student surveys. The three major independent variables were family obligations, parent information networks, and family norms. The results of the study indicated that family obligations have positive and statistically significant affects on 12<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics achievement for Caucasian students. According to Yan and Lin, the positive relationship between the three family-obligation indicators and African American students' mathematics achievement provides evidence that some forms of parent involvement might improve their mathematics achievement (Yan & Lin, 2005). A common finding in this study suggests that the tendency of adolescents to do well in school is greater when parents express high expectations to do well in school and conduct warm, nurturing, and frequent interactions with the adolescents.

### *Compare and Contrast*

All of the studies gathered data by using surveys for both parents and students. Two of the three studies mentioned compared differences within racial-ethnic groups. One study looked at parent involvement within schools

without noting differences between racial/ethnic groups. The study performed by Desimone looked even closer at differences between socio-economic groups. All of the studies determined, to some extent, that parent involvement has positive affects on academic achievement. Some of the studies broke down types of parent involvement to determine which types are most crucial. The types of parent involvement noted to make the most difference in academic achievement are: parenting, communicating, and learning at home.

### *Summary*

Parent involvement and racial identity development play a key role in the educational academic success of the student. Studies have shown that this involvement is compulsory. With so many different types of parent involvement, it should become second nature for parents to become involved in their students' academic lives making the learning experience a joint effort. Parents would then also help to establish a serious commitment to education. Keeping in mind that students of color depend heavily on their environment for cultural guidance and leadership, it becomes essential that parents impress the importance of education on their children. Parent involvement and racial identity development should be an integral part of policies that require parents to become more active in the educational experience of their children.

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

Parent involvement and racial identity development alone aren't enough to create the types of academic success needed to bridge the achievement gap. As students begin state testing, preparation becomes the focus as it edges nearer and nearer. It's disturbing that at East High School, a school with roughly only 4% of students identified as African American, American Indian, Alaskan Native, or Hispanic/Latino, the need is as high as it is for testing preparation according to the results from Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment.

#### *Goals and Objectives*

The goal of this research was to increase parent involvement and educate parents and students about the stages of racial identity development and prove that these two factors could greatly benefit academic success. It was expected that with sufficient evidence, school leaders at East High School would be able to create more opportunities to build strong parent, student, and school collaboration. It was the research team's desire to establish positive communication between school, parents, and the community. Also, this program would work to provide parents and students with educational workshops that would allow for them to become more aware of the students' academic potential. With an increase in parent involvement, it was anticipated

that overall student achievement would improve, resulting in growth in MCA test scores.

### *Selection of Subjects*

The focus of this study is East High School located in Duluth, Minnesota. The idea behind using just one school in this particular study was to pinpoint an area that administration could focus on for sustained school change. By concentrating on this specific school, administration, politicians, and community members would have a foundation for providing all members of East High School with concrete evidence of the relationship between parent involvement and racial identity development as it correlates to academic achievement. Only the students of color and their parents participated in this study.

### *Procedures*

The qualitative portion of this investigation was explored through the use of a survey. The methods used in this study were similar to that of the methods discussed in the literature reviews. All of the studies used surveys as a means of gathering data. Parents completed surveys to evaluate their perceptions of East High School. The attitudes and practices of parents were collected through surveys administered to parents during the regular school session. Surveys were distributed to students' parents via mail. A survey was sent at the beginning of the school year and then again near the end of the school year. The recipients were given a week to complete and return each of the surveys. Results of the responses from the surveys were then determined. Respect for all audiences was shown by the use of nondiscriminatory language throughout this research.

Surveys did adhere to the research ethics guidelines of the Institutional Review Board to assure that all members of the study were respected at all times. The rights and privacy of all members were also protected at all times.

The quantitative portion of the study included the gathering and comparing of MCAII data for East High School. Two different school years were used. The researchers then looked for trends within ethnic groups and increases/decreases between the two years. Data was retrieved from school report cards and previous Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. Student achievement was defined and methods to improve student achievement were established.

