

## **ABSTRACT**

Amanda J. Hartness, THE EFFECTS OF AFFINITY GROUPS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING (Under the direction of Dr. Marjorie Ringler), Department of Educational Leadership, July 2012.

Closing the Achievement Gap is one of the nation's top education reform topics today. Despite many education reform efforts, the academic achievement of African American students continues to lag behind that of white students. In efforts to improve minority student achievement, some schools and organizations have created affinity groups to increase student self-efficacy and connectedness to school. This research study examined the potential impact racial affinity groups had on African American student achievement at the elementary school level in one district.

THE EFFECTS OF AFFINITY GROUPS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING

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Amanda J. Hartness

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THE EFFECTS OF AFFINITY GROUPS ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN STUDENTS IN THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SETTING

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my grandfather, Kenneth H. Davis, who taught me that education is the most valuable thing a person can obtain in life. He always told me that education is one of the few things that can stay with you and no one can ever take it away. As a result of his wisdom, I have been able to complete this journey.

In addition, I dedicate this work to my father, Thomas Palmer, who taught me that the world is made up of many different people who all make a difference and play a part in the game of life. Growing up I watched my dad treat everyone with respect and dignity. He firmly believed that he was no better than any other man and that everyone deserved a chance in life. As a 10 year old, I remember being at his funeral and I listened to countless people tell stories of my dad's generosity and how he believed in people when no one else would. In a small town going against the "norm" was not an easy thing to do and I am proud to know that my dad stood up for what was right whenever he could. I know today that my dad's spirit lives on in my quest to do what is right for all children. I may not know all the answers in this journey but I hope that my legacy one day will reflect those values that he instilled in me at a very early age.

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To Jason, I thank you for your love and strong support during times I doubted my abilities and myself. Without your flexibility and sense of security, I would not be the person I am today and this research would not have been possible. Thank you for always believing in me and pushing me to be the leader that you knew I could be.

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I often became frustrated in this process because the type A side of me wanted a script, a guide, a checklist, or a to do list. In reflection, I learned that this journey was my own. I did not need anyone to do this for me, but it was ok to ask for help when I needed it. While this work has probably been one of the most difficult and frustrating things I have done in my professional life; I feel confident knowing that I can accomplish anything if I put my mind to it. This work needed to be my own and I needed to be the leader in this process to prove to myself that I can accomplish my dreams.

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **Problem Framing**

The Achievement Gap is one of the nation's largest and most frustrating educational reform topics (Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, Horwitz, & Casserly, 2010; Singham, 2003; 2005). Districts in essentially every state spend countless hours and resources investigating and implementing strategies to close the Achievement Gap and create schools that educate all children regardless of ethnicity. Educational vendors develop hundreds of programs and products that claim to be the solution. Educators often jump quickly for the new, hot products that promise a quick fix to an age-old question. How can a learning environment be created so it that will meet the needs of all learners?

There is a plethora of research that documents the educational experiences of African American students. Early research mainly focused on the failure of African American students to achieve at the same academic level as their White counterparts (Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966; Jencks, 1972). More recently, the emphasis in research has shifted from studies of academic failure to studies of the factors that contribute to African American student success (Ladson-Billings, 1990; Lee, Winfield, & Wilson, 1991; Lewis et al., 2010).

Despite the surplus of information related to the Achievement Gap, there is very little research on the use of affinity groups as a strategy to assist with this reform issue. Affinity groups are defined as small groups organized by common ideology, shared concerns, shared attributes, or beliefs (Michael & Conger, 2009; Shookhoff, 2006). This term is used within the study to describe support groups that are formed on the basis of race within the elementary school setting that meet on a regular basis to discuss issues related to education and race. The

literature review revealed research that connects affinity groups to higher student achievement, but it was largely conducted at the high school or college level. There is a need for more research to be conducted at the elementary school level regarding the use of racial affinity groups to increase achievement.

The elementary schools in the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School District in North Carolina, are striving to close the Achievement Gap between white students and African American students. All four elementary schools selected to participate in this research study have implemented racial affinity groups in an effort to close the achievement gap. These groups are for boys and girls who are African American. The groups focus their discussions on topics related to race and academics and they conduct activities designed to strengthen student self-esteem and racial identity. The goal of the affinity groups is to increase racial identity and self-esteem, which will in turn raise academic achievement. The schools have not evaluated the effectiveness of the racial identity groups.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research study was to examine the benefits of racial affinity groups at the elementary school level and determine if affinity groups impact academic achievement of African American students. The literature review explores the need for affinity groups as evidenced by the Achievement Gap between African American and white students. This gap is arguably one of the most important of all educational issues in the United States today (Slavin, 2006). Slavin explains this gap in achievement begins in early elementary school and then later develops into differences in high school graduation rates, college acceptance and completion, and ultimately the difference of socioeconomic status in adulthood. According to scores of The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) (2005) the reading achievement of white



fourth graders is virtually unchanged since the earliest national assessments in 1971. In the 1970s African American students made academic improvements on the NAEP, but have made little progress since the 1980s. On the 2010 NAEP, Reading scores remain lower than they were in 1992. There has been essentially no progress in closing achievement gaps that separate white students from black and Hispanic peers (NAEP, 2010). The study looked at racial identity development as a goal of affinity groups, and the connection to academic success for African American students. African American children between the ages of 3 and 6 display white biased choice behavior (Pipes, 2001). Pipes-McAdoo (2002) claim “It is paramount to examine the role of racial identity development within the larger societal framework if we are to understand how children view themselves and come to understand their world” (p. 73). Children construct their racial identity through social and community interactions. The media also portrays African Americans as often being lesser beings and communicate negative messages that can impact self-efficacy in young children (Dixon, 2000).

The research answered the following major question: *Do racial affinity groups in the elementary school setting have an impact on African American student achievement?* As schools develop strategies to meet the needs of all learners, it will be critical to evaluate the effectiveness of programs such as affinity groups.

### **Significance of the Study**

The research conducted can be a source of information for schools or districts that are implementing affinity groups in an effort to raise student achievement or reduce the Achievement Gap. Principals will gain insight regarding the current research, policies, and effectiveness of racial affinity groups. Policymakers can utilize current findings to refine or develop new policies regarding student groups and the use of affinity clusters in the school

setting. Parents and teachers of elementary-aged children could also benefit from the information presented in this research. With a thorough understanding of current research and issues surrounding race in schools, teachers and parents can collect more information to assist with implementation of quality programs that bridge the gap between home culture and school culture. Research in the area of affinity groups is limited. Therefore, the literature review and research findings could be a starting point for other researchers embarking on a project related to the Achievement Gap or affinity groups in schools. The majority of the research found and summarized in the literature review of this study was conducted at the high school and college levels, due to the lack of current research with elementary-aged students. The majority of research in the area of racial identity and affinity groups is related to high school and college-aged students. The literature review utilized these themes to show connections between achievement and racial identity development. This study adds to the current research related to affinity groups and African American achievement.

### **Research Questions**

This research project was designed to answer the following major question: *Do the benefits of racial affinity groups in the elementary school setting have an impact on African American student achievement?*

In order to answer the above question, the research answered the following questions throughout the research and data analysis.

1. Do students have higher self-efficacy and racial identity as a result of the affinity groups?
2. Do African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher or have

- higher growth rates on North Carolina End of Grade assessments than students who do not participate?
3. Do students who have participated in affinity groups longer have higher growth rates or proficiency rates on the North Carolina End of Grade assessment?

### **Methodology Introduction**

This research study is a, casual-comparative study that utilized quantitative and qualitative methods in a mixed design. The study followed the explanatory mixed design model. An explanatory mixed methods design consists of first collecting the quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative data (Crewswell & Plano Clark, 2007). The study included a convenient, matched pair sample from seven elementary schools within the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School District in North Carolina. The study compared African American students who participated in a racial affinity group against African American students of the same age who did not participate in the groups. The quantitative data sources included group participation, End of Grade test scores, and demographic statistics for the students. The qualitative data included information from student surveys, focus groups, as well as telephone interviews. The analysis included descriptive statistics from the PASW Statistics program 18, Release Version 18.0.

### **Limitations of the Proposed Research**

Several limitations are present in this research. One limitation is that there could be multiple factors contributing to the level of achievement when using data from standardized achievement tests. For example, student involvement in other school programs such as tutoring, mentoring, enrichment clubs, or other special programs could also increase student achievement. Other school factors such as teacher effectiveness, school climate, effectiveness of

administration, and current curriculum choices could also determine the level of student achievement. Second, the overall effectiveness of each affinity group was not measured. Third, the researcher had a close connection to the school and district. While writing and conducting this study, the researcher was a principal at one of the targeted schools. Other schools were included in this study in an attempt to reduce the level of bias. The researcher also established the racial affinity groups at two of the targeted schools, and therefore had an established belief that these groups are effective. The researcher is passionate about minority student achievement and entered the research study in hopes that the research would provide information that would be helpful in her mission to educate all children effectively.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Affinity Group-* Affinity groups are defined as small groups organized by common ideology, shared concerns, shared attributes, or beliefs (Michael & Conger, 2009; Shookhoff, 2006). This term is used within the study to describe support groups that are formed on the basis of race within the elementary school setting that meet on a regular basis to discuss issues related to education and race. The term was also utilized to describe other types of groups that form to meet a social or educational need in high schools and on college campuses.

*Affinity Seeking-* Affinity seeking is defined as the active social-communicative process in which individuals attempt to get others to like and feel positive toward them (Bell & Daly, 1984b). The researcher utilized this term in the constructs of the study to describe students seeking affinity with peers of the same race.

*AYP -* This acronym stands for Adequate Yearly Progress. It refers to the amount of instruction needed for students to make one year's worth of growth in a subject area. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, each State establishes a definition of "adequate yearly progress"

(AYP) to use each year to determine the achievement of each school district and school. The new definition of AYP is diagnostic in nature, and intended to highlight where schools need improvement and should focus their resources. The statute gives states and local educational agencies significant flexibility in how they direct resources and tailor interventions to the needs of individual schools identified for improvement. Under the No Child Left Behind Act, schools are held accountable for the achievement of all students, not just average student performance (United States Department of Education, 2002). When all students make adequate yearly progress, the achievement gaps between white and African American students should decrease.

*Achievement Gap* – The term Achievement Gap commonly refers to the significant difference in student achievement between white students and minority students (McMillian, 2003; Roscigno, 1999; Singhman 2005). For purposes of this study, the researcher utilized this term to focus on the disparities between the academic achievement of African American students and white students.

*Opportunity Gap*- Other theorists refer to the Achievement Gap as an opportunity gap, which refers to the disparities in social resources and opportunities for minority students and families (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Flores, 2007; Starratt, 2003; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). The term is utilized to explain the academic disparities between minority students and white students and to give a reason for the Achievement Gap. The term is also used to replace the term achievement gap.

*No Child Left Behind*- The desire for equity and equality in education also contributed to the creation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the most recent reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. President George Bush signed the bill into law on January 8, 2002. The NCLB legislation requires that schools, teachers and

administrators be held accountable in teaching certain populations of students (Smith, 2002). NCLB designates ten groups that are referred to as subgroups. NCLB is discussed throughout the study and end of year assessments that are required by NCLB are used as a data source.

*End of Grade Assessments-* Throughout the study the term EOG is used to describe the end of year assessments that elementary students in North Carolina are required to take in grades 3-8. The North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests are designed to measure student performance on the goals, objectives, and grade-level competencies specified in the *North Carolina Standard Course of Study* (NCDPI, 2011).

*Racial Identity Development-* This term describes the process that individuals go through as they acquire their individual racial identities or personalities. For the purposes of this study, the research focused on racial identity development of African American youth. The literature will introduce two different theories of racial identity development for African American adolescents. This research study explored the Helm's model of identity development in people of color which is comprised of five stages that are characterized by differences in racial reference group orientation and cognitive schemata related to racial issues (Helms 1995). The second theory utilized is the multidimensional model of racial identity, which describes how ethnic students define their racial identity (Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, & Smith, 1997; Sellers, Smith, Shelton, Rowley, & Chavous, 1998).

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

The purpose of Chapter 1 is to provide an introduction to the study of affirmation groups. Chapter 1 also provides definitions of key terms that are used throughout the study so readers will employ a common understanding of key terminology. Chapter 2 of this study provides an overview of current research and a comprehensive review of the literature related to the study.

The literature review is divided into the following sub sections: Historical Perspective, the Achievement Gap of African American Students, Contributing Factors of the African American Achievement Gap, Racial Identity Development Theory of African American Students, Racial Identity and Achievement, Affinity Groups and Affinity Seeking, Affinity Groups in the Educational Setting, and Affinity Group Policy in North Carolina. Chapter 3 presents the research design and methodology for the study. The research design is a problem of practice as a causal-comparative mixed methods design. The study utilized student assessment data from the North Carolina End of Grade Assessments in grades three through five in the areas of reading and math during the 2008-2010 school years. The quantitative measures also included the number of years students participated in racial affinity groups at their respective schools. The qualitative data included information gathered from focus groups, student surveys, and telephone interviews. Chapter 4 serves to explain the data analysis for the qualitative and quantitative methods utilized in the study. Each research question will be analyzed and summarized. Chapter 5 includes the final discussions and recommendations. In this final chapter the future recommendations for research will be outlined and study limitations will be reviewed. The researcher will give final conclusions for the study.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

While conducting the literature review a variety of search strategies and tools were utilized. The researcher kept a log detailing the various sources and search techniques utilized. Well over 135 searches were conducted and the following search strategies were utilized:

The majority of the research was conducted by basic library database searches utilizing the East Carolina Joyner Library. Most of the research cited came from ERIC searches or Psych Info databases. Originally the researcher was searching only in educational arenas and did not have much success with finding actual empirical research on the topic. Once a search was conducted in the arenas of Psychology and Sociology, the research results increased. The term affinity group is a fairly new term in the education arena. Affinity groups are defined as small groups organized by common ideology, shared concerns, shared attributes, or beliefs (Michael & Conger, 2009; Shookhoff, 2006). Many studies in the 1980s and 1990s were conducted to study racial peer groups.

### **Purpose of Research**

The purpose of this research study was to examine the benefits of racial affinity groups at the elementary school level and determine if affinity groups impact academic achievement of African American students. The literature review explored the need for affinity groups as evidenced by the Achievement Gap. The research sought to answer the following major question: *Do racial affinity groups in the elementary school setting have an impact on African American student achievement?* The literature review included the following major topics and sections. First, the historical aspects of the achievement gap were reviewed starting with the Brown vs. Board of Education era and continued through the Individuals with Disabilities Act, A Nation at Risk Report, No Child Left Behind, and concluded with the most recent reform



changes in the Race to the Top funding. A major area in the literature review is the research surrounding the achievement gap between white and African American students. The literature review revealed the following factors that impact the achievement gap: levels of student self esteem or efficacy, a teacher's level of caring and attitude, the use of culturally proficient teaching strategies, and student connectedness to the school environment. Another area of the literature review included research regarding the impact of racial identity development on African American students and the role that racial identity development has on student achievement. The final area of the literature review examined the term affinity groups and the utilization of these groups in educational settings.

### **Historical Perspective**

Over the years, many events in history have shaped the educational landscape and influenced the development of our nation's educational policies and laws. Issues of diversity and equity have plagued public education throughout history. Rulings such as *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka Kansas*, *Public Law 94-142*, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) have sought to ensure an equitable and appropriate education for all students. Table 1 outlines the historical events related to education that will be discussed in this research. The following sections outline major events in history that attempted to influence the academic achievement of African American students and reduce the achievement gap between white and minority students.

#### **Brown vs. Board of Education**

Oliver Brown was an African American parent who lived in Topeka, Kansas. He and other African American parents started a lawsuit against the Topeka, Kansas School System. The children of the plaintiffs were walking long distances to access transportation to their

Table 1

*Historical Events in Education Discussed in the Literature Review*

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Year	Name of Historical Education Event
1954	Brown vs. Board of Education
1975	The Individuals with Disabilities Act
1981	A Nation at Risk Task Force
2002	No Child Left Behind
2009	American Recovery and Reinvestment Act

---

segregated school. There was an all white school within walking distance to their homes (Donahoo, 2006; Ferguson & Mehta, 2004). Organized protestors and personal testimony alleged that segregated public schools were not equal and could not be made equal and therefore deprive students of equal protection under the laws (Imber & Van Geel, 2000). In 1954, in the landmark decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, the United States Supreme Court finally ruled that the "separate but equal" policy was inherently unequal. In 1955, in *Brown II*, the courts ruled that public schools must desegregate "with all deliberate speed" (Jones & Hancock, 2005; Patterson, Niles, Carlson, & Kelley, 2008). The *Brown vs. Board of Education* lawsuit provided that the government must provide an equal and appropriate education, primarily for African American students who attended segregated schools.

Despite the ruling, schools desegregated slowly over the next 20 years. This legislation forced the opportunity for African American and white children to be educated in the same classrooms. This decision laid the foundation for how our educational system operates today. Despite its hailed success, there are critics, who dispute the success of the court ruling and claim little has improved since its inception (Patterson, 2001). Dempsey and Noblit (1993) argue that desegregation undercut the value of education for African American students in multiple ways. The number of African American teachers declined, which meant that black students were being taught by a dominant race and culture. As a result of the cultural change, Noblit and Dempsey claim that discussion of race and culture diminished in schools. The main objective in schools after desegregation was to assimilate black students within the white culture. It was not until the 1980s that the education world began to address what had been lost as a result of school desegregation (Cecelski, 1994; Foster, 1995; Noblit & Dempsey, 1996; Siddle Walker, 1996).

Twenty-one years later Congress enacted a new law to equalize educational opportunities for all students. Many African American students were not given equal access to schools because of educational disabilities.

### **Individuals with Disabilities Act**

The Individuals with Disabilities Act was passed in 1975 by Congress to equalize educational opportunities for students with disabilities. It was originally called the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act and was later named the Individuals with Disabilities Act in 1990. The Individuals with Disabilities Act consisted of two major requirements: all students must be provided a free and public education and it must be administered in the least restrictive environment (Public Law 94-142, 1975). Before The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was enacted in 1975, U.S. public schools educated only 1 out of 5 children with disabilities. Until that time, many states had laws that explicitly excluded children with certain types of disabilities from attending public school, including children who were blind, deaf, and children labeled "emotionally disturbed" or "mentally retarded." At the time the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act was enacted, more than 1 million children in the US had no access to the public school system. Many of these children lived at state institutions where they received limited or no educational or rehabilitation services. Another 3.5 million children attended school but were "warehoused" in segregated facilities and received little or no effective instruction (United States Department of Education, 2010). The act required that public schools create an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for each student who is found to be eligible under both the federal and state eligibility/disability standards. The IEP is the cornerstone of a student's educational program. It specifies the services to be provided and how often, describes the student's present levels of performance and how the student's disabilities affect academic

performance, and specifies accommodations and modifications to be provided for the student. An IEP must be designed to meet the unique educational needs of that one child in the Least Restrictive Environment appropriate to the needs of that child. During the various reauthorizations of the Individuals With Disabilities Act between 1975 and 1990, the United States Department of Education sought to assess the quality of the educational system in the United States.