### *Testing Procedures*

Surveys were prepared using the online tool called Survey Monkey. The research team sent out 106 surveys to parents who had identified their child as a student of color at East High School. Surveys were sent out the third week of September, 2009-2010 school year. Participants were requested to return surveys within one week. The researcher and building administrators then summarized and reviewed information collected from the surveys. MCA data was also collected for pertinent sub groups from the previous school year, 2008 – 2009. By October 2009, based on the survey results and MCA data researchers defined the need for increasing the level of parent involvement and implementing racial identity development programs within East High School. Once the need had been defined, the researchers and school leaders developed a thorough list of the

program's components, and outlined the percentage of student academic achievement increase that was to be expected at the completion of this study.

East High School then began the process of reaching out to the parents of the students of color by making extra phone calls, initiating more frequent home visits, and providing on campus parent/student education about racial identity development and homework support. After sixth-months of increasing communication and implementing these programs, researchers issued the same survey to parents regarding parent involvement and racial identity development at East High School. These surveys were sent out to the same families the third week of April 2010. At this time 102 of the initially identified families were still in attendance at East High School. Surveys were not sent to any families that were new to the building. Again, parents were requested to return the surveys within one week's time. Once the second round of surveys were completed, researchers reported the changes, if any, in parent surveys responses regarding parent involvement and an understanding in racial identity development.

The research was noted to finish at the end of the school year, June 30, 2010, although MCA scores for the 2009 – 2010 school year were not available until later that summer. At that point, the researchers were also able to compare MCA 2009 data to MCA 2010 data to see if there were any significant increases in student achievement.

### *Summary*

As noted by Dr. Beverly Tatum Bell (1997), "if educators and parents wish to foster these positive psychological outcomes for the children in our care, we

must hear their voices and affirm their identities at school and at home” (1997, p. 168). Parent involvement and a solid understanding of racial identity development can improve schools, students’ academic achievement, and the connection between home and schools. Understanding racial identity development can then be one less barrier for students of color and can assist students of color in building positive relationships within their school and their environment.

While preparing children for the future, educators and parents must allow them opportunities for growth and understanding. As Dr. Tatum expresses, academic excellence can be included in the adolescent definition of what it means to be African American (2004). In summary, there is a definite need to define the correlation between parent involvement, racial identity development, and student academic achievement. Through continuous research and implementation of new programs, such as those implemented within this research project, this uncertain correlation between parent involvement, racial identity development, and academic achievement can only become clearer. This will undoubtedly allow for more students of color to realize their American dream.

## Chapter 4

### RESULTS

The first data that was interpreted was that from the surveys collected during both fall and spring of the 2009 – 2010 school year. There were 42 respondents for the Fall 2009 survey, a return rate of 40%, and there were 47 respondents for the Spring 2010 survey, a return rate of 46%. Figure 1 and Figure 2 show the ethnicities of the families that were represented for each survey response period. This ethnicity data was gathered from question 1 on the survey.