### **A Nation at Risk Task Force**

Secretary of Education T. H. Bell created the National Commission on Excellence in Education on August 26, 1981, directing it to examine the quality of education in the United States. The Commission was created as a result of the Secretary's concern about the widespread public perception that something was amiss in the educational system. Soliciting the "support of all who care about our future," the Secretary noted that he was establishing the Commission based on his "responsibility to provide leadership, constructive criticism, and effective assistance to schools and universities (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983)." This group began to study the decline of American schools and equality in education. Two years after the group's formation it published *A Nation at Risk, The Imperative for Educational Reform* (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report concluded "All, regardless of race or class or economic status, are entitled to a fair chance and to the tools for developing their individual powers of mind and spirit to the utmost. This promised that all children by virtue of their own efforts, competently guided, can hope to attain the mature and informed judgment needed to secure gainful employment, and to manage their own lives, thereby serving not only their own interests but also the progress of society itself" (United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). *A Nation at Risk*

has received numerous criticisms from educational reform theorist. Some conclude that even twenty-five years later, the United States is still at risk (Lips, 2008). A book entitled, *The Manufactured Crisis*, poses strong challenges to the report's conclusions. The authors Berliner and Biddle (1995), question the statistics documenting educational failure, on which the report was based, and how politicians used the report as a reason to implement what Berliner and Biddle see as misdirected reforms. The book alleges that the report was just one example of the ways political leaders at the time were misleading the nation about the quality of public schools. Goodlad (2003) wrote that "the report was able to gain a great deal of media attention, but that the attention seldom focused on its recommendations, looking instead at the "bad news" and the problems the report showed existed in schools." Goodlad (2003) also argues that the link between student achievement and the national economy was overstated in the report." Other criticisms of the report point to its emphasis on high schools, virtually ignoring K-8 education (Peterson, 2003), and to a lack of citations for the numerous statistics used as evidence of the low quality of American schools (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). While the Nation at Risk Report sought to reform education in the United States, it did not address the specific academic needs of minority populations. It was not until 2002 that our Nation once again addressed the specific achievement gaps between racial groups.

### **No Child Left Behind**

The desire for equity and equality in education also contributed to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the most recent reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. President George Bush signed the bill into law on January 8, 2002. The NCLB legislation required that schools, teachers and administrators be held accountable in teaching certain populations of students (Smith, 2002). NCLB designated ten groups that are

referred to as subgroups. They were defined as: Total School, African American, White, Limited English Proficient, Economically Disadvantaged, Students With Disabilities, Asian, Multi-Racial, Latino, and Indian. Schools who had forty students in any of the subgroups were assessed utilizing the overall proficiency rate for each group. Schools who continually failed to meet the federal standards were designated as schools in improvement status. Each year a school did not meet the testing benchmark additional sanctions were delivered. Even after the passing of NCLB in 2001, there is still a significant difference between the graduation rates of white students and African American students (Smith, 2002). For white students between the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, the graduation rate for students is 75%. Fewer than 50% of African American males graduate from high school, which is significantly below the national average of 68% (Balfanz, Legters, West, & Weber, 2007; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2004). Critics of No Child Left Behind argued that the law required states to focus on educational testing outcomes instead of indicators or strategies for success (Hammond, 2010; Kostakis, 1987; McDonnell, 1995; Porter, 1995; Scherff & Piazza, 2009; Starratt, 2003). The purpose of this legislation was to ensure that all children regardless of ethnicity have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments. No Child Left Behind has been criticized as being an unfunded mandate (McMillian, 2003). In 2009, President Obama authorized an economic plan that would bring additional funding to the programs founded by the No Child Left Behind Act.

### **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

President Barak Obama signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) on February 17, 2009, including \$12.2 billion in additional funds to stimulate the educational

system of the United States (United States Department of Education, 2010). The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), also known as the stimulus package, was an emergency spending plan designed to generate economic activity to prevent a further deterioration of the US and global economies. Approximately \$100 billion of the stimulus package's \$787 billion total was devoted to education programs. Fundamentally, the education funding was intended to help states address their budget deficits and assist with teacher layoffs. According to guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Education, states must apply their stimulus money to four reform areas:

1. Making progress toward rigorous college- and career-ready standards and high-quality assessments that are valid and reliable for all students, including English language learners and students with disabilities.
2. Establishing pre-kindergarten to college and career data systems that track progress and foster continuous improvement.
3. Providing intensive support and effective interventions for the lowest-performing schools.
4. Improving teacher effectiveness and the equitable distribution of qualified teachers for all students, particularly students who are most in need.

Despite the plethora of federal programs and mandates throughout history, the achievement gap continues to be at the forefront of educational issues plaguing the United States. The following sections outline the definition and causes of the achievement gap.

### **Achievement Gaps Between White and African American Students**

The term Achievement Gap commonly refers to the significant difference in student achievement between white students and minority students (McMillian, 2003; Roscigno, 1999;



Singham, 2005). Other theorists refer to the Achievement Gap as an Opportunity Gap, which refers to the disparities in social resources and opportunities for minority students and families (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Flores, 2007; Starratt, 2003; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). There are many studies theorizing that student socio-economic level is the major cause of the achievement gap (Sirin, 2005). The Achievement Gap between white students and African American students became apparent with the integration of our public schools, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s (Zhang & Cowen, 2009). The Achievement Gap began to widen in the late 1980s (Ikpa, 2003; Singham, 2003). Many scholars attribute the Achievement Gap to inequality and report that minority children do not have the same level of resources as their white counterparts, which creates an opportunity gap and, in turn, the Achievement Gap.

This gap of achievement is visible in a variety of academic outcomes. The high school drop-out rate for African American students is nearly double that of white students. Academic gaps in achievement increased in younger students across the United States (Jaynes & Williams, 1989). According to Smith (2005a), studies found that African American students nationwide are 2.9 times as likely as whites to be designated as mentally retarded and 1.3 times as likely to be labeled as having a learning disability. In 2005 African Americans scored on average 20 points behind their white counterparts on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). On the 2007 NAPE assessment of math skills for eighth-graders, the national percentage of white, male students scoring at or above the Basic level was 82% while the percentage of African American male students scoring at or above the basic level in grade eight was 46% (NAEP, 2007). Only about 50% of African American students are likely to earn high school diplomas (Balfanz et al., 2007).

Many school districts across the nation developed Achievement Gap policies in an attempt to raise the achievement of minority student groups. The Chapel Hill-Carrboro City School District (CHCCS) adopted policy code 3615 on August 5, 2002 (CHCCS, 2002). The policy was broad in nature and attempted to outline measures the district would take to eliminate racial predictability of achievement in minority student groups. The district used this policy as a way to guide the staff development for teachers and promote quality interventions at the school level. This policy did not speak directly to specific strategies, but gave schools the ability to implement interventions for specific groups on students in the attempt to close the racial Achievement Gap and also set the tone that the achievement gap was an important school district issue. Despite the addition of Achievement Gap policies and practices to increase achievement, districts and educational leaders continue to search for the cause of the differences in learning between white and African American students. Educators have varying opinions regarding these contributing factors.

### **Contributing Factors of the African American Achievement Gap**

The Achievement Gap continues to be a frequent political and educational reform topic (McMillian, 2003; Roscigno, 1999; Singham, 2005). Many theories exist about the cause of the Achievement Gap and many research studies have sought to identify instructional programs or interventions that can reduce or eliminate the Achievement Gap. Smith-Maddox (1998) concluded that there are many cultural factors that influence the achievement of African American students:

Students' aspirations, homework habits, participation in extracurricular activities as well as parents' socioeconomic status, parental involvement, expectations and regular

communication with teachers about classroom activities were shown to have a positive effect (p. 310).

Robert Evans (2005) provides research that a variety of factors impact the achievement gap between white and minority students. His research analysis includes the following factors: socioeconomic levels, single parent households, rate of television use, homework completion rates, early literacy rates, school turnover rates, birth weight, parent availability, school readiness factors, and more.

For the purposes of this research, the researcher selected themes related to or causes of the achievement gap that schools could potentially impact. For example, although research suggests that socio-economic levels dramatically impact achievement, the school has no direct impact on this for students. While we might know that this is an important factor, schools cannot directly influence the economic standing of individual families. Causes that were addressed within this research specifically are: Teacher Attitudes or Beliefs, Student Self Efficacy, Teachers' Level of Culturally Proficient Teaching, and Students' Connectedness to the school environment.

Brief definitions or descriptions are provided for each of these themes. Following these brief descriptions, in depth literature reviews are provided for each theme. Teacher attitudes and level of caring refers to what teachers believe and the assumptions they bring to the classroom. Staats's (1975, 1986) definition of attitude as a positive or a negative emotional response to social stimuli whose effect is to unveil a whole set of approach or shunning behaviors. The affective dimension of attitude is related to the emotions aroused by the subject of the attitude. In the context of this study the subject of the attitude is the student. It may also refer to the level in which a teacher genuinely cares about the success of a student. Student self-efficacy is the set

of beliefs that a student has about himself and how he acts on those beliefs (Pajares, 2002). A teachers' level of cultural proficiency is related to the cultural relevance of the instructional strategies a teacher utilizes and the degree to which a teacher incorporates student perspectives and cultures in the curriculum (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2003). Connectedness to the school environment is the level of engagement a student has for his surroundings and how this can impact academic performance (Blum, 2002).

### **Student Attitudes or Self-Efficacy**

The definition of self-efficacy is the capability to successfully learn, perform or execute behaviors at a desired level to bring about certain outcomes (Ryan & Ryan, 2005; Schunk, 2004). Self-efficacy stems from the social cognitive theory. Essentially, students form their own identity or self-worth from the culture around them, which is one of the four ways self-efficacy can be created (Pajares, 2002).

The social cognitive theory is based on the idea that human learning results from the quality of the individual's social environment. While observing others, one can absorb knowledge and social norms as well as develop skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes that shape one's identity. Evidence from research suggests that, as African American students conceptualize a positive outlook, their SAT scores increase (Awad, 2007). The belief is that individuals' hopes and expectations of the future influence present behavior (Honora & Rolle, 2002). Honora also suggests that students who are optimistic about the future tend to be more academically motivated than students who are uncertain about their possibilities. Teachers and school officials see this widening gap as a result of lowered expectations the students often place on themselves (Paige, 2010). These lowered expectations could result in the tracking of African American students into remedial and less academically rigorous classes. These issues of

inequality are evident in terms of the subject matter on standardized tests as well as the number of African American males placed in special education and suspended from school (McMillian, 2003; Roscigno, 1999; Singham, 2005).

“Stereotype threat” is a term used to explain why African American students often view themselves as being unsuccessful. Claude Steele first introduced the theory of Stereotype Threat for the purpose of explaining why African American students are performing at lower levels on standardized tests than their white counterparts (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006; McMillian, 2003; Osborne, 1999; Steele, 1997). In a study conducted on Stereotype Threat, students in different racial groups were informed before taking challenging tests that the results of similar tests were different based on the race of students who took the test. The study found that the achievement levels of African American students fell below that of their white counterparts in such stereotyped conditions. The authors concluded that the cognitive assumption based on the stereotype caused these same students to underperform on the test (Ryan & Ryan, 2005; Steele & Aronson, 1995). Another experimental study of stereotype threat conducted by Aronson, Davis, and Salinas (2006), found a strong correlation between racial identity and self-esteem. The study examined black racial identity as a mediator of academic performance in stereotype threatening situations. The results of the study indicate that promoting positive racial identity development can be helpful in low threat situations but not necessarily in test taking situations. The research suggests that schools must promote positive racial identities for students and must also create environments that create low levels of stereotype threat.

Based on the above research, Stereotype Threat suggests that African American students will exhibit anxiety when placed in a negative stereotype position about African Americans (Radziwon, 2003). The results of this anxiety caused African American students to perform

poorly relating to academic achievement, thus fulfilling the negative stereotype (Livingston & Nahimana, 2006). According to Steele (1997), it is the poor performance of the student that guides disconnectedness from school. This lack of achievement may produce in students the lack of belief that they can accomplish academic tasks. This lack of belief in one's ability to accomplish a task might affect the stereotyped individual's self-efficacy. Wigfield, A., & Eccles, J. S. (2003) noted that an African American student's belief in self decreases particularly when the belief assessed is task-specific. The results of their research indicate that self-efficacy, in terms of mathematics was lower in African Americans than that of their white counterparts. Ogbu (2003) researched various factors in the low performance of African American students in Ohio and found that it was not socioeconomic levels that accounted for the Achievement Gap. He suggested that it was the perceptions of the student and their own attitudes about and beliefs about learning. He found that students often were ridiculed as "acting white" when they showed academic excellence. The theory of acting white has since been used to describe the negative peer effects given to African American students who are academically successful.

Ogbu came under much scrutiny for his claims (Horton, 2004). Other scholars negated his work and claimed he was blaming the victims. Ferguson (2002) was opposed to Ogbu's research and claimed he left out critical factors such as economic variables. The vast majority of research though suggests that if a school culture has high expectations; the students are more likely to meet the expected outcome. If schools create a climate of caring, students will have higher self-efficacy and higher achievement.

Self-efficacy plays an important role in achievement as described in the above paragraphs. The following section examines how teacher attitudes and level of caring can impact student achievement and the shaping of self-efficacy.

## **Teacher Attitudes and Caring**

Teacher attitudes and level of caring for students can play a vital role in achievement according to Thayer and Bacon (1996). The term caring has been given various definitions in research. Thayer and Bacon (1996) suggest that caring is a relational epistemology model in which the importance of caring relationships are connected to student learning. In this model of learning, students of different cultural backgrounds are viewed holistically, and thus are often given more attention regarding their social, emotional, intellectual, and interactive needs. Students of color want to know that teachers care about them and this has been supported in the research.

For example, Ogbu (2003) revealed in his ethnographic study that African American students were more likely to blame their academic achievement on the level of caring and encouragement from their teachers. In Horton's study of best practices to close the Achievement Gap, he utilized teachers' level of caring as a quality-teaching indicator. Smith (2005b) claimed that students of color are intuitively intelligent despite poor grades. They know when people care about them and they know when people have a genuine nature. In his national survey research, African American students stated clearly that they want a caring teacher who is fair and whom they can trust.

According to some scholars, many African American males who have been the targets of teacher bias and inaccessible cultural material have come to view academic studies as a negative experience (Cokley, 2000). Ogbu offers the theory that minority students do not find success in the current schooling structure because they have identified with their oppressed and marginal position in society. He suggests that the major factor in changing this oppression is through authentic caring and inclusion (Ogbu, 2003). Ethnic minority youth, perceiving a lack of caring

and support from teachers, may show more risk for lower academic adjustment and engagement (Irvine, 1986; Murdock, 1999; Roser, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2000; Wong, Eccles, & Sameroff, 2003). A study by Wyngaard (2007) points to the importance of respect and relationships for African American students. Wyngaard asked African American high school students to define and express their perspectives on culturally responsive pedagogy and the impact it can have on students. The students explained relationships more than other factors. Wyngaard (2007) summarizes that “the educator, whether the building administrator or teacher, must be personable, caring, trustworthy, and have an interest and understanding of the lives of their African American students” (p. 122).

Other research supports that teacher beliefs and attitudes are not important factors in student achievement. They suggest that teacher skill level is the greater indicator (Oberman & Symonds, 2005). Oberman and Symonds’ study revealed that there were no statistical differences between teacher attitudes and level of caring. They also concluded this area of school culture is hard to diagnose or assess because individuals perceive caring in different ways. It is often difficult to teach practitioners how to be caring, thus leaving this area of school culture entirely up to individual personality and chance. This often leaves individual school leaders frustrated. School leaders do not have models or accountability structures in place to measure or monitor a teacher’s ability to care. Typical accountability or evaluation models measure instructional practices and current instructional methodologies or strategies. As suggested in the paragraphs above, it is critical that teachers form quality relationships with students. In addition to these relationships with students, teachers also need to be aware of cultural influences. Thus, the following section outlines how cultural proficiency can impact achievement and teacher understanding.



## **Lack of Culturally Proficient Teaching Strategies**

In their book, *Cultural Proficiency*, Lindsey et al. (2003) suggested that in the educational landscape today, teachers must not only understand their pedagogy, but must also utilize culturally proficient teaching strategies. Gay (2002) states, “Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using 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. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is validating and affirming” (Gay, 2002, p. 29). Many school districts today spend a great deal of money on purchasing culturally proficient teaching materials and funding appropriate staff development in the area of diversity and equity. The International Reading Association (IRA) produced a report in 2004 suggesting that an important part of closing the academic Achievement Gap for African American students is to first understand the cultural obstacles that these students face. Au (1993) found that students struggle with the cultural discontinuity between their home and school lives. Students do not internalize the same experiences or expectations at home that are necessary for academic success in the school setting. The author further suggested that African American students are culturally different from most of their teachers and require culturally responsive approaches in the learning environment.

Hillard (1991) argues that the way teachers approach students of different races is key to understanding academic disparities. Administrators and educators are responsible for developing and delivering information to students that will build upon their previous knowledge. Administrators accomplish this by hiring “highly qualified” teachers and staying abreast of educational reforms. Teachers accomplish this by using research-based practices. The federal and state governments hold each group accountable through reportable results on state

assessments. Harvey, McKenzie, Wilkins, and Robinson (1993) further state that a reason for this gap of achievement may be teaching styles that involve dull strategies and rote learning, which might not be favorable to the learning style of African American students. This style of teaching precludes instruction that focuses on higher thinking skills needed for future success in college or in the workplace. Some well-known titles that promote culturally proficient teaching strategies are: *Other People's Children* (Delpit, 1995), *The DreamKeepers* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know* (Howard & Nieto, 1972), *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (Gay, 2002), and *How to Teach Kids Who Don't Look Like You* (Davis, 2005).

Research shows that minority youth report that adults are a pivotal factor in discrimination in schools (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Romero & Roberts, 1998, 2003; Sellers, Copeland-Linder, Martin, & Lewis, 2006; Szalacha, Erkut, Garcia Coll, Fields, Alarcon, & Ceder, 2003; Wong et al., 2003). Minority youth also report that school officials and staff can be a source of discrimination (Fisher et al., 2000; Greene, Way, & Pahl, 2006; Rosenbloom & Way, 2004). In a qualitative study conducted by Fisher et al. (2000), the research found that 46% of African American youth and 50% of Hispanic youth perceived that they were given a lower grade than they deserved because of their race or ethnicity. It is imperative for education professionals to have cultural proficiency and understanding of cultural bias. As the research suggests above, students implicate teachers and other staff members as part of the problem in schools. When teachers have a lack of understanding regarding student cultures, they discriminate. When discrimination occurs, students feel isolated and disconnected from their schools. Asante (1991) asserts that African American children who learn about their history, culture, possibilities, and achievements are "better students who are more disciplined and who

have greater motivation” (p. 30). The next section outlines how student connectedness to the school environment is an important factor in student success.