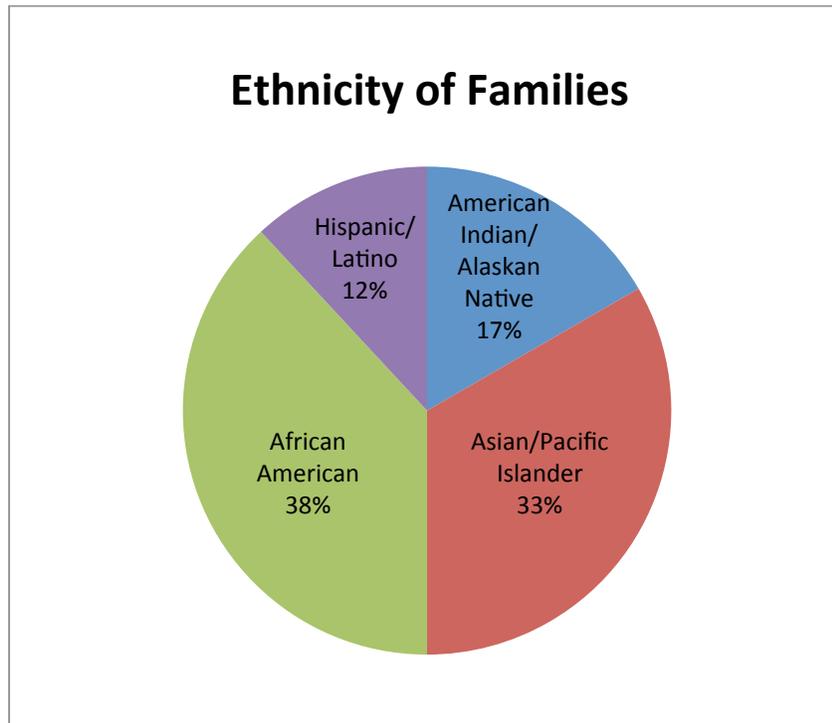


Figure 1 Survey respondents' ethnicities – Fall 2009

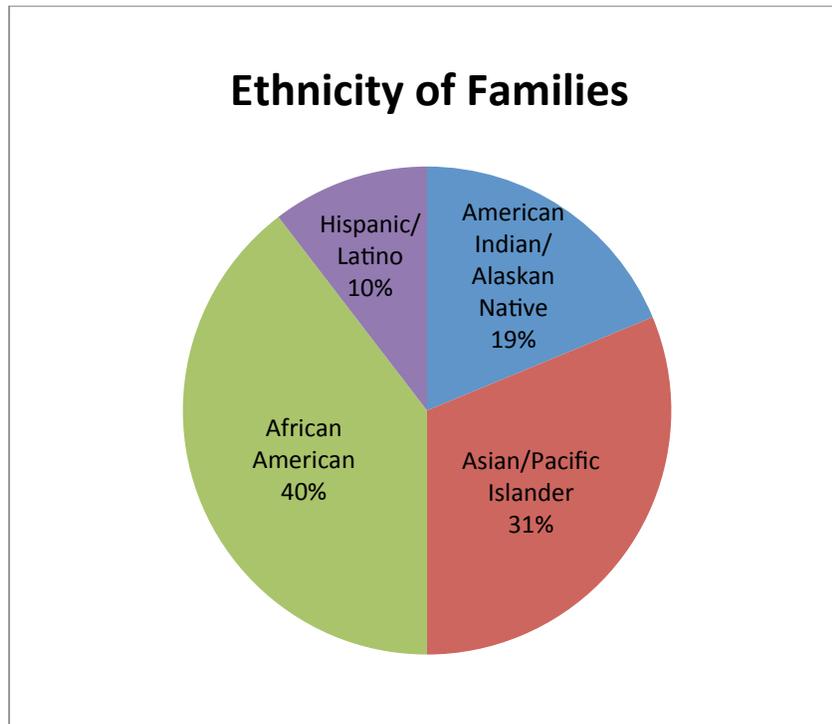


Figure 2 Survey respondents' ethnicities – Spring 2010

When comparing and contrasting fall to spring survey responses there weren't any significant differences in how the parents responded to question two through seven. They were remarkably similar. The data from these first few questions are not reported in Table 1 and Table 2, but a few salient points were taken from questions on both surveys. When parents responded to question "what is the highest level of education the caretaker of the student(s) has completed", approximately 95% indicated that high school was the highest level of education they had received. The other 5% indicated that they had attained a college level degree. It should also be noted that the majority of responses on both surveys came from mothers.

The data collected on both surveys also indicated that there were two of these first seven questions that all parents agreed upon. The first was that 100% of the respondents were willing to work with the school to help their child become more successful. Unfortunately though, only one fourth of the respondents identified having a contact within the school with whom they were comfortable with or felt they could trust to communicate openly with. The other three fourths of the respondents stated that they did not have a contact at school that they could seek out if their child needed extra help or they had a concern. Also 100% of the parents indicated that they desired for their child to go on to college after high school.

The results for the remaining thirteen questions included in the survey appear in Table 1 and Table 2. Some of these questions were looked at more closely, because they specifically addressed parent involvement and racial identity development within East High School. The questions that were most significant to this research were 12, 13, 14, and 19.

The researchers recognized that six-months in between surveys wasn't a huge amount of time to expect significant changes at East High School, but because the student of color population was fairly small and students' academic success was at stake, it was decided that this research would be conducted during this one school year. The researchers were eager to determine if the efforts in increasing parent involvement and supporting racial identity development were having a positive impact on student achievement. Also, the perceptions of parents would determine what next steps would be taken and if

the researchers needed to be more deliberate in creating opportunities for parents to be involved with their child's educational career.

Although most of the survey responses didn't differ much over the six-month span, the response differences from fall to spring for these four questions were still very telling. Question 12 asks the respondents if their child has ever been discriminated against at school. When comparing the fall to spring surveys there was an increase in the number of parents that selected "strongly agree" that their child had been discriminated against at school.