### **Student Connectedness to the School Environment**

Student connectedness to school has been found to be an important factor in school success (Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Lewis, Sullivan, & Bybee, 2006). Do students feel valued? Do they feel safe to be themselves? Lewis, Sullivan, and Bybee (2006) and Goodenow and Grady (1993) define school connectedness as the extent to which an individual student feels accepted, valued, supported, and encouraged by classmates, teachers, and others such as administrators and support staff in the school environment and culture. School connectedness also refers to how important one feels oneself to be as part of the life and activity of the classroom. School connectedness is also commonly referred to as school disengagement. School disengagement has been consistently linked to the Achievement Gap of African American males (Jackson, 2003). Osborne (1999) suggests that utilizing the strategies of disengagement greatly affects the results of standardized test scores. To foster a sense of connection in the public school setting, particularly for those marginalized, alternative-learning initiatives that specialize in the marginalized group may support efforts in decreasing the Achievement Gap and citizenship of African American students. According to researchers such as Donna Ford (1993) and Claude Steele (1997);

The extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported at school may be an important factor in supporting academic achievement of poor minority youth. Although a sense of school belonging is important for all students, it may be especially critical to the academic survival of those students who are more likely

to feel alienated and unaccepted in an environment whose values and beliefs seem incompatible with their own. (Gutman & Midgley, 2000, p. 228)

The research included in this section outlined a few of the many theories or causes of the achievement gap. The four causes of the achievement gap highlighted in this section relate to African American students specifically. The literature review revealed that the teacher's attitude and level of caring as well as the culturally proficient teaching strategies utilized can impact academic achievement of African American students. Student self esteem and level of connectedness to the school environment can also impact achievement levels. The specific causes were selected because they are directly linked to each other and the use of affinity groups can address many of the associated issues. The following sections give details into racial identity theory and the use of affinity groups to mitigate some of the contributing factors of the achievement gap.

### **Racial Identity Development of African American Students**

Several scholars have researched and developed theories of racial identity development of African American students (e.g., Cross 1971, 1991; Helms, 1990, 1995; Noblit & Stone, 2008). Racial socialization or identity is a pivotal concept in teaching African American students and there is significant literature on this topic (Demo & Hughes, 1990; Helms, 1990; Helms & Talleyrand, 1997; Peters, 1985). Racial socialization or identity development in the United States is a process of learning one's place in American society. Olsen (1997) argues that if you are American, you will be grouped by race. In today's society racial identity is something that is taught only in the family unit and has been eradicated from educational realms. Helms (1990) defines racial identity as "a sense of group or collective identity based on one's perception that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group" (p. 3).

Du Bois (1993) referred to this identity as a double consciousness of being both an American and a Negro. Helm's model of identity development in people of color is comprised of five stages that are characterized by differences in racial reference group orientation and cognitive schemata related to racial issues (Helms, 1995).

African Americans typically progress through the following stages of identity development: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion, Internalization, Integrative (Helms, 1995).

*Pre-Encounter:* A white racial reference group orientation and rejection of African Americans as such and obliviousness to socioracial concerns.

*Encounter:* Ambivalence and confusion regarding racial identity and repression of anxiety-provoking racial information.

*Immersion:* An African American racial reference group orientation and rejection of whites, an externally defined racial identity and hyper vigilance toward racial stimuli.

*Internalization:* An African American racial reference group orientation without rejection of whites, internally defined racial identity, and flexibility and objectivity regarding racial information.

*Integrative Awareness:* Valuing of one's own collective identities and empathy and collaboration with other oppressed groups.

Some researchers utilize the multidimensional model of racial identity to describe how ethnic students define their racial identity (Sellers et al., 1997; Sellers et al., 1998). Sellers and his followers designed a model based on the historical and contemporary experiences of African Americans. They utilized two major components called centrality and private regard (Fuligni, Witkow, & Garcia, 2005; Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006; Sellers et al., 2006). Centrality is the extent to which adolescents define themselves in terms of their ethnicity.

Private regard refers to their personal affect toward their own ethnic group. The positive private regard of youth has been associated with ethnic group membership and positive outcomes for minority youth (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Chavous, Bernat, Schmeelk-Cone, Caldwell, KohnWood, & Zimmerman, 2003; Fuligini et al., 2005; Kiang et al., 2006; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney, Cantu, & Kurtz, 1997; Rowley, Sellers, Chavous, & Smith, 1998; Sellers et al., 2006; Umana-Taylor, Diversi, & Fine, 2002; Yip & Fuligini, 2002).

Some early African American racial identity development research conducted by Kenneth and Mamie Clark suggests that African American self-hatred exists among African American adolescents (Clark & Clark, 1939). In their famous “doll test” minority youth frequently selected the white doll as the preferred choice suggesting that white superiority was a cognitive issue for minority children. Cross and Parham suggest that African American racial identity development is a complicated cognitive process that can impact social environments (Cross, Parham, & Helms, 1998). Research from Oberman and Symonds suggests that race is one of the major contributing factors to the Achievement Gap, therefore it is imperative that schools study this factor (Oberman & Symonds, 2005). Robert Carter’s (1990) longitudinal research regarding college students showed a direct relationship between racism, racial identity, and academic attainment. Patricia Marshall’s (2002) research recommends, “Educators need to create deliberate learning opportunities that promote healthy racial identities.” Many researchers conclude that the study of ethnic identity constructs are important to study within educational reform because ethnic identity has been linked to positive psychological outcomes in adolescents (Kiang, Yip, Gonzales-Backen, Witkow, & Fuligni, 2006; Lee, 2003, 2005; Lee & Yoo, 2004; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney et al., 1997; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Sellers et al., 2006; Whitesell, Mitchell, Kaufman, & Spicer, & the voices of Indian Teens Project, 2006; Yip &

Fuligini, 2002). The aforementioned research studies were conducted on high school and college aged students, which suggests that ethnic identity development and positive psychological benefits are rarely seen in earlier developmental years.

### **Nine Cultural Characteristics and Six Learning Style Preferences of African Americans**

Boykin and Bailey (2000) present some interesting information regarding the nine dimensions of African American culture, originally proposed by Allen and Boykin (1992). Their study of the nine cultural traits and their use in pedagogy revealed that African American students performed higher on academic tasks when the nine characteristics were utilized to a greater degree. Boykin's nine dimensions are described in Table 2.

Shade (1981) later outlined learning style preferences for African American learners. This model focused on connecting the cultural dimensions into pedagogy. The learning styles Shade (1981) noted are (p. 42):

1. Learning best through observation and modeling of activity, not being told.
2. Having a high energy level and needing a variety of tasks and much movement.
3. Functioning best if the material is contextualized.
4. Preferring to process material through kinesthetic activities, visual images, auditory material, interactive processes and finally through print oriented approaches.
5. Preferring to demonstrate their knowledge in performance rather than to demonstrate in tests. They are always and foremost performers.
6. Being highly creative and imaginative, and they demonstrate excellent physical coordination, which suggest that art and physical education must become integrated aspects of the cognitive curriculum, not just frills.

Table 2

*Boykin's Nine Characteristics of African American Culture (1983, p. 95)*

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Dimension	Definition
Spirituality	Is based on the belief that all elements of the universe are of one substance, or spirit.
Resilience	Is the conscious need to bounce back from disappointment and disaster and to have tools of humor and joy to renew life's energy.
Humanism	Describes the African view that the whole world is vitalistic, or alive, and that this vitality is grounded in a sense of goodness.
Communalism	Denotes awareness of the interdependence of people. One acts in accordance with the notion that the duty to hone's family and social group is more important than the individual privileges and rights.
Orality and Verbal Expressiveness	Refers to the special importance attached to knowledge that is passed on through word of mouth and the cultivation of oral virtuosity.
Personal Style and Uniqueness	Refers to the cultivation of a unique or distinctive personality or essence and putting one's own brand on activity a concern with style more than being correct or efficient. It implies approaching life as if it were an artistic endeavor.
Realness	Refers to the need to face life the way it is without pretense.
Emotional Vitality	Expresses a sense of aliveness, animation and openness conveyed in the language, oral literature, song dance, body language, folk poetry, and expressive thought.
Musicality and Rhythm	Demonstrates the connectedness of movement, music, dance, percussiveness, and rhythm, personified through the musical beat.



The research suggests that racial identity development is an important factor in the achievement gap and it is important to include in the schooling of African American students. The process by which minority students transcend through these phases can be fostered and supported through quality instructional methods and programming in schools. The following section shows the connection between racial identity development and higher achievement.

### **Racial Identity and Achievement**

As mentioned, several different theoretical frameworks exist and highlight the important role of race-related experiences in shaping developmental and academic trajectories among ethnic minority youth (García Coll, Lamberty, Jenkins, McAdoo, Crnic, Wasik, & Vazquez García, 1996; Spencer, Dupree, & Hartman, 1997).

Researchers typically present opposing views regarding the connection between racial identity development and achievement among African American students (Harper & Tuckman, 2006). Some contend that African American racial identity impedes academic success and others assert that African American identity development will increase achievement (Chavous et al., 2003; Noblit & Stone, 2008). Some researchers argue that African American youth are aware of academic barriers to their success and thus distance themselves from the behaviors that might ensure academic success. Students believe that even with these behaviors, they are unlikely to attain academic success, so they self-sabotage (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1988). Many students of color have inaccurate perceptions regarding the academic ability of minorities and they reject academic tasks to preserve failure (Osborne, 1997). When students understand their racial identity, they have been shown to have higher achievement on academic tasks. High levels of achievement are typically found with African American students who have an

awareness of discriminatory barriers and simultaneously show a commitment to academic structures (O'Connor, 1999).

Phinney (1989) suggests that individuals who struggle with racial identity development will enter an identity crisis period that may cause challenges such as lower academic achievement and social disengagement. Oberman and Symonds' study revealed that race did play an important role in student achievement. Their study revealed that addressing racial issues and identity development is essential to narrowing the Achievement Gap (Oberman & Symonds, 2005). In their study to determine strategies to close the Achievement Gap they found that 90% of the schools that were most successful in closing the gap had structured opportunities for faculty and students to discuss race and racial identity (Oberman & Symonds, 2005). Gurin (1999) and Eaton (2001) found that African American students benefitted academically more from same-race relationships than they benefitted from inter-racial friendships.

Chavous et al. (2003) and Phinney (1990) report that there is more empirical support for the notion that stronger racial identity relates to higher achievement values, which may help to buffer adolescents from the negative impacts of institutionalized racism on their academic motivation and engagement. Overall, the research does seem to suggest that racial identity development, ethnic identity, and their formation needs to be at the forefront of scholarship regarding educational attainment, life experiences, and psychological health (Ashmore et al., 2004; Downey, Eccles, & Chatman, 2005; Noblit & Dempsey, 1996; Pahl & Way, 2006; Phinney, 1990; Quintana, 2007; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990).

As shown in the previous section, research does support the theory that racial identity has an important influence on student achievement. If this is the case; how do school district and individual school leaders create programs or practices that increase student racial identity?

Many school districts are starting grass root programs that are racial affinity groups in an effort to increase student racial identity development. The following section defines and outlines affinity groups and affinity seeking.

### **Affinity Groups and Affinity Seeking**

The development of affinity between members of special interest groups has been a concern of researchers in communication and social psychology for several decades according to Richmond, Gorham, and McCroskey (1987). Although the use of the term "affinity" is relatively new, in their first book in the field of communication, McCroskey and Wheelless (1976) include the development of affinity as one of the five primary functions of human communication. They suggest that seeking affinity with another person often is the primary purpose of dyadic communication. Bell and Daly (1984a) note that a person who is unable to garner affection, support, attention and other social reinforcements from those around him or her is likely to suffer from a level of social and personal turmoil, that an individual's sense of personal worth is substantially increased by others' indications that they are liked. Affinity seeking is defined as "the active social-communicative process by which individuals attempt to get others to like and feel positive toward them" (Bell & Daly, 1984a, p. 1).

Research conducted by Swanson, Spencer, and Petersen (1998) suggests that group attitudes and beliefs are especially important in the psychological and social development of African American youth. Other research suggests that group affiliation and recognition of self result in high self-esteem and academic improvement particularly in low performing African American students (Demo & Parker, 1987; Finn & Rock, 1997; Oyserman, Gant & Ager, 1995). Phinney (1989) describes a stage of group affiliation called internalization, where a strong group affiliation brings psychological health, in turn resulting in the achievement phase,

in which African American students show increased academic results. Internalization often occurs in later years of social cognitive development according to Phinney. High school and college aged students begin to benefit from the achievement phase. Conversely, Graham (1994) suggests that there is little research focusing on African American youth and how ethnic group membership and beliefs can impact achievement.

Affinity groups are defined as small groups organized by common ideology, shared concerns, shared attributes, or beliefs (Michael & Conger, 2009; Shookhoff, 2006). The origin of affinity groups dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Spain. Spanish anarchists organized their bases in logical groupings called affinity groups. Affinity groups appeared again in the U.S. antiwar movement of the 1960s and 1970s (Shookhoff, 2006). The term was used by Ben Morea and the group Black Mask. Later, anti-war activists on college campuses organized around their interests or backgrounds -- religious, gender, ethnic group, etc.

The idea of large-scale affinity group based organization was planted in the United States on April 30, 1977 when 2,500 people, organized into affinity groups, occupied the Seabrook, New Hampshire nuclear power plant. The growing anti-nuclear power and disarmament movements adopted this model, and used it in many successful actions throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. Today, corporations and public school organizations use affinity groups to address issues the organization is facing (Michael & Conger, 2009). Forsythe wrote in a recent New York Times article that the Central Intelligence Agency, which has embarked on an aggressive diversity-recruiting campaign in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks, is now utilizing affinity groups. The CIA finds that affinity groups are one way to make diverse employees feel welcome and valued. In 1999, they created a new position, Special Assistant to the Director of Central Intelligence for Diversity Plans and Programs, to ensure

that the entire C. I. A. work force is managed appropriately and that all employees have an equal opportunity for advancement. The agency currently has 10 employee networks. They range from the Agency Network for Gay and Lesbian Employees (ANGLE) to the Native-American Council, and Trailblazers, a “disability” advisory panel. School districts such as the Bay Area, California have developed affinity group statements that appear on public relations materials put forth by the district.

“POCIS advocates and actively supports the development of affinity groups and affinity spaces in Bay Area independent schools at the K-12 level. Recognizing the need for both students and adults of color and white allies to have safe spaces to further their identity development, POCIS believes that affinity groups are a vital part of supporting and empowering People of Color (PoCs) in our school communities.”

### **Affinity Groups in the Educational Setting**

Affinity groups in the school setting have proven to be a successful strategy for increasing student achievement (Aguilar & Gross, 1999; Shookhoff, 2006). Discussing students of color, Tatum (2003) argued that it is a healthy part of psychological development to seek out racial identity groups. She even explained how these groups can lead to more productive and healthy intergroup interactions or cultures in educational settings. *“Racial grouping is a developmental process in response to an environmental stressor, racism. Joining with one's peers for support in the face of stress is a positive coping strategy”* (Tatum, 2003). Students have a developmental need to explore the meaning of their identity with other students who are like them culturally (Upton, 1998). Many Schools are putting in place programs that facilitate this kind of intergroup exploration and bonding in co-curricular groups or clubs known as

affinity or affirmation groups. In these groups, students talk about issues that may hinder their performance, such as: racial encounters, social isolation, test anxiety, etc.

Research conducted by Anderson (1988) and Cross (1998) revealed that deliberate, self-chosen affiliation with African American culture can have a positive impact on achievement in the school setting. There are strong historic ties to African American culture and the valuation of achievement (Anderson, 1988; Cross, 1998). Group affiliation in the school setting can facilitate African American youths' development of positive achievement beliefs (O'Connor, 1999; Sanders, 1997; Ward, 1990).

Educators, leaders in the community, and some school systems are convinced that African American students need enrichment initiatives specifically designed for them in an effort to reverse the status quo associated with failure in the school and society (Ascher, 1991). Harper discussed that being African American in school is rife with problems. African American students are presented with the challenge of balancing identity constructs that reflect an awareness of the existence of discriminative forces, and must realize the importance of effort and achievement despite these forces (Harper & Tuckman, 2006).

In schools and school districts across the country, alternative learning initiatives have been formed to assist in eliminating the Achievement Gap of African American students (Mitchell, 2004; Ratteray, 1994). These programs may be during the day programs or after school enrichment programs (Mitchell, 2004). These initiatives operate as independent, alternative, and extended-day educational opportunities for African American students, particularly males (Brown, 1999; Bush, 1997; Murrell, 1999). In a research study conducted by Datnow and Cooper, it was discovered that many students identified their African American peer group networks, both formal and informal, as one of the most important factors in helping them

cope in the predominantly white environments of their schools and to lessen their feelings of alienation. The study was a 3-year longitudinal case study, which utilized qualitative data analysis of surveys, interviews, and observations. The researchers indicated that these peer networks functioned in important ways to simultaneously foster school success and to provide a place for them to affirm their racial identities (Datnow & Cooper, 1997). Datnow and Cooper's study also found that student peer connections increased over time in these affinity groups or peer networks. As students spent more time together, they increased their own self-concept and racial identity (Datnow & Cooper, 1997). The qualitative data collected in the study concluded that the racial peer networks not only helped the students to cope with social and psychological pressures, but also to succeed academically. The most striking feature of these networks was the social value their members placed on high academic achievement and hard work in school. Sedlacek and Brooks (1976) conducted a meta analysis of over 20 years of research addressing African American college student success. They discovered that college campus groups that addressed academic barriers and racism showed increased levels of academic success and connection to campus life (Sedlacek & Brooks, 1976).

Bowman and Howard (1985) discovered through a quantitative study that African American youth, who had been given instruction, emphasizing group affiliation and pride and awareness of social inequities, had higher achievement. The research in Bowman and Howard's study examined the content of race socialization messages Black parents conveyed to their children. Participants consisted of 377 members of the youngest cohort in three-generation families. Parents' race socialization messages consisted of four themes: (a) racial pride, (b) self-development orientations, (c) racial barrier orientations, and (d) egalitarian views. Racial pride messages emphasized Black unity, teachings about heritage, and instilling positive feelings

toward the group. Self-development messages emphasized individual excellence and positive character traits. Racial barrier messages emphasized an awareness of racial inequities and strategies for coping with these. Affinity groups attempt to deliver the same type of racial messages to students that Bowman and Howard found within family dynamics.

Research conducted on college campuses revealed that higher achieving African American students had high racial identity (Ford & Harris, 1997). Ford and Harris conducted a quantitative study that used the revised Racial Identity Scale for Black Students (RIS) to assess students' racial identity. The RIS was administered to 149 students. The revised scale contained 24 Likert-type questions (strongly agree=4 to strongly disagree=1). The RIS is divided into four subscales: pre-encounter, encounter, immersion-emersion, and internalization (Ford & Harris, 1997). Chavous et al. (2003) contend that students who are alienated from their group express the lowest levels of motivation and connectedness to school. African American students' participation in racial affinity groups had a high impact on their educational outcomes. On the basis of racial identity theory (Cross, 1971, 1991; Helms, 1990, 1995) and Tatum's (1997) scholarly work, the study by Wade and Okesola sought to test the hypothesis that racial identity development influences peer group selections and school performance. This quantitative study examined the influence of racial identity and other potential factors that may contribute to African American high school students' selection of a racial peer group. Participants were 104 African American students (14-19 yrs old). To assess racial peer group selection, participants responded to five statements regarding a scenario that was developed for this study by the authors. Results indicated that racial identity, feelings of racial similarity, and racial composition of one's neighborhood were differentially related to peer group selection. The researchers found that some African American students' involvement in an African American peer group within a



multiethnic environment may have a strong positive influence on the students' values about academic achievement (Wade & Okesola, 2002).

Research in this area is of particular importance at the elementary school level as a recent study by French, Seidman, Allen, and Aber (2006) found that mean levels of ethnic affirmation do not begin to increase until after the transition to middle school for all youth and was particularly marked among African American and Latino youth. The study examined the developmental trajectory of ethnic identity for African American, Latino American, and European American early and middle adolescents. Four hundred and twenty students were assessed over 3 years.

Some researchers suggest, however, that radicalized affinity groups result in higher levels of student bias and discrimination (Nealy, 2009). A Harvard study of college campus peer groups revealed that intergroup contact reduces ethnic tension and increases friendships across racial lines (Sidanius, 2008). The Diversity Challenge is the largest and most comprehensive case study to date on college campus. The study synthesizes over five years' worth of qualitative and quantitative research by an interdisciplinary team of experts to explore how a highly diverse environment and policies that promote cultural diversity affect social relations, identity formation, and a variety of racial and political attitudes. The study followed 2,000 UCLA students for five years in order to see how diversity affects identities, attitudes, and group conflicts over time. They found that racial prejudice generally decreased with exposure to the ethnically diverse college environment. Students who were randomly assigned to roommates of a different ethnicity developed more favorable attitudes toward students of different backgrounds, and the same associations held for friendship and dating patterns. Students who interacted mainly with others of similar backgrounds were more likely to exhibit bias toward

others and perceive discrimination against their group. The authors found that involvement in ethnically segregated student organizations sharpened perceptions of discrimination and aggravated conflict between groups. In the study, social group identity theory is utilized to suggest that radicalized peer groups would increase racial tension. As students socialize with a radicalized group they come to prefer that group and exert dominance and hostility toward other groups (Sidanius, 2008). Some researchers also suggest that same-race peer influence increases negative impact on academics (Wade & Okesola, 2002).

Steinberg et al conducted a quantitative study during 1987-1988 school year that administered a 30-page, two-part questionnaire with a series of standardized psychological inventories, attitudinal indexes, and demographic questions to approximately 15,000 students in 9 high schools. The sample was 67% White and approximately 33% non-white, with nearly equal proportions of African American, Hispanic, and Asian American youngsters. The questionnaires contained measures of psychosocial development and functioning, as well as social relations in and outside of school. The outcome variables were psychosocial adjustment, schooling, behavior problems, and psychological distress. The study found that high-achieving African American students in high school did not find academic support from same-race peers and tended to affiliate with other ethnic groups as a result of the negative peer pressure they internalized (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau (2009), concluded that students who join ethnic clubs have a lower proportion of interracial friendships than students who do not join the clubs. They argue that clubs focusing on race segregate students to a higher degree.

### **Affinity Group Policy in North Carolina**

The Equal Access Law applies to most student-led, special interest, non-curriculum clubs

and states that the group must be allowed to organize in most U.S. high schools. Their right to assemble is usually protected under the *Equal Access Act*, (20 U.S.C. §§ 4071-74). The law, amended in 1984, applies only to high school student groups. Currently, there are no policies that apply to elementary school student groups that the researcher could find.

Many school districts have created their own policies for student enrichment groups and co-curricular clubs referencing the Equal Access Act of 1984. The Chapel Hill Carrboro City School District adopted the Extracurricular Activities, Co-curricular Activities and Student Organization policy on March 9, 2009. Policy code 3620/4500 outlines the use of student organizations and clubs within the school setting. This policy is not high school level specific, so it could apply to elementary level groups as well. The policy outlines that clubs should be created to bring interest in interscholastic athletics, extracurricular activities, and co-curricular activities in promoting leadership and team skills, practicing democratic principles, and to encourage the lifelong learning process (CHCCS, 2009). The policy states that all students should be allowed to participate in the organizations unless a student is restricted for one of the allowed restrictions. Students can be restricted from attending student organizations based on student grades, behavioral expectations, and attendance concerns. Affinity or affirmation student groups would fall under this district's co-curricular policy; therefore, any student would be able to participate in a racial affinity group outside of his or her own racial identity. Most schools advertise the affinity groups and typically find that only students of the racial subgroup do attend.

North Carolina currently does not have explicit policies related to affinity groups. Although equal access laws could be applied, it could be important for districts to have specific guidelines and policies for these groups.

Chapter 2 included a review of the current literature related to this study. Themes from the literature included: Historical aspects of education that relate to the achievement gap, a description of the achievement gap and the theorized causes of the gap, a description of racial identity development and the link to academic success of African American students, the definition and use of affinity groups as a means to close the achievement gap, and affinity group policy in education. The literature review gives a thorough analysis of the historical aspects of the achievement gap as well as several other major themes. Researchers typically present opposing views regarding the connection between racial identity development and achievement among African American students. Some contend that African American racial identity impedes academic success and others assert that African American identity development will increase achievement

Affinity groups in the school setting have proven to be a successful strategy for increasing student achievement and revealed that deliberate, self-chosen affiliation with African American culture can have a positive impact on achievement. Many students identify their African American peer group networks as one of the most important factors in helping them cope in the predominantly white environments of their schools and to lessen their feelings of alienation identities Peer networks function in important ways to simultaneously foster school success and to provide a place for students to affirm their racial identities . Student peer connections increase over time in these affinity groups or peer networks.

Chapter 3 gives a thorough description of the study methodology and design. The chapter includes the following sections: research design, a description of the school district, descriptions of participating schools, descriptions of each affinity group, the research questions, and the limitations of the study.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

Chapter 3 of the study describes the methodology utilized to answer the study's purpose to examine the benefits of racial affinity groups at the elementary school level and determine if affinity groups impact academic achievement of African American students. This section includes a description of the school district and sample schools participating in the study, a description of the research questions, a description of the methodology utilized, and study limitations.

The research study is a mixed methods, causal-comparative study. The study will compare the students who participated in the African American Affinity groups to African American students who did not in the same district with quantitative analysis and will study selected students who participated in an affinity group within the district through qualitative analysis. A mixed methods design was utilized and qualitative and quantitative methods were implored. Mixed methods research is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing both qualitative and quantitative research and methods in a single study to understand a research problem more effectively. The assumption is that the use of both methods, in combination provides a better understanding of the research problem and questions that either method by itself (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Casual-comparative research methods attempt to show cause of effect relationships (Taylor, 2005). Causal-comparative research should be used when the cause cannot be manipulated to discover how one variable influences another. This method of research is often called ex-post facto research because it happens after an event has occurred. In the case of this research study, the affinity groups have already started and we studied them after they began. Causal-comparative research is exploratory in nature and does not always

follow true experimental design. The independent variables cannot be manipulated. This form of research typically occurs with two groups and one specific variable or treatment.

### **Research Questions**

1. *Do students have higher self-esteem and racial identity as a result of their participation in the affinity groups?* This information was collected through focus group data collection, telephone interviews, and student surveys. Information regarding the data collection process can be found in the following section. Individual and group responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded.

2. *Do African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher on the reading and math portions of the North Carolina End of Grade assessments than students who do not participate in an affinity group?* The data collected was gathered from the school district testing and accountability office. The End of Grade Test results for reading and math were analyzed for the 2008-2010 school years. The overall proficiency measure of 1, 2, 3 and 4 were compared for each subject area as well as each subject area overall scale score. A T test analysis was utilized to compare the overall scale scores and proficiency rates for students who participated in an affinity group as compared to students who did not.

3. *Do students who have participated in affinity groups for a longer period of time have higher growth rates or proficiency rates on the reading and math portion of the North Carolina End of Grade assessment?* A T test analysis was conducted to compare the overall growth rates to the number of years a student participated in a school affinity group. An ANOVA analysis was also utilized to measure the variable of time spent in a group where the number of years or groups was greater than 2.

## Hypothesis

The hypotheses for this study are:

As African American students in grades 3-5 participate in racial affinity groups they increase their racial identity.

As African American students in grades 3-5 participate in racial affinity groups they increase their self-esteem.

African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher on the reading and math portions of the North Carolina End of Grade assessments than African American students who do not participate in affinity groups.

As the length of time of participation in an African American affinity group increases, students in grades 3-5 have higher growth rates on End of Grade Assessments.

The null hypotheses for this study are:

African American students who participate in affinity groups do not score higher on End of Grade Assessments than students who are not in groups.

*Independent Variables:* Racial affinity group participation and years of affinity group participation.

*Dependant Variables:* End of Grade assessment scores for reading and math, Individual student growth rates on End of Grade assessments for reading and math, levels of self-esteem, levels of racial identity development.

## Context of the Study

The Chapel Hill Carrboro City School District is one of the highest performing districts in the state and the Nation. Despite these glowing results, African American students in the district continue to score lower on academic measures. The district has engaged in equity and racial identity development staff development for almost ten years with marginal improvements to student outcomes. Despite some increases in achievement, African American students typically score at the bottom of district measures of achievement. During the 2009 school year in grades 3-5, White students were 96.9% proficient in math and African American students were only 71.4% proficient. Despite approximately 20 point gains in math for African American

students in 2009, the Achievement Gap of 25.5% remains. Similar trends are visible in reading. White students in grades 3-5 were 95.6% proficient in reading, while African American students lagged behind at 52.3% proficient. This startling difference equates to a 43.3% Achievement Gap.

### **Description of District**

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (CHCCS) is one of two public school systems in Orange County, NC. Established in 1909, CHCCS is located near the flagship campus of the University of North Carolina (UNC) and the world renowned Research Triangle Park (RTP). As a result of the district's proximity to higher education and research facilities, the community boasts one of the most highly educated populations in America. The district operates three high schools, four middle schools, ten elementary schools, a school for young people being treated at UNC Hospital, and an alternative program for high school students. These schools serve more than 11,000 students.

CHCCS has the state's highest district-wide SAT score at 1,185, or 1,757 when the writing component is included. The state average is 1,004, and the national average is 1,017. This high average was attained while more than 96 percent of the district's eligible students took the test. More than 1,200 high school students are enrolled in challenging Advanced Placement (AP) courses. This participation has earned two of the district's high schools (the third opened in 2007 and wasn't eligible) ranking in Newsweek magazine's list of top high schools. In 2007, East Chapel Hill High ranked 149, and Chapel Hill High ranked 243. Nearly 92% of last year's graduating senior class went on to two- or four-year institutions of higher learning. Thirty-four students in the current graduating class were named National Merit Finalists, while 15 of them received National Merit Scholarships. CHCCS has North Carolina's highest four-year cohort



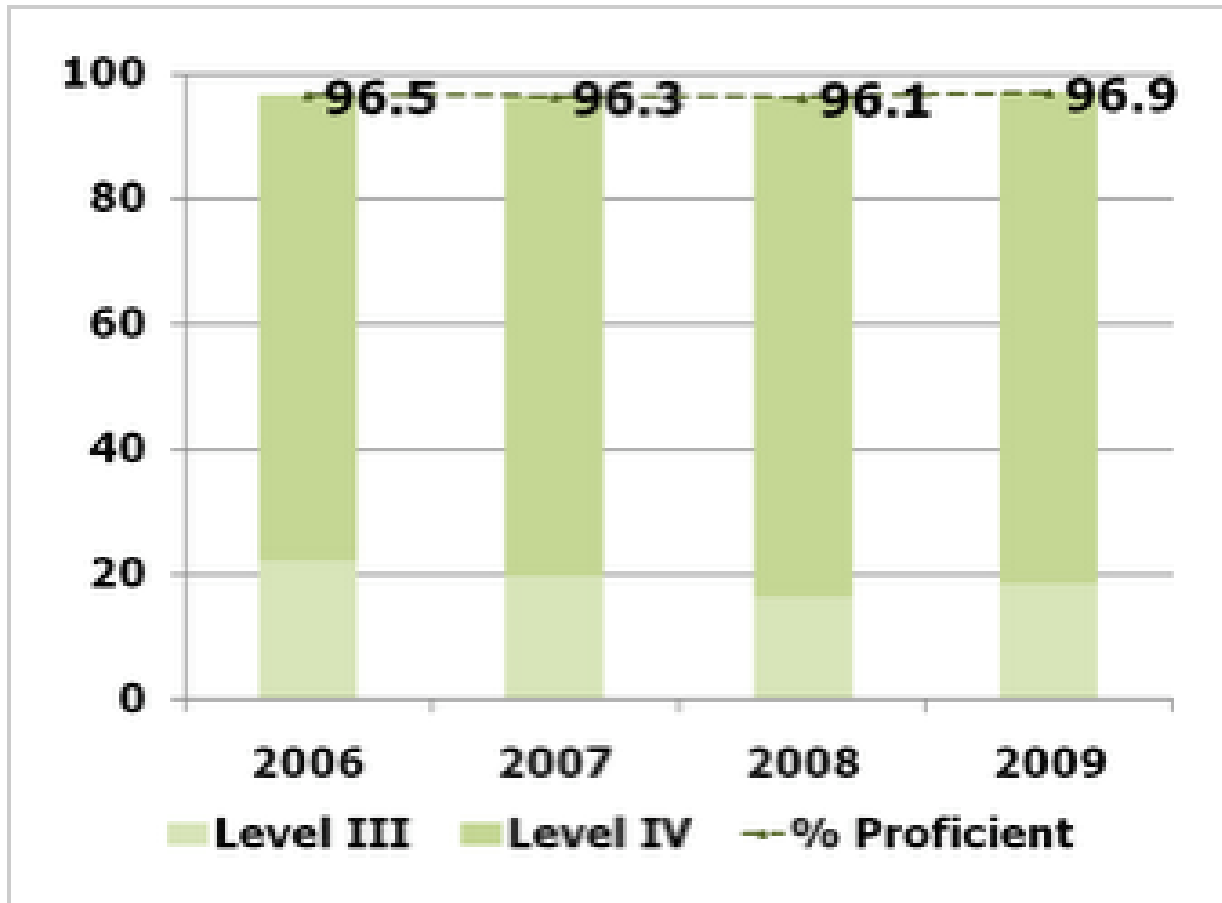
graduation rate at 87.3% and the state's lowest dropout rate at 1.12%. The district was recognized by the North Carolina State Board of Education for its 28% improvement over the previous year.

In terms of students, 31% of the district's students are identified as gifted. More than 93% of students in grades 3-8 are proficient on state-mandated End-of-Grade tests in reading, while more than 83% of them are proficient on the End-of-Grade tests in mathematics. At the high school level, 87% of students are proficient on state-mandated End-of-Course tests. For the 2006-2007 school year, CHCCS had one of the state's highest per pupil expenditures at \$9,779.

In terms of staff, nearly 200 CHCCS educators hold the prestigious certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS). Forty-two percent of teachers hold a master's or doctoral degree. The CHCCS teacher turnover rate is 8.5%, half of the state average of 17%. CHCCS employs 1,870 staff members, of whom 1,150 are teachers or administrators.

CHCCS schools have struggled with meeting AYP performance measures over the past years. At the elementary level, three out of ten schools have typically not met AYP standards. At each of the schools, the African American subgroup is one of the areas of low performance. Figures 2 and 4 highlight the reading and math scores for African American students in the CHCCS district. At the same time, the White subgroups at these schools have continued to perform at high levels. Figures 1 and 3 highlight the proficiency scores for math and reading for white students. Two of the three schools, Carrboro and McDougle, started racial affinity groups as a means to reduce the achievement gap and increase African American student achievement. Affinity groups are defined as small groups organized by common ideology, shared concerns, shared attributes, or beliefs (Michael & Conger, 2009; Shookhoff, 2006). In other elementary

## White Students--Math



*Figure 1.* Chapel Hill district proficiency levels in math for white students.