It's not a great surprise that a student who attends a predominantly Caucasian school may feel isolated due to his or her race. Question 13 responses determined that over half of the students of color at East High School had expressed feelings of isolation to their parents. The number of responses for each survey stayed virtually the same.

Question 14 asked parents if they believe their children feel equally as valued as others around them. From fall to spring there was a significant increase in the number of parents that believed their child felt equally valued at school. In the fall only sixteen parents strongly agreed compared to the spring where 33 parents strongly agreed.

Question 19 asked specifically about parents' satisfaction with their opportunities for involvement at East High School. The data suggests that at the end of the school year about half of the parents were still dissatisfied with their opportunities for involvement within the school. These responses did not vary much from fall to spring.

Table 1  
 Parent Survey Results – Fall 2009

Survey question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. The atmosphere at my child's school seems open and friendly.	17	15	7	3
9. I am informed about my child's progress.	11	14	10	7
10. My child is safe at school.	25	11	6	0
11. When I contact the school, I usually get a receptive and helpful response.	12	15	11	4
12. My child has experienced racial discrimination at school.	14	8	14	6
13. My child has expressed feelings of isolation due to his/her race.	13	10	10	9
14. The school has an environment where all students feel equally valued.	16	11	9	6
15. I am encouraged to participate in school events and activities.	7	12	15	8
16. In my opinion, the school performs well academically.	42	0	0	0
17. The school succeeds at preparing students for college/post-secondary education and/or career options.	20	13	7	2

Table 1 Continued

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<b>18. I would recommend this school to other people.</b>	27	8	5	2
<b>19. I am satisfied with my opportunities for involvement at this school.</b>	13	8	12	9
<b>20. The behavior expectations in my child's school are consistently enforced among all students.</b>	8	6	14	14

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Table 2  
 Parent Survey Results – Spring 2010

Survey question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. The atmosphere at my child's school seems open and friendly.	20	15	9	3
9. I am informed about my child's progress.	13	15	10	9
10. My child is safe at school.	30	11	6	0
11. When I contact the school, I usually get a receptive and helpful response.	13	16	12	6
12. My child has experienced racial discrimination at school.	25	11	4	6
13. My child has expressed feelings of isolation due to his/her race.	17	9	10	11
14. The school has an environment where all students feel equally valued.	33	8	4	2
15. I am encouraged to participate in school events and activities.	15	17	11	4
16. In my opinion, the school performs well academically.	40	5	2	0
17. The school succeeds at preparing students for college/post-secondary education and/or career options.	20	15	9	3

Table 2 Continued

18. I would recommend this school to other people.	30	9	5	3
19. I am satisfied with my opportunities for involvement at this school.	13	11	14	9
20. The behavior expectations in my child's school are consistently enforced among all students.	10	6	16	15

Table 3 and Table 4 reflect MCA scores by subgroups for reading and math for the 2008 – 2009 and 2009 – 2010 school years. The scores show how students performed at the statewide level, district level, and at East High School. What is seen immediately is that the testing sample size at East high school is not large enough to be reflected percentagewise except specifically regarding black students for MCAII reading. The results are positive showing a 16% increase in the course of one year.

Table 3  
MCAII Comparison Data – Reading

% Proficiency on MCAII Reading Test						
	Statewide 2009	Statewide 2010	Duluth District 2009	Duluth District 2010	East Senior High 2009	East Senior High 2010
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	50.50%	52.40%	53.00%	55.00%		
Asian/Pacific Islander	60.40%	61.10%	75.20%	78.00%		
Hispanic/ Latino	47.30%	48.50%	62.30%	69.20%		
Black	44.90%	47.00%	44.00%	48.10%	50.00%	66.70%
White	78.70%	79.10%	78.40%	78.90%	87.20%	90.50%

Table 4  
MCAII Comparison Data – Math

% Proficiency on MCAII Math Test						
	Statewide 2009	Statewide 2010	Duluth District 2009	Duluth District 2010	East Senior High 2009	East Senior High 2010
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	40.70%	42.70%	39.80%	35.90%		
Asian/Pacific Islander	63.90%	65.70%	64.60%	64.60%		
Hispanic/ Latino	44.50%	46.00%	51.40%	47.10%		
Black	34.00%	36.60%	28.30%	27.40%		
White	68.90%	71.20%	61.20%	62.00%	42.70%	56.30%

### *Analysis of Data*

An increase in parents responding that their child had been discriminated against at school might have been due to the fact that parents were possibly becoming more attuned to what their child was saying at home. While an increase in parent/student communication about school would be a positive change, time spent dealing with discrimination concerns inevitably leaves less time for academics. If a child believes that he or she is being discriminated against this ultimately plays a role in the academic success of that child. This data suggests that East High School still needed to address discrimination as a whole school. All students would benefit from more education about being empathetic and kind to one another.

It was disheartening to see that the number of students that had expressed feelings of isolation grew from fall to spring. It becomes paramount for schools to be proactive in how they allow and help students fit into the larger school community. This also creates a great platform for the school to introduce racial identity development to the students who may feel isolated. It was obvious based on this data that East High School needed to implement more opportunities for racial identity development for students of color and spend more time communicating with all students about celebrating their differences and accepting others.

Since in most cases perception is reality, question 14 about students feeling equally valued at school was critical to this study. Feeling valued is one of the most basic human needs. Because this study takes place in a

predominantly affluent Caucasian school the students of color who attended this school, by in large, did not share their white peers socioeconomic status.

Assuring that students who stand out biologically and economically feel valued and important is consequential. The data collected during this study suggested that East High School had begun to make significant changes in making sure that all students felt valued within the school. This was a success to be celebrated.

The researchers were, however, perplexed by the responses to question 19. Parents had not perceived that more opportunities had been provided for them to get involved. The researchers believed that if students felt more valued then they were doing a good job of being more inclusive. This was disappointing especially since one of the intents of the study was to get parents more involved. It was concluded from this survey result that it was time to get more deliberate about creating opportunities for parents.

The MCA data that had been collected indicated that some of the strategies that were being used were proving to be successful; it also acknowledged the need for sustained efforts.

### *Deductive Conclusions*

#### *Hypothesis 1.*

Students with parents that are active in their education, both at home and in school, will have higher academic achievement levels. After looking at the data collected the researchers concluded that it is still somewhat unclear if this hypothesis holds true. Based on the responses to question 14 and the MCA data from 2009 to 2010 it is possible that the students' performance may have

improved due to their increased feeling of being valued at school. Further, prolonged research would be necessary to determine whether or not parent involvement was solely responsible for the increase in MCA Reading scores from 2009 to 2010.

**Hypothesis 2.**

Students with fainéant parents who are not involved in their educational career will continue to have lower academic achievement levels. Based on the data collected the researchers were unable to draw any conclusions about this hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 3.**

Parents who understand that their children go through stages of racial identity development can provide a foundation built on self-awareness, pride, and meaningful knowledge. The students in these homes will also find higher levels of academic success. Similar to Hypothesis 1, it was possible that the increase in students' perceived feeling of value at school was responsible for the increase in MCA Reading scores from 2009 to 2010. However, there was still insufficient evidence to determine if this hypothesis was true.

***Summary***

The researchers knew that for some inexplicable reasons in America, educators have not able to make substantial gains in closing the achievement gap. East High School has tried to get a handle on this phenomenon by being proactive. The researchers tried to gather data that would help to determine if the initiatives created would yield results and what further steps were needed.

The surveys indicated that there was still much more work to be done regarding the improvement in academic achievement for students of color. The researchers also needed to increase the perception of how students and parents felt about the opportunities the school was providing to support the belonging and inclusion of all students. This is where the researchers thought racial identity development would be helpful. The researchers believed that since East High School's student of color population was relatively small, being able to accomplish these tasks would be attainable. The data showed that some of the perceptions about East High School were improving for students and parents, but the academic growth of students' still needed significant improvement. One major positive outcome of this research was that baseline data had been gathered and strategies had begun to be implemented to help students of color become more successful in school. The researchers believed that with the information that had been gathered, there was a clearer understanding of what would be necessary to further support the increase in parent involvement, racial identity development, and student achievement at East High School.