# African American Students--Math

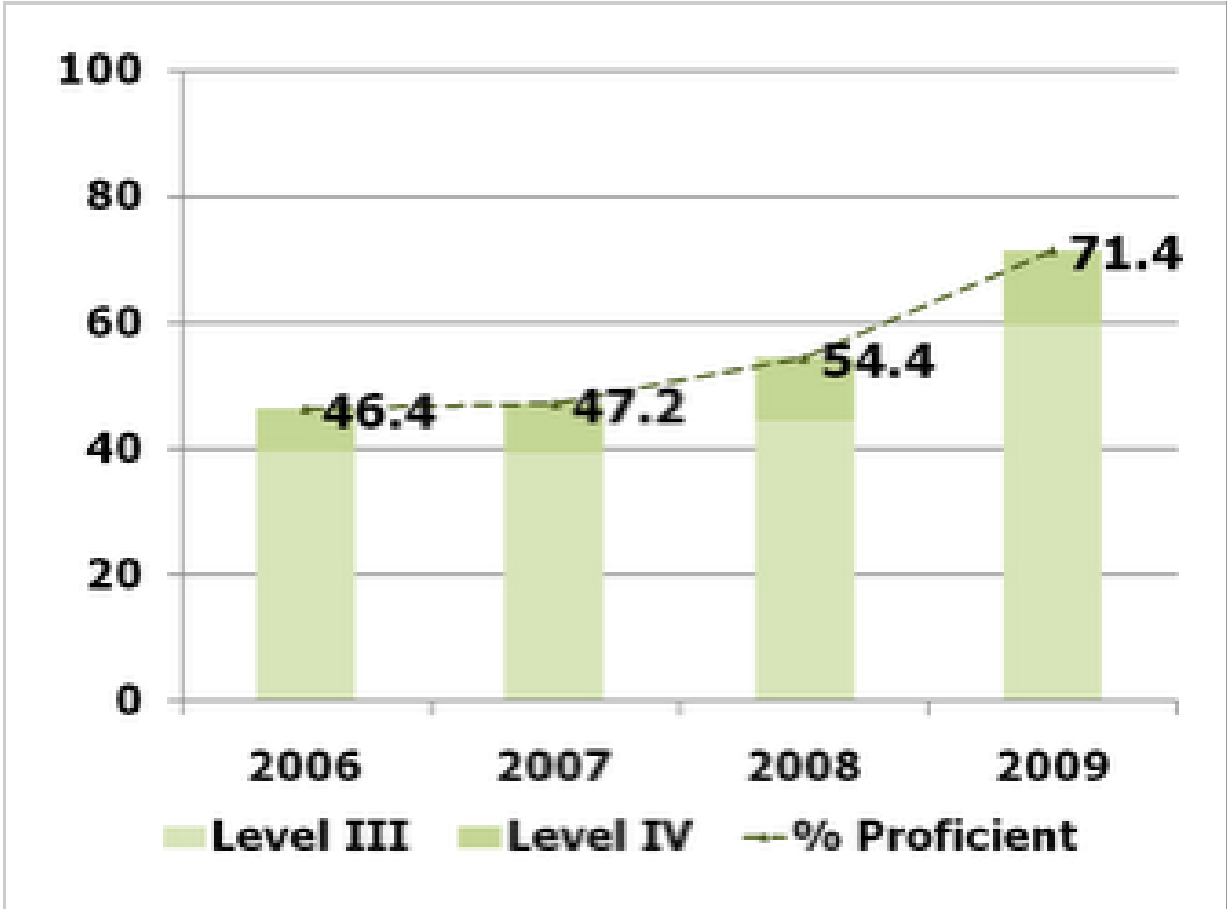
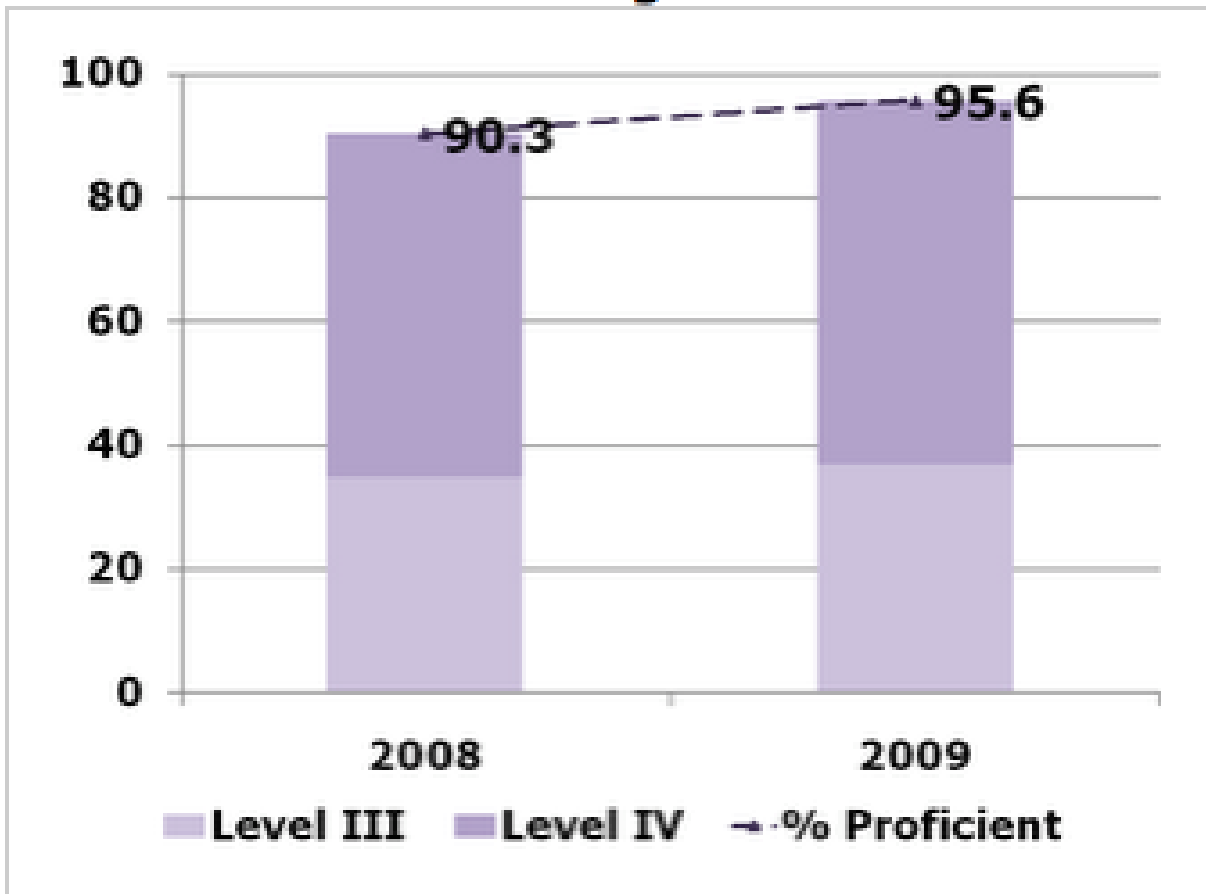


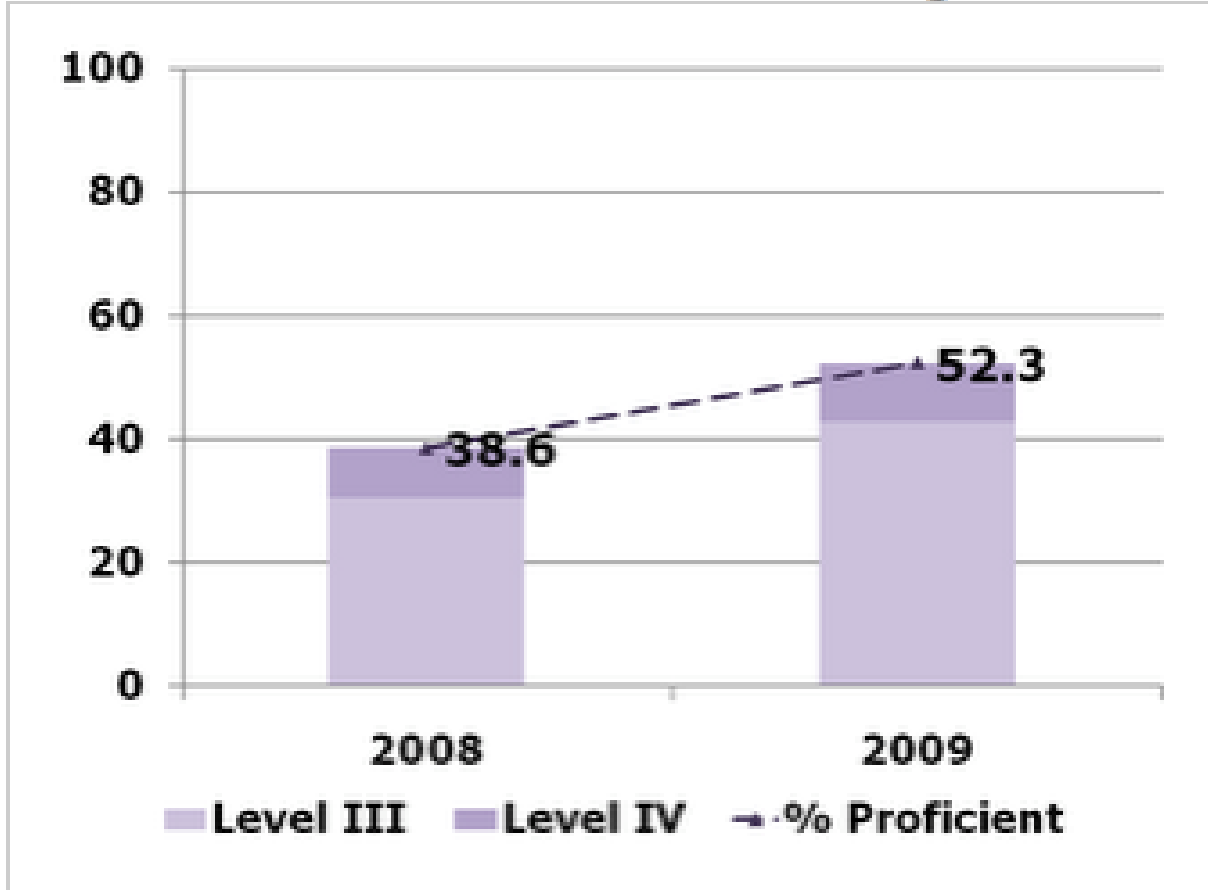
Figure 2. Chapel Hill district proficiency levels in math for African American students.

## White Students--Reading



*Figure 3.* Chapel Hill district proficiency levels in reading for white students.

## African American Students--Reading



*Figure 4.* Chapel Hill district proficiency levels in reading for African American students.

schools, there may not be 40 African American students to make a subgroup, therefore that subgroup is not measured at the school. The number of students needed to create a subgroup is 40, therefore many of the schools have met AYP, despite the fact that they also have an Achievement Gap (United States Department of Education, 2002).

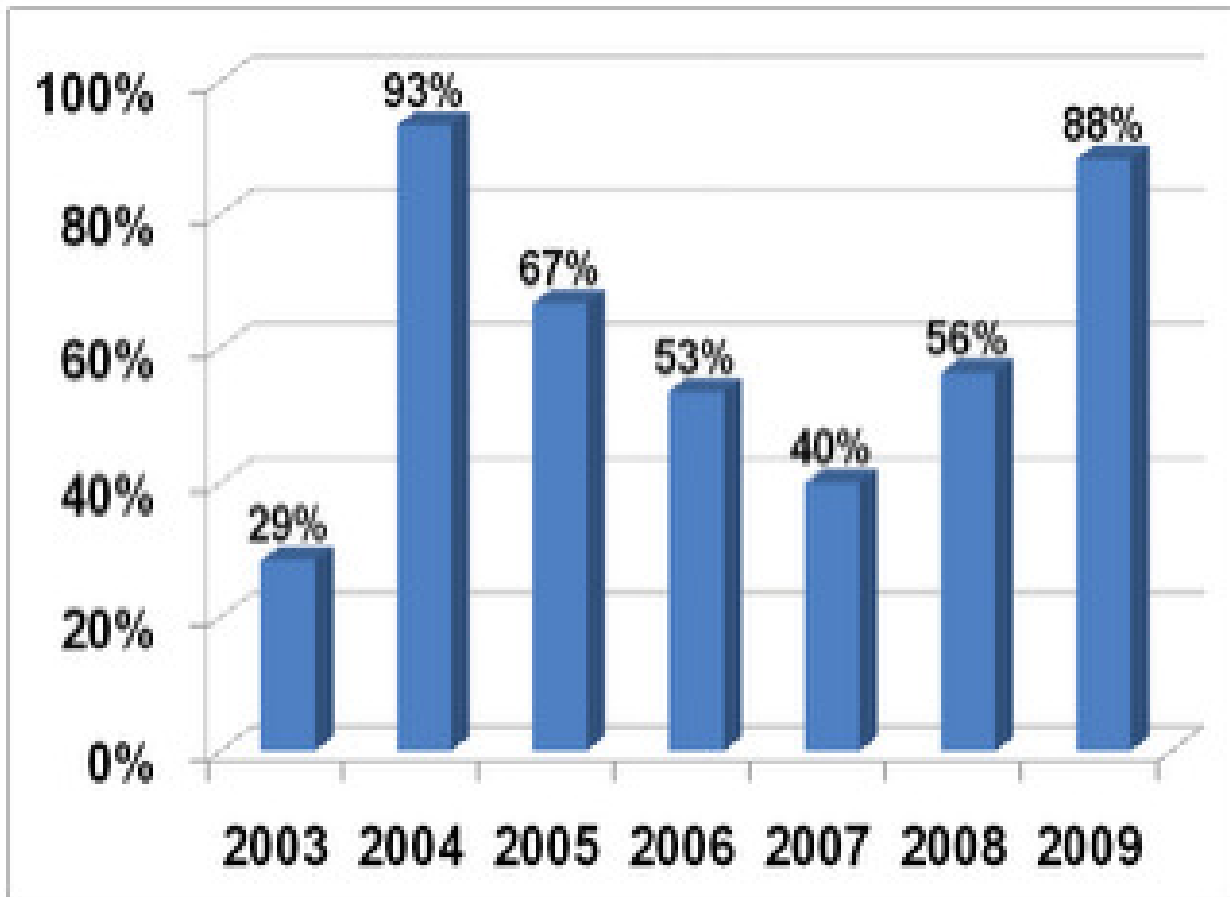
### **Percent of CHCCS Schools Meeting AYP**

As the No Child Left Behind standards increase, the district will continue to struggle with meeting AYP standards of achievement. Figure 5 shows the districts percentage of schools meeting the AYP standard over time. The law states that 100% of students will be proficient by the year 2014 (United States Department of Education, 2002). Figure 6 shows the Federal requirements for AYP proficiency levels by year. Tables 3 and 4 highlight the districts White and African American subgroups AYP status over time in reading and math.

### **Participants**

Participants in this study were collected from multiple elementary schools across the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School district that met the study criteria. The student samples included students who are African American as indicated on the school demographic reporting form or students who report being mixed race but identify with the African American race. The students are in grades three through eight and are the age ranges of eight to 12.

The treatment group consisted of the following schools: Carrboro Elementary, McDougle Elementary, Ephesus Elementary, and Scroggs Elementary. The treatment schools each have racial affinity groups for students that met the study qualifications.



*Figure 5. Percentage of Chapel Hill Carrboro City Schools meeting AYP Standards over time.*

	3rd - 8th Grade		10th Grade	
	Math	Reading	Math	Reading
2002 - 2003	74.6	69.8	54.9	52.0
2003 - 2004	74.6	69.8	54.9	52.0
2004 - 2005	81.0	76.7	70.8	35.4
2005 -2006	65.8	76.7	70.8	35.4
2006 - 2007	65.8	76.7	70.8	35.4
2007 - 2008	77.2	43.2	68.4	38.5
2008 - 2009	77.2	43.2	68.4	38.5
2009 - 2010	77.2	43.2	68.4	38.5
2010 - 2011	88.6	71.6	84.2	69.3
2011 - 2012	88.6	71.6	84.2	69.3
2012 - 2013	88.6	71.6	84.2	69.3
2013 - 2014	100	100	100	100

standards recalibrated--new test edition

*Figure 6.* Federal AYP Standards by year.



Table 3

*District 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade AYP for Math*

Year	Math AYP Standard	Overall Outcome	African American	White
2009	77.2	Met with Safe Harbor	91.9	94.7
2008	77.2	Not Met	86.6	90.4
2007	65.8	Not Met	84.2	89.1
2006	65.8	Not Met	82.5	85.1
2005	81	Met or Exceeded	93.9	93.6
2004	74.6	Met or Exceeded	94.8	92.7
2003	74.6	Not Met	93.1	92

Table 4

*District 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grade AYP Results for Reading*

Year	Reading AYP Standard	Overall Outcome	African American	White
2009	43.2	Met or Exceeded	85.2	90.2
2008	43.2	Not Met	78.5	86.7
2007	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	93.8	>95
2006	76.7	Not Met	93.4	>95
2005	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	93.2	>95
2004	68.9	Met or Exceeded	93.6	>95
2003	68.9	Not Met	92.1	92.6

- The existing affinity group has been in place more than one full school year. (Years)
- The group must focus on African American racial identity development. (Focus)
- The group must have a consistent meeting schedule of a minimum of one meeting per month. (Meetings)
- The groups must have established group leaders who have been involved with the group for two or more years. (Leaders)

The study used a convenience sample as well as matched pair samples. A convenience sample was most appropriate because the researcher had access to the schools and students who participated in groups. The convenience sample is categorized as nonprobability sampling, because the population elements are selected on the basis of their availability (Kalton, 1983). Kalton defines the most common type of nonprobability sample as a convenience sample. In a convenience sample, the researcher utilizes whatever individuals are available rather than selecting from the entire population. The schools selected to participate in the treatment group were a convenience sample because the schools and groups already existed.

The schools selected to be in the control group were selected by utilizing the matched sample method. The sample was pulled from schools that have similar demographics and academic achievement levels as the treatment schools. Matching is the process of identifying one or more characteristics that influence the outcome and assigning individuals to the experimental and control groups equally matched on that characteristic (Creswell, 2008). The control group schools are Frank Porter Graham Elementary, Morris Grove Elementary, and Estes Hills Elementary. These schools were related to the treatment schools in relative school size, student demographics, and student achievement levels.

Three district schools were not included in the study. Rashkis Elementary, Seawell

Elementary, and Glenwood Elementary will not be included in the control sample group. These schools were eliminated because their student demographic levels, achievement levels, and school size did not closely align with the treatment schools. These schools are outliers in the district's achievement data set as well as levels of free and reduced lunch students. They did not match the matched sample qualifications. Two of the schools also started affinity groups during the school year but the groups did not match the study qualifications.

Each of the school participants are included in the following section. The information included describes the school's racial affinity group as well as outline the school's historical data for African American students compared with white students.

### **Carrboro Elementary School**

Carrboro Elementary started racial affinity groups for African American students during the 2007-2008 school year. This is the 5<sup>th</sup> year the school has offered the groups for African American students. The girls participate in a group called "Me, Myself, and I", which is facilitated by an African American teacher within the school. The girls meet on a bi-weekly basis during the school day. The girls participate in a variety of activities throughout the school year. The boys participate in a group called "Boys in Action". During the first two years, an independent consultant facilitated the group. Currently, one male, African American teacher from the school and one White, male teacher from the school, facilitates the group. The boys' group meets on a bi-weekly basis during the school day. The groups discuss the following topics: Leadership, responsible behavior, society stereotypes, race, attitudes, and academic achievement. The groups participate in a variety of activities that include: A trip to Atlanta, a local farm, walk for education event, a local attraction called Frankies, Civil Rights museum, plays, a Washington, DC trip, aquarium trip, and a tree climbing class. The school utilizes a

variety of funding sources to pay for the group activities and students also conduct fundraising activities. Tables 5 and 6 highlight the achievement and AYP trends for Carrboro Elementary School. Table 7 shows the affinity group criteria for Carrboro Elementary.

### **Ephesus Elementary School**

The African American Boys' Affinity group at Ephesus Elementary has been in place for over 5 years. The group is called "Boys to Men" and is facilitated by an African American teacher assistant and the school counselor. The group serves African American boys in grades three through five. The group meets on a weekly basis during the school day. The group discusses topics such as: behavior, attitudes, role models in the community, and self-esteem. The group has enrichment opportunities that include: an educational day to a local college, local sporting events, a visit to a local courthouse, and an outing for lunch. The school utilizes a variety of funding sources to fund the group outings. Tables 8 and 9 highlight the achievement and AYP trends for Ephesus Elementary School. The affinity group criteria for Ephesus Elementary are found in Table 10.