## Chapter 5

### DISCUSSION

#### *Implications for Effective Schools*

When disaggregating the data, the researchers identified a few different areas that needed to be addressed. First, the researchers had a good understanding that parents and students were not going to be privy to the term “racial identity development.” The assumption was that parents and students felt a certain way about being of color, which could create feelings of isolation, and disconnectedness that could contribute to lack of educational performance. Aforementioned racial identity development explains that students of color go through phases and why it is important to understand these phases. Racial identity development contends that the more a person of color understands what is happening to them based on the color of their skin, they can begin to address those issues with strategies that create better balance for their lives. Effective schools should spend significant energy in supporting students and parents in their quest to explore racial identity development.

Within the last decade the term “parent involvement” has become a trendy phrase. This recent trend is a euphemism relating to the lack of educational achievement regarding students of color. This lack of achievement is supposedly caused by lack of parent involvement. There is also a common misconception believed by the dominant culture, Caucasians, that because of the

lack of parent participation/involvement from families of color that these parents do not want their children to be successful in school. This couldn't be further from the truth. All parents want their child to succeed and go on to college or some type of post-secondary education! A major factor at play is the notion that families of color believe that teachers are the primary educators of the child, not fully comprehending the importance that parents can play throughout the process. It is important for school administration and staff to keep in mind that parents of students of color most certainly desire for their children be successful. It would be advantageous for schools to provide instruction for parents to teach about different ways in which they can support their students in learning.

Question number 4 in the survey is related to level of education the parent/guardian had received. This was of significant importance to the researchers because they knew that the higher level of education a parent receives the better equipped they are to assist their child in their educational journey. As the researchers began to break the data down further, a trend started to emerge. The researchers noticed, as suspected, that the parents who received an education higher than high school had students that were doing markedly better than the students of parent who had only gotten as far as high school. This was the target group. The researchers knew that these were the students who needed extra support. Schools can support these students by providing homework assistance at school. School districts could also work with

community organizations to provide tutors and/or homework clubs for students and parents outside of school.

Another prevalent challenge is of the single parent home. The researchers made this assumption based of the reality that among the students of color, mothers were the individuals that most often filled out the survey. This becomes a significant issue especially contributing to the idea of help with homework. To make the point clear, the mother's level of education and ability to be present when homework is needing to be completed plays a huge factor to the accomplishments of the student. Educators need to keep in mind that students that live in single parent homes may need extra time to complete schoolwork outside of school and extra time and support from teachers at school.

### ***Recommendations***

The researchers decided the data explained two separate challenges. First it is necessary to make students of color feel part of the larger community and make them feel at home within their school. The researchers knew they could accomplish this by being proactive about being inclusive. Historically students of color, primarily males, came to the school to play sports. This phenomenon has since changed. It will be important for educators at East High School to identify those students of color who may be involved in sports or other extra curricular activities. They may have a different perception regarding isolation. Students who do not take part in extra curricular school activities may have less of an opportunity to associate with other students. It will be paramount to find other ways to include them into the school community. School staff needs to

start having conversation with students of color that were experiencing significant challenges. The researchers would address this by having goal setting conversations and by simply asking the students what they needed to be successful.

Secondly, the data showed us that parent involvement among the students of color population was significantly lower than their white peers. This is a much larger challenge. Getting parents to participate is not a challenge just for East High School but a challenge throughout the United States as well. In order to continue supporting increase parent involvement it is also recommended that East High School reaching out to the parents of the students of color by making extra phone calls, initiating more frequent home visits, and providing on campus parent/ student education about racial identity development and homework support.

### *Summary*

In doing this project the researchers sought to find out if increasing racial identity development and parent involvement would create higher levels of achievement among students of color at East High School. If students of color could recognize that they live in a homogenous area and that they will continue to go through phases, this could explain why they may feel as if they don't fit in. The researchers assumption was that understanding racial identity development would benefit them and cater the social and emotional needs of the student. Because historically Caucasian teachers haven't been hugely successful at educating students of color the parent involvement phenomenon

emerged. Research has shown that parent involvement can help a child be more successful. But more needs to be done to insure higher rates of success for the schools student of color population.

The researchers knew that creating more parent involvement opportunities would be essential. The researchers also knew that if the opportunities didn't create any more involvement it was still the teachers' responsibility to educate all students regardless. The researchers created an initiative that would provide more opportunities for parents to be involved in their child's academic journey. The researchers also thought it would be helpful for students to have opportunities to learn what racial identity development is and how affects their academics success or lack there of. The researchers didn't think that they would see exponential growth immediately but that there would be positive growth over time.