### **McDougle Elementary School**

McDougle Elementary started racial affinity groups during the 2008-2009 school year. McDougle Elementary affinity group criteria are highlighted in Table 11. The 2010-2011 school year marks the third year the groups have been offered. The school started a boys group called "Brothers in Learning" which served African American boys in grades 3-5. The principal hired an independent consultant to meet with the boys once per week for 30 minutes during lunch period. The boys discussed current events, issues about race, educational issues, and issues the boys were facing. The group was informal and served as a support group for the boys. The boys met by grade level in small groups. During the year the school also designed service learning

Table 5

*Carrboro AYP Status History for Math*

Year	Math Standard	Overall Outcome	All	African American	White
2009	77.2	Met with Safe Harbor	89.2	57.6	97.3
2008	77.2	Not Met	83.1	47.1	94.1
2007	65.8	Not Met	82.4	63.2	94.7
2006	65.8	Met with Safe Harbor	78.9	59	92.4
2005	81	Met or Exceeded	94.5		>95.0
2004	74.6	Met or Exceeded	96.1		>95.0
2003	74.6	Met or Exceeded	90.3		>95.0

Table 6

*Carrboro AYP Status History for Reading*

Year	Reading Standard	Overall Outcome	All	African American	White
2009	43.2	Met or Exceeded	81.9	41.2	98.2
2008	43.2	Met with Safe Harbor	75.9	47.1	87.6
2007	76.7	Met with Safe Harbor	90.2	76.3	98
2006	76.7	Not Met	88	87.2	95.6
2005	76.7	Not Met	88.6		>95.0
2004	68.9	Met w/ Conf. Interval	90.8		>95.0
2003	68.9	Not Met	83.5	66	>95.0

Table 7

*Carrboro Elementary Racial Affinity Group Criteria*

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Criteria	School Status	Met Criteria
Years	5 years	Yes
Focus	Meeting topics include race and self-esteem	Yes
Meetings	Bi-weekly basis	Yes
Leaders	Leaders have been in place for 4+ years	Yes

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Table 8

*Ephesus AYP Status History for Math*

Year	Math Standard	Overall Outcome	All	African American	White
2009	77.2	Met or Exceeded	93	81.1	98.1
2008	77.2	Met w/ Conf. Interval	87.6	75	96.2
2007	65.8	Met or Exceeded	88.8	72.2	96.4
2006	65.8	Not Met	82.3	51.1	95.7
2005	81	Met w/ Conf. Interval	92.1		>95.0
2004	74.6	Met or Exceeded	94.9	88.6	>95.0
2003	74.6	Met or Exceeded	94.2		>95.0

Table 9

*Ephesus AYP Status History for Reading*

Year	Reading Standard	Overall Outcome	All	African American	White
2009	43.2	Met or Exceeded	84.5	56.8	93.3
2008	43.2	Met w/ Conf. Interval	74	43.6	88.7
2007	76.7	Met or Exceeded	93.2	75	98.2
2006	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	89.4	70.2	98.9
2005	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	91.1		>95.0
2004	68.9	Met w/ Conf. Interval	89.9	79.5	>95.0
2003	68.9	Not Met	89.8	57.5	>95.0

Table 10

*Ephesus Elementary Racial Affinity Group Criteria*

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Criteria	School Status	Met Criteria
Years	5+ years	Yes
Focus	Meeting topics include race and self-esteem	Yes
Meetings	Weekly basis	Yes
Leaders	Leaders have been in place for 5+ years	Yes

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Table 11

*McDougle Elementary Racial Affinity Group Criteria*

Criteria	School Status	Met Criteria
Years	3 years	Yes
Focus	Meeting topics include race and self-esteem	Yes
Meetings	Bi-weekly basis typical a min. of monthly	Yes
Leaders	Leaders have been in place for 3 years	Yes

projects for the students to lead. The boys did grounds clean-up, food drives, and served as ambassadors for school-wide events. The boys also took a trip to a Historically African American College as well as a college football game. That same year, the school started an African American girls' group called S. T. A. R. S., which stands for Sisters Together Achieving Remarkable Success. The group was organized by the principal and was facilitated by an African American teacher and teacher assistant. The girls' group served students in grades 3-5. The girls met once per month on Saturday mornings. The girls spent a great deal of time discussing self-esteem, race issues, manners, and other issues the girls brought up. A local African American sorority Alumni group also supported the group. The girls participated in several service learning activities. They organized a food drive, baked bread for the homeless, and served as ambassadors for multiple school events. The girls also participated in a few cultural outings including a trip to the Nutcracker ballet, visiting the North Carolina Museum of Art, an etiquette luncheon at Mama Dip's restaurant, and a trip to see the Alvin Ailey African American ballet theater. The school noticed a significant increase in parent participation in school events after the start of the girls' group. The year ended with a school sleepover where the girls spent the night in the school with group leaders and administration. This activity has been the highlight of the group. The groups at McDougle are funded by a variety of funding sources including: state dropout prevention funds, federal Title I funding, school general funds, state instructional funds, and funds raised from fundraisers for the groups. Tables 12 and 13 highlight the achievement and AYP trends for McDougle Elementary School.

Table 12

*McDougle AYP Status History for Math*

Year	Math Standard	Overall Outcome	All	African American	White
2009	77.2	Met with Safe Harbor	88.4	57.1	98.9
2008	77.2	Not Met	80.6	33.3	94.5
2007	65.8	Not Met	85.2	29.4	94.8
2006	65.8	Met with Safe Harbor	83.9	45.5	93.7
2005	81	Met w/ Conf. Interval	94.8	80	>95.0
2004	74.6	Met w/ Conf. Interval	94.7	72.7	>95.0
2003	74.6	Met or Exceeded	>95.0		>95.0

Table 13

*McDougle AYP Status History for Reading*

Year	Reading Standard	Overall Outcome	All	African American	White
2009	43.2	Met or Exceeded	81.8	51	94.6
2008	43.2	Not Met	74.2	33.3	89.6
2007	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	91.7	61.8	97.6
2006	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	93.7	72.7	98
2005	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	92.1	71.1	>95.0
2004	68.9	Met or Exceeded	93.4	72.7	>95.0
2003	68.9	Met or Exceeded	94.1	75	>95.0

## **Scroggs Elementary School**

The African American affinity group at Scroggs elementary has been in place for three years. The Scroggs affinity group criteria is highlighted in Table 14. The Boys' group is called BET. The girls' group is called Sisters' Circle.

The group includes African American students in grades 3-5 or students who are mixed race that identify as African American. The groups meet once per week for approximately 30 minutes during the school day. The groups are lead by the school counselor and a teacher assistant. The group sessions include discussions around the following topics: self esteem, attitudes, successful African American people, leadership, behavior, and school related skills. The groups participate in various school activities that include: decorating the school for holidays or special events like Black History month, creating a quilt of dreams, helping with the news channel, etc. The groups at Scroggs do not participate in as many enrichment activities outside of school as a few of the other groups did. The school does not have any specific funding sources for the groups. The group leaders have used their own funds or PTA funds to cover expenses. Tables 15 and 16 highlight the achievement and AYP trends for Scroggs Elementary School.

This section reviewed the participants of the study and the qualification of each school affinity group. The following section outlines the data sources of the study and specific information about the North Carolina End of Grade Assessment Program.

### **Data Sources**

The research study included both qualitative and quantitative data sources. The study utilized some pre-existing data as well as data collection methods and procedures. The pre-



Table 14

*Scroggs Elementary Racial Affinity Group Criteria*

Criteria	School Status	Met Criteria
Years	3 years	Yes
Focus	Meeting topics include race and self-esteem	Yes
Meetings	Weekly basis	Yes
Leaders	Leaders have been in place for 3 years	Yes

Table 15

*Scroggs AYP Status History for Math*

Year	Math Standard	Overall Outcome	All	African American	White
2009	77.2	Met w/ Conf. Interval	91.2	50	96.3
2008	77.2	Met with Safe Harbor	90.8	70.7	94.7
2007	65.8	Met w/ Conf. Interval	91.4	76.5	96.6
2006	65.8	Met with Safe Harbor	87.8	71.4	91.9
2005	81	Met or Exceeded	>95.0		>95.0
2004	74.6	Met or Exceeded	96.7		>95.0
2003	74.6	Met or Exceeded	95		>95.0

Table 16

*Scroggs AYP Status History for Reading*

Year	Reading Standard	Overall Outcome	All	African American	White
2009	43.2	Met or Exceeded	85.7	50	95.8
2008	43.2	Met or Exceeded	83.2	42.1	93.3
2007	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	94.3	88.2	99
2006	76.7	Met w/ Conf. Interval	92.9	78.9	97.1
2005	76.7	Met or Exceeded	>95.0		>95.0
2004	68.9	Met or Exceeded	94.7		>95.0
2003	68.9	Met or Exceeded	92.8		>95.0

existing data utilizes district End of Grade assessment results in reading and math, including scale scores, achievement levels, and growth rates for individual students in grades three through five. The data collection process involves collecting qualitative data from focus groups within each of the treatment schools. Data was collected from parents, students, and group leaders. The qualitative data included open-ended questions, storytelling/narrative responses, as well as affinity group descriptions. The following section outlines information related to the North Carolina End of Grade Assessment data.

### **North Carolina Assessment History**

In 1995 the North Carolina General Assembly directed the State Board of Education to develop a restructuring plan for public education. The State Board conducted an in-depth study involving public hearings, surveys and interviews; reviewed current mandates and operating procedures; and undertook a major organizational analysis to relate all education operations to the mission. In May 1995, the New ABCs of Public Education outlined the framework for a dramatic restructuring. In 1996 One hundred eight schools in ten school districts piloted The New ABCs of Public Education assessments. The General Assembly approved the State Board's plan and put into law the School-Based Management and Accountability Program (the ABCs). In 1997 the ABCs implementation began for schools with grades K-8. The model included growth and performance proficiency composites and included EOG Reading and Mathematics and Writing at Grade 4.

### **Proficiency Levels from End of Grade Assessments**

The study utilizes descriptive statics to analyze the proficiency levels of African American students in grades 3, 4, and 5. The frequency of level III and IV achievement levels

are analyzed comparing the students who participated in the affinity groups against like peers who did not participate.

The North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests are designed to measure student performance on the goals, objectives, and grade-level competencies specified in the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. The End of Grade Test in the areas of reading, math, and science measure proficiency in North Carolina. This test created by the North Carolina Department of Instruction and is mandated for all students in grades three through eight. This study included math and reading proficiency levels for grades three through eight.

The achievement levels were built prior to the beginning of the ABCs accountability model. They were structured by using the percent of students whom the teachers rated into one of four achievement levels based on descriptions of the achievement levels (Level I, II, III, IV). These percentages were applied to the distribution of student scores so that, in the standard setting year, the same percentage of students were placed in Achievement Level I by test score as by teacher judgment. As test editions changed, the new versions of the test were equated to the old versions. This equating has allowed North Carolina to graph continuous trend data across the eight years of the ABCs Accountability Program.

Proficiency levels are given for each subject area test and a level III or IV is considered proficient. The achievement levels are derived from the student developmental scale scores for each test. Each subject area test has a developmental scale score band for each achievement level. Figure 7 includes an example of how achievement levels are derived from developmental scale scores.

**Achievement Level Ranges for the North Carolina End-of-Grade Tests  
Mathematics at Grades 3–8**

Subject/Grade		Level I	Level II	Level III	Level IV
<b>Mathematics</b> (Starting with the 2005-06 school year)	3	311-328	329-338	339-351	352-370
	4	319-335	336-344	345-357	358-374
	5	326-340	341-350	351-362	363-378
	6	328-341	342-351	352-363	364-381
	7	332-345	346-354	355-366	367-383
	8	332-348	349-356	357-367	368-384

*HSP-C-018 May 3, 2007*

*Figure 7.* Achievement levels for the North Carolina End of Grade Test for mathematics.

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The achievement levels for the North Carolina End of Grade Assessment are described below from the parent information section of the NC Department of Public Instruction website ([www.ncdpi.com](http://www.ncdpi.com)).

- *Achievement Level I* - Students performing at this level do not have sufficient mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area to be successful at the next grade level.
- *Achievement Level II* - Students performing at this level demonstrate inconsistent mastery of knowledge and skills in this subject area and are minimally prepared to be successful at the next grade level.
- *Achievement Level III* - Students performing at this level consistently demonstrate mastery of grade level subject matter and skills and are well prepared for the next grade level.
- *Achievement Level IV* - Students performing at this level consistently perform in a superior manner clearly beyond that required to be proficient at grade level work.

### **Individual Student Growth Data or Academic Change**

The research also included student growth data from the End of Grade Assessment of math and reading. This data is utilized to determine if there are statistical differences in individual student growth rates for African American students who participated in an affinity group as compared with like peers who did not participate in a group.

The current North Carolina accountability model uses the term “growth” as academic change. The academic change is based on an average of the previous two years’ assessments. If there is only one previous year’s EOG test data available, the expectation for change will be based on one previous assessment. The formulas factor in an adjustment for regression to the

mean (a student who performs above or below the mean score on one EOG will likely score closer to the mean on a subsequent EOG).

### **The Current Formula(s)**

The new North Carolina growth formula uses a standardized scale score called the *c* score to measure relative student performance instead of the original developmental scale score. The *c*-score is compared to a *z*-score in that it standardizes how far and in what direction the student's score is from the mean expected score.

Academic change or growth is expressed as the difference between a student's actual *c-scale* score for the current year and the student's average of two previous assessments with a correction for regression toward the mean. A positive academic change indicates a gain in academic achievement, while a negative academic change indicates a loss in academic achievement from the previous two years. The simplified formula to determine academic change or individual student growth is:

$$AC = CSc\text{-scale} - (0.92 \times ATPAc\text{-scale})$$

Where

AC = academic change

CS = current score

ATPA = average of two previous assessment scores

A modification is made to the formula for determining academic change in grade 3 and for any instance when only one previous year's EOG score is available. The formula, adjusted for one previous year's assessment score, is:

$$AC = CSc\text{-scale} - (0.82 \times PA\ c\text{-scale})$$



Where:

AC = academic change

CS = current score

PA = previous assessment score

(NCDPI Accountability Services 3/8/5/10)

## **Data Analysis**

### **Quantitative Data**

The quantitative research is organized and evaluated utilizing descriptive statistics and the SPSS program. The research questions were analyzed using an independent 2-tailed t-test and ANOVA. All analyses were conducted with PASW Statistics 18, Release Version 18.0. The researcher compared achievement scores for the North Carolina End of Grade test for students who participated in a racial affinity group and those students who were of the same race but did not participate in the affinity groups for the 2008-2010 school years. The researcher also collected student growth data to measure the significance of the student growth and number of years participating in a racial affinity group. An independent 2-tailed T test was utilized to evaluate the mean scores and determined if there were any differences among the groups. The research compared the number of years each student who participated in a group and measured the mean scores for each group in relation to the number of years of participation utilizing an ANOVA.

Some qualitative data was also collected during focus group sessions and phone conversations for each of the treatment schools. The focus groups were held with parents, students, and group leaders. Questions were recorded and coded so they could be included in the data analysis.

## **Qualitative Data**

The qualitative data was collected during a focus group session and via telephone interviews. It is important to note that the qualitative data analysis was only conducted on the treatment group of the study. The qualitative data collection was taken from a sample of students who participated in affinity groups at one of the treatment schools during the 2008-2010 school years. Every family in the treatment group of 97 students was contacted and only 37 responses from 31 individual families were given. The information collected in the focus group was recorded utilizing an iPod recording device and an external microphone. The data was transcribed and then coded. Creswell (2008) describes coding as a process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data. The qualitative data was verified utilizing interrater reliability methods. Creswell (2008) describes this method as two or more individuals who will observe and individual's behavior or process and record scores, and then the scores observed are compared to determine whether they are similar. The researcher obtained an interrater reliability score of .93. Other qualitative data included narrative story telling. During the focus group sessions and phone interviews the facilitator asked parents to describe the changes in student attitudes and behaviors. This data was best shared as a narrative story. Creswell (2008) describes this method as a first person oral telling or retelling of events related to the personal or social experiences related to the problem. These stories often have a beginning, middle, and end.

### **Data Analysis for Each Research Question**

1. *Do students have higher self-esteem and racial identity as a result of the affinity groups?* This information was collected through focus group data collection, telephone interviews, and student surveys. The information was coded and themes were analyzed from the

transcriptions. Tags were associated with student self esteem and racial identity. The parents of the students, group leaders, and students were asked questions regarding racial identity development. The following information from the research was utilized to code the racial identity stages. African Americans typically progress through the following stages of identity development: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion, Internalization, Integrative (Helms, 1995).

*Pre-Encounter:* A white racial reference group orientation and rejection of African Americans as such and obliviousness to socioracial concerns. Ex. Child might rather have a white doll than a black one or might ask for blonde hair.

*Encounter:* Ambivalence and confusion regarding racial identity and repression of anxiety-provoking racial information. Ex. Might ask many questions about their race, but does not seem to understand racial discrimination when it occurs.

*Immersion:* An African American racial reference group orientation and rejection of whites, an externally defined racial identity and hyper vigilance toward racial stimuli. Ex. Beginning to accept own race, but rejects the other race. Very in tune with racial injustice.

*Internalization:* An African American racial reference group orientation without rejection of whites, internally defined racial identity, and flexibility and objectivity regarding racial information. Ex. Identifies with African Americans but also values other races. Identifies self as being black. Can look at racial issues around them and understand they are not defined by what happens around them.

*Integrative Awareness:* Valuing of one's own collective identities and empathy and collaboration with other oppressed groups. Ex. Identifies with own race, accepts other races, and begins to have feelings for other oppressed groups. Begins to be an advocate for others.

The students and parents were asked questions regarding the students' level of self-esteem.

Which level do you think best describes your child's level of self-esteem?

Low- Stereotype threat level- Students might think lower of themselves based on social norms around them. Ex. If told that African American students do poor in school the student might believe this and actually perform lower than their capability.

Medium- Acting White level- Student might be capable of high quality work and performs high but worries about being called "white" by peers.

High- Integrative level- Student is socially aware of surroundings but is able to find value from within despite external pressures.

2. *Do African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher on North Carolina End of Grade assessments than students who do not participate?* The data collected was gathered from the school district testing and accountability office. The End of Grade Test results for reading and math were analyzed. The overall proficiency measure of 1, 2, 3 and 4 were compared for each subject area as well as each subject area overall scale score. A two tailed T test analysis was utilized to compare the overall scale scores and proficiency rates for students who participated in an affinity group as compared to students who did not. In order to reject the null hypothesis an p value of .05 or lower was needed to show significance.

3. *Do students who have participated in affinity groups for a longer period of time have higher growth rates or proficiency rates on the reading and math portion of the North Carolina End of Grade assessment?* A two tailed T test analysis was conducted to compare the overall growth rates to the number of years a student participated in a school affinity group. In order to reject the null hypothesis an p value of .05 or lower was needed to show significance. An

ANOVA analysis was also utilized to measure the variable of time spent in a group if the number of years or groups should be greater than 2. The testing year of 2010-2011 was selected as the sample year to obtain the largest sample size. Data was needed across multiple years for test subjects.

### **Confidentiality and Institutional Board Requirement Consideration**

Appropriate measures were taken throughout this research study to ensure that all Institutional Review Board guidelines are followed. IRB approval was obtained. The researcher worked closely with the school district director of accountability in order to obtain the necessary information for this study. The researcher provided the district with IRB information and a file was created to record the purpose of the study as well as document any statistical tests run. Each school principal signed a participation release and parents and students gave verbal permission to participate in the study. The database compiled by the district was stripped of any student identification measures once the data was coded. The researcher was given student names for the first phase of the data collection. Once the codes were assigned for students participating in the affinity groups, the names were removed. The researcher kept this information on a secure E-Pirate drive supplied by the University. The data from the study was not stored on any public or school affiliated equipment or devices. Once the final coding was completed, all original files with student identification were destroyed.

Just as it is important to recognize the measures to ensure confidentiality within the research study; it is also important to outline the limitations within a study. The following section reviews the limitations of this research study and the measures enforced to mitigate these issues.