All parents' care about their children but in many situations may not know how to help them. The researchers know how important education is and how vital it is to the future success of the students. Caucasian students have the luxury of seeing example upon example of academic success by the images they see of who and what success looks like, but they may not realize they have seen these examples. When it comes to students of color educators need to make sure to help students connect the dots, so to speak, and make sure that they see themselves in all aspects of the educational process by providing concrete examples of what success looks like. Educators need to create ways for parents to get involved and speak to the social and emotional needs of the child, thus an

increase of achievement. The researchers believed that if these things were accomplished with fidelity that it would be at a great starting point in helping students of color realize their American Dream!

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## APPENDIX A

### Parent Involvement Survey For Duluth East High School

Researchers: Sebastian Witherspoon & Nathan Glockle

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[nathan.glockle@duluth.k12.mn.us](mailto:nathan.glockle@duluth.k12.mn.us)

This study is being conducted in order to evaluate and recommend Parent involvement strategies at East High School. The purpose of this survey is increasing the level of parent involvement, which will in turn increase student achievement.

If you agree to participate in this study you will be given a survey, the data will be compiled and used to determine next steps as it pertains to a parent involvement program.

In order to ensure anonymity you will only put your name on the attached consent form. Completed survey's will be turned into a sealed envelope and will only be opened by the researcher. All surveys will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification of participants. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study.

As a participant your feedback will provide information on what is going well for the team and what can be improved upon. This study should take about 5 minutes of your time. There are no known foreseeable risks or discomforts involved in participating in this study.

Your participation is voluntary. If at any time you wish to withdraw your participation you are free to do so.

When finished, place the page with your signature and survey into the envelope provided for you. Make sure to seal the envelope and turn it in to mailbox no later than **date inserted here**.

Thanks for your help!

APPENDIX A CONTINUED

**Authorization: I have read the above and understand the nature of this study. I have agreed to participate in this survey. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I can choose to withdraw from the study at any time.**

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Participants Signature

Date

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Researcher's Signature

Date

**APENNDIX B**

**Parent/Guardian Survey  
East High School**

<p>1. What is your primary racial/ethnic background*?</p> <p>*This information is gathered to assure that all racial/ethnic backgrounds are represented within the survey responses.</p>	<p>A. American Indian/Alaskan Native B. Asian/Pacific Islander C. African American/Black D. Hispanic/Latino</p>
<p>2. What is your relationship to the child you are thinking of when you answer this survey?</p>	<p>A. Mother B. Father C. Grandparent D. Other/Guardian</p>
<p>3. What grade is your child currently in?</p>	<p>A. Freshman B. Sophomore C. Junior D. Senior</p>
<p>4. What is the highest level of education the primary caretaker of the student(s) has completed?</p>	<p>A. Less than High School B. High School Graduate C. Some college D. College degree or higher</p>
<p>5. Would you be willing to work with the school to help your child become more successful?</p>	<p>A. Yes B. No C. Other</p>
<p>6. Do you have a contact at your child's school that you feel comfortable with or that you can trust?</p>	<p>A. Yes B. No C. Other</p>
<p>7. What do you want for your child educationally?</p>	<p>A. To graduate from high school B. Some post secondary education C. To graduate from college D. Other *</p>

## APENNDIX B CONTINUED

	Strongly	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8. The atmosphere (i.e. surroundings) at my child's school seems open and friendly.	A	B	C	D
9. I am informed about my child's progress.	A	B	C	D
10. My child is safe at this school.	A	B	C	D
11. When I contact the school, I usually get a receptive and helpful response.	A	B	C	D
12. My child has experienced racial discrimination at school.	A	B	C	D
13. My child has expressed feelings of isolation due to his/her race.	A	B	C	D
14. The school has an environment where all students feel equally valued.	A	B	C	D
15. I am encouraged to participate in school event and activities.	A	B	C	D
16. In my opinion, the school performs well academically.	A	B	C	D
17. The school succeeds at preparing students for college/post secondary education and/or career options.	A	B	C	D
18. I would recommend this school to other people.	A	B	C	D
19. I am satisfied with my opportunities for involvement at this school.	A	B	C	D
20. The behavior expectations in my child's school are consistently enforced among students.	A	B	C	D

# Sebastian L. Witherspoon

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seblee6666@gmail.com

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## EDUCATION

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University of Wisconsin, Superior, WI	Summer 2013
✓ <b>Currently completing an Ed.S. in Education Administration</b>	
University of Wisconsin, Superior, WI	December 2009
✓ <b>Master of Arts degree in Education Administration</b>	
The College of St. Scholastica, Duluth, MN	May 2004
✓ <b>Bachelors of Arts degree in Business Management</b>	
Lake Superior Community College, Duluth, MN	June 2002
✓ <b>Associate Arts degree in Liberal Arts</b>	

## EXPERIENCE

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### **St. Cloud Area Schools**

October 2011-Present

*Equity Services Director*

St. Cloud, MN

- ✓ Identify educational strategies that will increase academic achievement for students of color.
- ✓ Develop and implement programs that foster and support school and community partnerships.
- ✓ Work collaboratively with all education departments to establish best practices that will aid students in becoming college and career ready.
- ✓ Understand MN rules around Desegregation/Integration law.

### **University of Wisconsin-Superior**

February 2010 – October 2011

*Recruiter/Advisor – Educational Leadership*

Superior, WI

- ✓ Identify potential students for the Teacher Education program from underrepresented populations that meet high-demand teacher education areas.
- ✓ Recruit, advise, and support teacher education candidates, focusing particularly on students from diverse backgrounds.
- ✓ Work collaboratively with the education department to implement a high quality teacher education program that prepares students to meet high-demand teaching areas.

**Duluth Public Schools (ISD #709)**

October 2008 – February 2010

*Diversity/Integration Specialist*

Duluth, MN

- ✓ Advocated for the successful achievement and development of protected students throughout the district (with a concentration on the three high schools and the three middle schools).
- ✓ Provided training for the staff, the community, and the students, including cultural curriculum, peer mediation, and specific integration experiences that benefit instruction and learning.
- ✓ Worked with students of color their parents and staff to provide a smooth transition from elementary, middle school, into high school
- ✓ Provided mediation facilitation when cultural conflicts occurred.
- ✓ Developed student leadership, skill building and produce ongoing collaborations in our community

**Duluth Public Schools (Denfeld High School)**

August 2006 – October 2008

*Restorative Practices Coordinator*

Duluth, MN

- ✓ Trained all incoming 9<sup>th</sup> grade students on Restorative Practices
- ✓ Facilitated student (suspension) re-entries
- ✓ Mediated student behavior referrals
- ✓ Assisted students in achieving academic success

**Men as Peacemakers (Duluth Public Schools)**

September 2004 – August 2006

*Restorative Practices Facilitator*

Duluth, MN

- ✓ Trained and facilitated Restorative Circles within the school district Duluth Public Schools (ISD 709) and community

**SKILLS, STRENGTHS, AND CORE COMPETENCIES**

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Skilled in presentation, communication, leadership, and computers including Windows, Word, Outlook, Excel, Power Point, and Internet

Strengths include good judgment in decision making, self-directed, organization, work ethic, time management, discipline, flexible and creative

Core Competencies include building relationships, excellent business judgment, demonstrating knowledge of under-represented populations, teamwork, leadership, and resourcefulness

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**ADDITIONAL TRAINING AND COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP EXPERIENCE**

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- ✓ Attended 3 consecutive Integration Conferences in Minneapolis **(2006-2008)**
  - ✓ Attended National Restorative Practices Conference **(2006)**
  - ✓ Attended Developmental Model Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)/Intercultural Developmental Inventory (IDI) Training **(2007)**
  - ✓ Co-facilitated “Undoing Racism” workshop for students at Denfeld High School **(2007)**
  - ✓ Attended Leadership Training **(2007)**
  - ✓ Attended Minnesota’s Annual Mentoring Conference **(2008)**
  - ✓ Attended Restorative Learning Training **(2008)**
  - ✓ Developed and Coordinated Tutoring/Mentoring Service Learning class at Lincoln Park Middle School **(2008)**
  - ✓ Committee Member for the Desegregation/Integration Equity Framework (IEF) **(2008)**
  - ✓ Council member of the Education Equity Advisory Council (EEAC) Duluth Public Schools **(2008-present)**
-