## **Study Limitations**

Careful consideration was given in the creation of the research proposal and design. Despite these considerations, there are several noted limitations for this research study. This study focused on African American students despite the fact that other groups could also benefit. A great deal of research was uncovered in the area of Asian and Hispanic student racial identity development. When looking at student achievement data regarding standardized tests, there could be multiple factors contributing to the level of achievement. For example, student involvement in other school programs such as tutoring, mentoring, enrichment clubs, or other special programs could also increase student achievement. Other school factors such as teacher effectiveness, school climate, effectiveness of administration, and current curriculum choices could also determine the level of student achievement. Second, the overall effectiveness of each affinity group was not measured. The researcher did not measure the quality of each program and no qualifiers or standards are set by the district for affinity groups. Each school affinity group did have to meet some general standards to be included in the study, but this did not measure the quality of the programming. Each school was required to participate only if the following conditions had been met: the affinity group had been established more than one full school year, the group has a formal schedule and meeting format, the group has an established leader, the group is dedicated to speaking about race as it applies to the educational setting, and the groups must follow all district policies regarding equal access. The final limitation of this study that should be noted is possible researcher bias. Although the researcher made every attempt to obtain quality data, it should be noted that the researcher has a close connection to the school and district. While writing and conducting this study, the researcher was a principal at one of the targeted schools. Other schools were included in this study in an attempt to reduce the

level of bias. The researcher also established the racial affinity groups at two of the targeted schools, and therefore has an established belief that these groups are effective. The researcher is passionate about minority student achievement and entered the research study in hopes that the research would provide information that would be helpful in her mission to educate all children effectively.

## **CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS**

This study examined qualitative and quantitative data to respond to three research questions that explore the benefits and impact of racial affinity groups on achievement. The literature review revealed that research shows that students who participate in racial affinity groups have higher self-esteem, racial identity, and achievement. The majority of research, however, was conducted at the high school and college level. This study adds to the existing research by including research conducted at the elementary and middle school levels.

This study included student achievement scores from the North Carolina End of Grade Assessments in the area of reading and math. The data included was collected from the Chapel Hill Carrboro City school district for the testing years of 2008-2010. The North Carolina End of Grade Tests were implemented in conjunction with the ABCs of Public Education accountability system in 1996. These tests were utilized to measure student overall proficiency levels in a subject area. These tests also measured student growth, or the change in performance from year to year. (NCDPI, 2007). Material covered on the North Carolina End of Grade assessments is aligned to the North Carolina Standard Course of Study curriculum.

This chapter details the procedures utilized in this study for data collection and analysis. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. Do students have higher self-efficacy and racial identity as a result of the affinity groups?
2. Do African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher on North Carolina End of Grade assessments than students who do not participate?
3. Do students who have participated in affinity groups longer have higher growth rates or proficiency rates on the North Carolina End of Grade assessment?



## **Description of the Study Participants**

The participants in this study (n=230) were selected from third through eighth grades in the Chapel Hill Carrboro City school district in North Carolina. The study included four schools in the test population. Carrboro Elementary, McDougle Elementary, Ephesus Elementary, and Scroggs Elementary were selected as the study schools as they met the study criteria outlined in chapter 3.

Test Population Criteria:

- The existing affinity group has been in place more than one full school year. (Years)
- The group must focus on African American racial identity development. (Focus)
- The group must have a consistent meeting schedule of a minimum of one meeting per month. (Meetings)
- The groups must have established group leaders who have been involved with the group for two or more years. (Leaders)

Three district schools were utilized as control schools. Frank Porter Graham Elementary, Morris Grove Elementary, and Estes Hills Elementary were selected as the control schools because they did not have affinity groups that met the research study qualifications yet the student population was similar to the population of the schools in this study. Three district schools were excluded from the study because they did not meet study criteria and the schools were outliers for the district demographics and data, therefore Glenwood, Rashkis, and Seawell Elementary schools were not included in the study.

The study participants consisted of 230 third through eighth grade students in the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School district in the testing years of 2008-2010. Table 17 details the descriptive statistics for the study participants. The quantitative analysis included 97 students

Table 17

*Descriptive Statistics for Affinity Group Participants*

Affinity Group Membership	Yes (Test Gr.)	No (Control Gr.)	Total
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	51	58	109
Female	46	75	121
Total	97	133	230
<b>Grade</b>			
3	33	57	90
4	61	95	156
5	85	107	192
6	52	57	109
7	24	22	46

*Note.* Note test subjects are counted over the span of 3 years from 2008-2010, so each student could be counted up to 3 times for concurrent data analysis.

who participated in affinity groups during the tested years or had previously been in a group in one of the test population schools. The control group included 133 students who did not participate in affinity groups during the testing years of 2008-2010 or had not participated in an affinity group in previous years from 2008-2010. The study had 109 male participants and 121 female participants. Students who took an alternative version of the End of Grade test were not in the study because the alternate tests do not have a scale score that can be standardized or compared to the regular test scores. Likewise, some students were excluded if they did not have test scores for all three testing years of 2008-2010 because this study also measured student growth, which requires multiple years of data.

The independent variable divided the participants into two groups. Students who participated in an affinity group are labeled as (Y) and students who did not participate in an affinity group are labeled as (N). The test group (Y) included 42% (n=97) of the study participants. The control group (N) included 58% (n=133) of the study participants see Table 17.

The study also consisted of qualitative data that included focus groups and phone interviews of the parents who participated in the affinity groups as well as student interviews and surveys. Table 18 includes descriptive statistics for the qualitative participants. The focus groups and phone interviews consisted of n=37 or overall 38% of the total test group population n=97 and represented 31 different families. Female students represented n=27 or 73% of the population and male represented n=10 or 27% of the population. All but one of the parents interviewed were female.

### **Description of Student Achievement Data**

The study includes achievement data for the years 2008-2010. Student achievement data was made available through the testing and accountability office. Student growth or academic

Table 18

*Descriptive Statistics for Qualitative Focus Group and Interview Participants*

Grade	Total	Male	Female
3	9	3	6
4	5	1	4
5	10	3	7
6	5	0	5
7	5	2	3
8	3	1	2
Totals	37	10	27

*Note.* \*Gender denotes the gender of the student participating, not the parent.

change was utilized. Academic change or growth is expressed as the difference between a student's actual *c-scale* score for the current year and the student's average of two previous assessments with a correction for regression toward the mean. A positive academic change indicates a gain in academic achievement, while a negative academic change indicates a loss in academic achievement from the previous two years. Student overall achievement levels for reading and math were also utilized. Proficiency levels are given for each subject area test and a level III or IV is considered proficient. The achievement levels are derived from the student developmental scale scores for each test. Each subject area test has a developmental scale score band for each achievement level.

Due to the varying scale score levels depending on norming year of a single test, a standardized z score was created for each norming year for both reading and math. This was calculated by taking the current student scale score and then subtracting the state norming year mean and finally dividing by the state norming year standard deviation. This gives each grade and year a standardized scale z score range that can be utilized to run the study analysis. In the study tables and analysis this standardized scale score will be referred to as the "standard" score.

### **Analysis of Data**

Analysis of Research Question #1: 1. *Do students have higher self-esteem and racial identity as a result of the affinity groups?*

Parents (n=31) and students (n=37) who participated in the focus groups or phone interviews were asked a series of questions to determine the students' level of racial identity development and self esteem. See appendix D and F for parent and student questions. Parents were asked if they felt the group did or did not impact the level of self esteem and racial identity development and were then asked to select which level they felt best described their child. For

self esteem a level of low, medium, and high were utilized with descriptors for each relating specifically to African Americans from the literature review. A specific scale such as the Rosenberg was not utilized specifically because every student was not surveyed and the scale was not developmentally appropriate for students who were only 8 years old and did not apply specifically to African Americans. The level of low was defined by stereotype threat (Steele, 1997), the medium level was defined as acting white (Ogbu, 2003), and the high level was defined as the integration and awareness level (Helms, 1995), all of which were defined in the chapter 2 of the study. Racial identity was measured by the 5 levels of racial identity development from the Helm's model described in the literature review section (Helms, 1995). A score of 1 represented the pre-encounter level, 2 represented the encounter level, 3 represented the immersion level, 4 represented the internalization level, and 5 represented the integrative awareness level. The various levels of self esteem and racial identity development were also cross-referenced with the years of group membership as well as parent open ended responses. Group leaders were also asked if they felt that overall racial identity development and self-esteem were impacted by the affinity groups but were not asked to use the rating scale that the parents utilized. Table 19 shows the descriptive statistics for the parent responses for self esteem and racial identity levels. Students were asked if the affinity groups increased their self esteem or increased their racial identity development. Table 20 shows the response frequency for the student questions.

Parents, students, and group leaders were also asked to describe the overall benefits of the affinity groups during the focus groups and phone interviews. A focus group was held at McDougle Elementary School that included 3 parents and 3 students who participated in affinity groups. The focus group sessions were recorded using an iPod recording device and external

Table 19

*Parent Responses for Racial Identity Levels and Self-Esteem Levels of Students*

Self Esteem	Totals	<i>Racial Identity Levels 1-5 from Helm's Model</i>				
		1	2	3	4	5
High	11	0	0	0	6	5
Medium	16	0	0	5	9	2
Low	4	1	1	2	0	0
Totals	31	1	1	7	15	7

Table 20

*Student Responses to Self-Esteem and Racial Identity Questions During Focus Groups and Phone Interviews*

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Does group increase self-esteem?	32	3	2
Does group increase racial identity?	21	6	10
Do you enjoy the group	37	0	0
Do you wish to remain in the group	37	0	0



microphone. After the focus group notices for the other school locations did not bring participants, the original IRB proposal was amended to include phone interviews so the larger sample could be obtained. The phone interviews (n=28 parents and n=34 students) were conducted on speaker phone, once verbal assent was given and recorded utilizing an iPod recording device and external microphone. These responses were recorded and then coded to find emerging themes. Each question was transcribed and then coded for common themes. Codes were utilized for the following themes: RI- Racial Identity, SE- Self Esteem, SA- student achievement, RM- role models, UR- understands race, EXP- Provided Experiences, FR- Friendship Issues, INV- Involvement in School. Selected quotes from these responses are recorded below.

Every parent(n=31) and group leader (n=6) indicated that they felt the affinity group helped children develop a stronger sense of racial identity development. When asked if they also felt the group directly increased the student's level of self esteem, 27 parents responded yes and 4 parents responded that they did not think the group was directly responsible for increasing self esteem. Group leaders largely felt that the affinity group increased self-esteem, 1 of the 6 leaders felt that self-esteem did not increase as a result of the group. The data collected from the focus groups and phone interviews showed that parents also indicated a strong correlation between high self-esteem and higher levels of racial identity development, which supports much of the research revealed in the literature review. Table 19 shows the responses for racial identity and self-esteem levels. The data highlights the correlation that a higher racial identity level also resulted in a higher self-esteem level. Some of this research suggests that group affiliation and recognition of self result in high self-esteem and academic improvement particularly in low performing African American students (Demo & Parker, 1987; Finn & Rock, 1997; Oyserman et

al., 1995). Every student who perceived himself as having a high self-esteem rating also had a level 4 or 5 in racial identity development on the Helms Model (Helms, 1995). It can be concluded that parents felt that their children were developing racial identity development as a result of the group, which also increased self-esteem.

Students had a difficult time with the questions related to racial identity development. A brief description was given to students to explain the meaning of racial identity. See Appendix F for full student questions. “*Racial identity is defined as the process by which individuals come to understand his/her race and accept their own race.*” Out of 37 students questioned, 21 believed that the group helped them with their identity. Ten students responded they were not sure, and 6 responded no. When asked if the group assisted with self esteem, the students were able to answer more definitively. The students were given a brief definition of self-esteem from the research. See appendix F for full student questions. “*Self-esteem is defined as how you feel about yourself as a student within the school.*” Thirty-two of 37 students said the group assisted them with self esteem. Two students said they were not sure, and 3 said no. Thirty-seven of 37 students responded that they enjoyed the group and wanted to see it continue.

Parents, students, and group leaders were asked to describe the overall benefits of the affinity groups during the focus groups and phone interviews. These responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded to find emerging themes. The analysis revealed 3 major themes from parents and group leaders: the group provided positive racial role models for the students, the students were specifically taught about race and have a better understanding of race, and the students participated in activities that gave them experiences they might not otherwise have. Table 21 shows the qualitative responses for each theme. Specific quotations from participants are included below for each major theme.

Table 21

*Benefits of Affinity Groups Reported by Parents and Group Leaders During Focus Groups and Phone Interviews*

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Theme	Parents	Group Leaders
Positive Role Models	29	5
Increased Understanding of Race	21	5
Experiences and Opportunities	25	6

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## **Theme 1: Positive Racial Role Models**

Many of the respondents talked about the importance of students having positive role models in school. The group leaders and parents discussed how the affinity groups assisted with the students having another person at school to look up to and trust. Some discussions repeated the research from Wyngaard (2007), suggesting that having a positive role model is vital for the success of African American students. Parents frequently discussed that schools don't have enough positive black role models. Group leaders expressed their desire to use the affinity groups as a way to introduce these positive role models.

- “My son does not have a positive black role model in his life. It was helpful for him to have a successful, male role model to guide him during his elementary years. He looked up to the teacher and wants to one day be more like him.”
- “Growing up, I never had many positive role models that looked like me. I am happy to know that my daughter has a teacher like Mrs. X to help her know what it means to be a black woman in Chapel Hill. I often felt growing up here that I was invisible and I know that my daughter does not feel that way because of the role models she has been given.”
- “All you see on the TV is how black folk are just bad. When I was growing up I had only white teachers. I like that the group leader is black and can show my child what it means to be smart, successful, and proud.”
- “I am so glad that my son had 2 positive role models that were male because of this program. My son talked about Mr. X at home and really enjoyed the activities in the group.”

- “Some of our students have never seen a successful black person. It is important for our groups to show children that there are successful people of color all around them.”
- “We worked hard to introduce a variety of positive role models in our groups. We brought in professionals to showcase a variety of different careers. Students were able to see many people in the community who looked like them.”
- “Our group had a mission to bring in positive role models. We used former students and community members to help students set life goals and academic goals.”

## **Theme 2: Understanding Race**

During focus group and phone interviews, participants discussed the importance of students understanding race. Parents discussed how they frequently share with their children how race can impact their lives. This is similar to the research found in the literature review from Bowman and Howard (1985) who discovered through a quantitative study that African American youth, who had been given instruction, emphasizing group affiliation and pride and awareness of social inequities, had higher achievement. Bowman and Howard learned that discussions about race inside the family unit were important factors for student success. Group leaders discussed the importance of schools utilizing messages regarding race with students. Parents and group leaders agreed that schools do not talk about race enough. Research from Patricia Marshal, (2002) concluded that schools need to include explicit instruction regarding race.

- “I liked that Mrs. X talked to my daughter about race. They looked at music videos and talked about how black women are often shown in a negative way in the media.

Mrs. X and Mrs. X talked to my child about learning about her culture and how to be proud in a way that can be accepted.”

- “I think my son knows more about his race now than I do as a result of the group. He comes home telling me about things that I never knew. I like that the group leaders have shown him about race and how the world will view him. As a mom, I sometimes worry about how others view him but I am not always sure how to tell him that. The group leaders were able to give my son first hand experiences that can help my son know how to respond when he has these same experiences. There are just some things that I can not teach my son just like there are some things that you, as a white woman can not teach my son. The group leaders helped my son with these things and I am grateful for that.”
- “My daughter used to talk about how she did not like being black and how she wished she was different. Since being in the group with other girls like her I think she understands herself better and she does not seem to make these negative comments anymore. I think she has learned more about her own race and now she is not so ashamed of it.”
- “My family always talks about how we should be proud of our race, but my daughter has always wanted to be different. She does not always fit in with her black friends and often does not with her white classmates either. The group helped her understand why these differences are there and I think she now comes to terms with knowing why she is different. I don’t think she fully understands or accepts her race yet but she definitely knows who she is now.”

- “Our group always framed our activities and discussions around race. Everything we do is with a racial lens. We try to be sure that we don’t water that down. Kids need to learn about their heritage and their race so they can be proud of it. We tried to make sure that every activity taught the students about understanding their world and how their day to day life can be impacted by their race.”
- “We talked about race all the time and some parents did not like that. Not many, but a few. I think it made some people uncomfortable. It really made some staff members uncomfortable, but it is important that our students learn about race. The group helped many kids learn for the first time what it really means to be a black boy in school or at the mall or at home. Many parents just don’t teach that and our school definitely don’t teach that.”

### **Theme 3: Provided Experiences**

The theme of providing experiences was heavily discussed by the parents and group leaders. Parents shared stories of their children and the opportunities they had been given as a result of the affinity groups in schools. Group leaders discussed cultural outings and opportunities students were able to participate in throughout the years. This particular theme was not one that was discussed in the literature review specifically but could be connected to one of the contributing factors of the achievement gap as discussed in the literature review. Some theorists refer to the Achievement Gap as an Opportunity Gap, which refers to the disparities in social resources and opportunities for minority students and families (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Flores, 2007; Starratt, 2003; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). There are many studies theorizing that student socio-economic level is the major cause of the achievement gap (Sirin,

2005). The focus group and interviews did reveal that parents and group leaders felt that these opportunities were an important part of the affinity groups' success.

- “My son loved the trips and the activities in the boys group. One of his favorites was going to Mr. X’s farm. He talked about those chickens and vegetables for weeks afterwards. I don’t have a garden or can’t take my son to places like this so it was great that he learned about these things. He also enjoyed the trip to D.C. I think he felt like a leader because he was in the group and had these experiences.”
- “One of my daughter’s favorite days was the beauty and spa day. She came home singing the song “Unpretty” and talking about the commercial where the lady gets all airbrushed to look pretty. She learned so much from this experience and I am glad she knows that beauty is from within. The personal hygiene tips were also helpful because she won’t ever listen to me when I tell her to wash that face!”
- “My son really liked the trip to the college alumni day. He of course loved the football game, but I liked that he got to see a college town and got to learn about what people do there. He enjoyed going with his friends and Mr. X on the bus too without me.”
- “We really enjoyed the valentine tea party where the girls all got to tell someone they were a hero to them. Some of the moms and grand moms were crying because it was the first time their kids had said something like this to them. The girls were proud of their speeches and seemed to enjoy it.”
- “The experiences in the group have given my child confidence. This year she was able to perform during an assembly and at a middle school game. She felt so grown. I watched her go from being afraid to go to practice to coming home shouting about



how awesome it was. The experience of getting to be a leader was something I could not give her. The step show was amazing. I got teary eyed watching those girls strut their stuff.”

- “Part of the goal of our group was to provide our students with experiences that can help them in school. Many of our students had never been to a museum or to a nice restaurant. We were able to show the girls about manners, etiquette, and other real life experiences.”
- “These kids need to get out of Chapel Hill and see that there is more out there for them. I don’t know how many of my kids had never left the city. I was shocked. When we took the trip to D.C. they got to see a whole new world. Had we not taken the kids, they might not have ever left Chapel Hill and that is scary to me.”

### **Theme Analysis for Student Participants**

Students were asked their perceptions about the benefits of affinity groups during focus groups and phone interviews. Student responses varied from the parents and group leaders. Both parents, group leaders, and students reported that the groups provided students with positive experiences. The students identified that the groups helped with friendship issues and the parents and group leaders did not. Students also noted that the affinity groups helped them become more involved in school. The 3 major themes that emerged from students were: the group helped us with friends (n=23), helped me get involved in school more (n=31), and gave me opportunities (n=35).

#### **Theme 1: The Group Helped With Friends**

Although friendship was not specifically included in the review of the literature, it was clear that students found this to be an important part of affinity group benefits. Twenty-three

students identified this as a benefit of the affinity group that they participated in. This idea of social groups or friendship circles can be traced back to other research related to this study.

Affinity seeking is defined as "the active social-communicative process by which individuals attempt to get others to like and feel positive toward them" (Bell & Daly, 1984a, p. 1).

Research conducted by Swanson, Spencer, and Petersen (1998) suggests that group attitudes and beliefs are especially important in the psychological and social development of African American youth. According to this research, it is important for students to feel liked and valued in the school setting. Students clearly identified that their affinity groups help them form friendships within the school setting.

- “The group helped me learn how to get along better with my friends and learn more about each other.”
- “We got to know each other better and it helped us not fight as much and stuff at school. I guess we learned to respect each other more cause Mrs. X taught us that we are like a family.”
- “I got to know other girls in school that were not in my class that I might not know if I did not go to the group.”
- “Last year I was not in the group and I did not have as many friends. This year I know everyone like me and we play all the time now. I was too shy to get to know other girls like me sometimes.”
- “I knew I had other people that I could depend on. We got to be really close. We still fought some but I think that is like totally normal and stuff. Mrs. X made us realize though that we had to stick up for one another.”

## **Theme 2: The Group Helped Me Get Involved in School More**

During focus groups and interviews it was clear that students wanted to feel connected at school. Students discussed ways that the groups helped them feel more involved in their respective schools. Thirty-one students discussed the theme of school connectedness. The literature review also discussed the definition of school connectedness. Goodenow and Grady (1993) define school connectedness as the extent to which an individual student feels accepted, valued, supported, and encouraged by classmates, teachers, and others such as administrators and support staff in the school environment and culture. Research from Jackson (2003) suggested that how connected a student feels at school can also impact achievement levels, specifically in African American males. The excitement of the students' responses indicated that they clearly felt the affinity groups had an impact on their ability to be involved in the total school program.

- “I liked getting to be a part of school stuff like the assembly this year.”
- “The group made me feel like I was a leader at school. I got to be a tour guide and I got to do things that I did not get to do before the group. This year I liked getting our own t shirts and getting to perform in front of the school.”
- “I feel like the teachers know me now because I am in the group and get to be a part of things at school. I am like a rock star cause people know me now.”
- “The girls group was like a secret club and we got to do things that sometimes other kids did not get to do. This made me feel special at school.”
- “I was so excited to come to school because I had a job to do. The group needed me to do my part.”

### **Theme 3: The Group Gave Me Opportunities**

The theme of opportunities or experiences was reported by (n=35) students during the focus groups and interviews. This was the highest rated theme from the students. Students recounted in detail specific opportunities and trips that they experienced as a part of the affinity groups at their respective schools. It was clear that the trips and other experiences were the highlight of the groups. This particular theme was not one that was discussed in the literature review specifically but could be connected to one of the contributing factors of the achievement gap as discussed in the literature review. Some theorists refer to the Achievement Gap as an Opportunity Gap, which refers to the disparities in social resources and opportunities for minority students and families (Burriss & Welner, 2005; Flores, 2007; Starratt, 2003; Taliaferro & DeCuir-Gunby, 2008). There are many studies theorizing that student socio-economic level is the major cause of the achievement gap (Sirin, 2005). The focus group and interviews did reveal that parents, group leaders, and students felt that these opportunities were an important part of the affinity groups' success.

- “We got to go on some trips in the group. My favorite was the trip to the art place.”
- “I got to do things that I had never done before like bake bread, spend the night at school, and travel to the art museum.”
- “I liked the trip to the college football game where we got to meet other people who were in college. I want to go to college someday because of that trip.”
- “My favorite activity in the group was the trip to Washington. My mom could never take me there and the group helped me go there.”

- “The trip to Mr. X’s farm was a cool experience that I would have never got to do. My family does not do that sort of stuff so it was cool to get to go and see that kind of stuff.”
- “I liked all the activities and things we did in the group. I got to do things that other kids did not.”

In conclusion, from the opinions and perceptions gathered from the parents, group leaders, and students, it can be concluded that the affinity groups at the four treatment schools do contribute to students’ overall racial identity development and self-esteem. We can conclude that in the context of the study participants, the affinity group did serve to increase the students’ overall racial identity development level and level of self-esteem.

Analysis of Research Question #2: Do African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher or have higher growth rates on North Carolina End of Grade assessments than students who do not participate?

Achievement levels and growth rates were examined to determine if the variable of group membership had an effect on overall achievement. Math and reading achievement were measured by the North Carolina End of Grade Assessment for each grade and year during the study range. Table 22 shows the descriptive statistics for each test. Group membership was determined by assigning a code for the research database. Students who participated in a group were coded with a (1) and students who did not participate were coded with a (2). The null hypothesis for this analysis was that African American students in grades 3-5 who participate in racial affinity groups do not have higher achievement than students who do not participate in groups.

Table 22

*Mean Achievement Levels and Growth Rates by Group Membership*

Variable	Yes			No		
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
Math Best Achievement:						
2008-2009	2.60	.79	97	2.71	.73	133
2009-2010	2.77	.65	83	2.88	.69	113
2010-2011	2.80	.66	74	2.89	.63	101
Math Growth Rates:						
2008-2009	-.02	.53	94	.08	.52	124
2009-2010	.20	.55	76	.12	.54	102
2-10-2011	.00	.49	66	.11	.48	88
Reading Best Achievement:						
2008-2009	2.32	.93	97	2.29	.96	133
2009-2010	2.39	.92	83	2.62	.87	113
2010-2011	2.62	.82	74	2.64	.69	101
Reading Growth Rates:						
2008-2009	-.03	.60	94	-.12	.55	120
2009-2010	-.02	.55	77	.09	.58	105
2010-2011	.08	.49	65	.05	.51	89

Independent 2-tailed T-Tests were utilized to assess the mean differences between independent variable groups on a dependent variable. The independent variable is group membership. The dependent variables are student achievement levels (range I-IV) and student growth rates. The means and standard deviations of students' reading and math achievement scores and growth rates by year and group membership can be found in Table 23. Levene's Test for Equality of Variances was used to evaluate the assumption that the population variances for group membership were equal. The results of these tests indicated that homogeneity of variances could be assumed, p values ranged from .264 to .959, for the different dependent variables. Results of the independent t-tests revealed that there were no significant differences between students who participated in an affinity group and those who did not participate in a group on reading and math achievement levels and growth rates. Differences between the group membership means were minimal. The research was unable to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the students who participated in an affinity group did not score higher or have higher growth rates on the North Carolina End of Grade Assessments than students who did not participate.

Analysis of Research Question #3: Do students who have participated in affinity groups longer have higher growth rates or proficiency rates on the North Carolina End of Grade assessment?

A series of Univariate Analysis of Variances (ANOVA) were conducted to determine if years of group membership have a significant effect on achievement levels and growth rates. The testing year 2010-2011 was selected to run this analysis. The sample year was selected because it would yield the largest sample size. In order to run the analysis for students who had been in groups for 3 years, testing data over the span of 3 years was utilized. The independent

Table 23

*Student Reading and Math Achievement Scores and Growth Rates by Year and Group**Membership*

		Independent Samples Test		
		t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Math Achievement 2008-2009	Equal variances assumed	-1.403	228	.162
Math Achievement 2009-2010	Equal variances assumed	.230	194	.818
Math Achievement 2010-2011	Equal variances assumed	-.210	174	.834
Math Growth 2008-2009	Equal variances assumed	-1.374	216	.171
Math Growth 2009-2010	Equal variances assumed	.984	176	.326
Math Growth 2010-2011	Equal variances assumed	-1.437	152	.153
Reading Achievement 2009-2010	Equal variances assumed	-.521	194	.603
Reading Achievement 2008-2009	Equal variances assumed	-.118	228	.906
Reading Achievement 2010-2011	Equal variances assumed	-.737	174	.462
Reading Growth 2008-2009	Equal variances assumed	1.174	212	.247
Reading Growth 2009-2010	Equal variances assumed	-1.372	180	.169
Reading Growth 2010-2011	Equal variances assumed	.387	152	.699



variable for each analysis was years of membership (range was from 1-3 years). Dependent variables were standardized achievement scores and growth rate for the 2010-2011 school year only. Means of dependent variables by years of group membership can be found in Table 24. The results of the ANOVA analysis can be found in Tables 25-32.

ANOVA Results revealed no significant effects ( $ps > .05$ ) for any of the dependent variables, see Tables 25-32. Post hoc analyses were not conducted due to lack of non-significant  $F$  tests. The number of years a student was in an affinity group did not impact the students' achievement level or growth rate. The research was unable to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the students who participated in an affinity group longer did not score higher or have higher growth rates on the North Carolina End of Grade Assessments than students who participated for a shorter period of time.

#### **Chapter 4 Summary**

The data analysis in this chapter was designed to answer the following major question: *Do racial affinity groups in the elementary school setting have an impact on African American student achievement?* In order to answer the above question, the research utilized the following group of hypothesis.

#### **Hypothesis**

The hypotheses for this study are:

African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher on the reading and math portions of the North Carolina End of Grade assessments than African American students who do not participate in affinity groups.

As the length of time of participation in an African American affinity group increases, students in grades 3-5 have higher growth rates on End of Grade Assessments.

The null hypotheses for this study are:

Table 24

*Means of Dependent Variables: Reading and Math Achievement and Growth by Years of Group Membership*

Years of Membership		Math Growth 2010-2011	Math Achievement 2010-2011	Reading Growth 2010-2011	Reading Achievement 2010-2011
1	Mean	-.14	-4.2085483870968	.25	-2.01189639222942
	N	19	25	19	25
	Std. Deviation	.569	8.31438622188254	.431	4.164534971792777
2	Mean	.10	-.0888183980967	.03	-.21634615384615
	N	26	26	25	26
	Std. Deviation	.378	.63448948833980	.469	.799806333395886
3	Mean	-.01	-3.0725806451613	-.02	-2.27836879432624
	N	21	24	21	24
	Std. Deviation	.517	9.46121335264295	.536	7.907820431427290
Total	Mean	.00	-2.4168656468241	.08	-1.47471014492754
	N	66	75	65	75
	Std. Deviation	.486	7.31481546270027	.488	5.112770921589340

Table 25

*Between-Subjects Factors – Dependent Variable: Math Achievement 2010-2011*

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<u>Years Membership</u>	<u>N</u>
1	25
2	26
3	24

---

Table 26

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects – Dependent Variable: Math Achievement 2010-2011*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	231.487 <sup>a</sup>	2	115.744	2.235	.114
Intercept	452.151	1	452.151	8.733	.004
Years of Membership	231.487	2	115.744	2.235	.114
Error	3727.996	72	51.778		
Total	4397.576	75			
Corrected Total	3959.483	74			

Table 27

*Between-Subjects Factors – Dependent Variable: Math Growth 2010-2011*

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Years of Membership	N
1	19
2	26
3	21

---

Table 28

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects – Dependent Variable: Math Growth 2010-2011*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.619 <sup>a</sup>	2	.309	1.324	.273
Intercept	.020	1	.020	.084	.773
Years of Membership	.619	2	.309	1.324	.273
Error	14.725	63	.234		
Total	15.346	66			
Corrected Total	15.344	65			

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>. R Squared= .040 (Adjusted R Squared = .010).

Table 29

*Between-Subjects Factors – Dependent Variable: Reading Achievement 2010-2011*

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Years of Membership	N
1	25
2	26
3	24

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Table 30

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects – Dependent Variable: Reading Achievement 2010-2011*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	63.886 <sup>a</sup>	2	31.943	1.230	.298
Intercept	169.066	1	169.066	6.508	.013
Years of Membership	63.886	2	31.943	1.230	.298
Error	1870.506	72	25.979		
Total	2097.499	75			
Corrected Total	1934.392	74			

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>. R Squared= .033 (Adjusted R Squared = .006).



Table 31

*Between-Subjects Factors – Dependent Variable: Reading Growth 2010-2011*

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Years of Membership	N
1	19
2	25
3	21

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Table 32

*Tests of Between-Subjects Effects – Dependent Variable: Reading Growth 2010-2011*

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.854 <sup>a</sup>	2	.427	1.843	.167
Intercept	.471	1	.471	2.033	.159
Years of Membership	.854	2	.427	1.843	.167
Error	14.373	62	.232		
Total	15.612	65			
Corrected Total	15.228	64			

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>. R Squared= .056 (Adjusted R Squared = .026).

As African American students in grades 3-5 participate in racial affinity groups they do not increase racial identity.

As African American students in grades 3-5 participate in racial affinity groups they do not increase self-esteem.

African American students who participate in affinity groups do not score higher on End of Grade Assessments than students who are not in groups.

*Independent Variables:* Racial affinity group participation and years of affinity group participation.

*Dependant Variables:* End of Grade assessment scores for reading and math, Individual student growth rates on End of Grade assessments for reading and math, levels of self-esteem, levels of racial identity development.

The following is a summary of each research question and the final conclusion for each question as discussed in this chapter.

1. *Do students have higher self-esteem and racial identity as a result of their participation in the affinity groups?* This information was collected through focus group data collection, telephone interviews, and student surveys. Individual and group responses were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The analysis of student, parent, and group leader perceptions was that the affinity group participation did increase student racial identity development and did increase self-esteem.

2. *Do African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher on the reading and math portions of the North Carolina End of Grade assessments than students who do not participate in an affinity group?* The data collected was gathered from the school district testing and accountability office. The End of Grade Test results for reading and math were analyzed for the 2008-2010 school years. The overall proficiency measure of 1, 2, 3 and 4 were compared for each subject area as well as each subject area overall scale score. A T test analysis was utilized to compare the overall scale scores and proficiency rates for students who

participated in an affinity group as compared to students who did not. The analysis did not support the hypothesis and found that there were no significant differences in results for group membership. The research was unable to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the students who participated in an affinity group did not score higher or have higher growth rates on the North Carolina End of Grade Assessments than students who did not participate.

3. *Do students who have participated in affinity groups for a longer period of time have higher growth rates or proficiency rates on the reading and math portion of the North Carolina End of Grade assessment?* A T test analysis was conducted to compare the overall growth rates to the number of years a student participated in a school affinity group. An ANOVA analysis was also utilized to measure the variable of time spent in a group where the number of years or groups was greater than 2. The analysis revealed no significant differences for growth rates or achievement levels for the years of group membership. The research was unable to reject the null hypothesis and concluded that the students who participated longer in an affinity group did not score higher or have higher growth rates on the North Carolina End of Grade Assessments than students who participated for shorter periods of time.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary

The purpose of this research study was to examine the benefits of racial affinity groups at the elementary school level and to determine the impact on academic achievement as well as contribute to the existing literature in this educational area. The study utilized a mixed methods design imploring quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative data utilized was obtained from the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School District in North Carolina. Reading and math achievement and growth levels were analyzed for n=230 African American students across 3 testing years from 2008-2011. The qualitative data collection was conducted via e-mail and phone interviews, focus group interviews, and student surveys. The participants were the parents of the students who participated in an African American affinity group at one of the four treatment schools in the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School District, students who participated in the groups, and group leaders. In analyzing these data, several major findings were evident.

### Findings and Discussion

This research project was designed to answer the following major question: *Do racial affinity groups in the elementary school setting have an impact on African American student achievement?* In order to answer the above question, the research utilized the following questions throughout the research and data analysis.

1. Do students have higher self-efficacy and racial identity as a result of the affinity groups?
2. Do African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher or have higher growth rates on North Carolina End of Grade assessments than students who do not participate in groups?

3. Do students who have participated in affinity groups longer have higher growth rates or proficiency rates on the North Carolina End of Grade assessment?

### **The Impact of African American Affinity Groups on Self Efficacy and Racial Identity**

The first research question in the study sought to reveal the impact that African American racial affinity groups in the elementary school setting could have on student self-efficacy and racial identity development. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed several conclusions. Every parent and group leader felt that the group helped to increase racial identity development for students. Students seemed to have a better understanding of race as a result of the group experience according to parents and group leaders. Open-ended responses also revealed that the specific discussions around race helped increase students' level of understanding about their heritage. It can also be concluded that that group membership over time seemed to increase the students' level of racial identity and self-esteem. In every instance that a parent selected a high level of self-esteem, the parent also selected a level 4 or 5 racial identity development level on the Helm's Model Scale (Helms, 1995), indicating that parents also felt that racial identity had an impact on self-esteem. Another finding was that as the grade level increased, the level of racial identity increased. All students scoring a level 4 or 5 on the racial identity development rating scale were above 4<sup>th</sup> grade. The students who scored a level 1 or 2 on the identity scale and low on the self-esteem scale were in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. This conclusion corroborates research from the literature review that suggests that racial identity development and higher self-esteem typically occur in later years of adolescence. Research from (Kiang et al., 2006; Lee, 2003, 2005; Lee & Yoo, 2004; Martinez & Dukes, 1997; Phinney et al., 1997; Romero & Roberts, 2003; Sellers et al., 2006; Whitesell et al., 2006; Yip & Fuligini, 2002) suggests that the achievement phase of identity development does not occur until middle to upper adolescent years. This research helps

to explain why students had a difficult time answering the questions related to racial identity development during the focus groups and phone interviews. If understanding of race typically happens later in adolescent years, the question being asked in the study were not developmentally appropriate, therefore the students were unclear with their responses. They were able to articulate that they felt they had higher self esteem, but developmentally they had a much more difficult time answering questions related to race specifically. Research from Datnow and Cooper (1997) revealed that student connection to the peer group increases over time. The final conclusion that can be made from this data collection is that students who participate in affinity groups over time increase their racial identity development and self-esteem.

### **The Impact of African American Affinity Groups on Student Achievement**

The second area of focus for this research study was to determine if African American students who participate in affinity groups score higher or have higher growth rates on North Carolina End of Grade assessments than students who do not participate. For this area of the study, quantitative data from the North Carolina End of Grade Assessment was utilized from the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School District. It was determined that group membership did not have a significant impact on achievement or growth rates. The analysis revealed no significant differences among group members or non-group members. The conclusion could be made as a result of the qualitative data collection, that perhaps the early effects of the affinity groups are only related to racial identity development and self-esteem levels and the academic benefits do not happen until later in the developmental process. The studies of French et al. (2006) support this conclusion. Their study found that mean levels of ethnic affirmation do not begin to increase until after the transition to middle school and into high school for all youth and was particularly

marked among African American and Latino youth. The study examined the developmental trajectory of ethnic identity for African American, Latino American, and European American early and middle adolescents. Only 18 of the 37 students felt that the affinity group impacted their achievement at school.

### **The Impact of African American Affinity Group Membership Over Time on Growth Rates and Achievement Levels**

The final research question for this study was to determine if students who have participated in affinity groups longer have higher growth rates or proficiency rates on the North Carolina End of Grade assessment. For this area of the study, quantitative data was analyzed from the North Carolina End of Grade Assessment for reading and math. The data analysis revealed that there were no significant differences between students who participated longer in affinity groups. The qualitative data did reveal that parents indicated higher racial identity development and self-esteem levels when students had been in the groups 3 or more years. Research in the literature review from Datnow and Cooper (1997) supports the claim that group affiliation increases over time, thus leading to academic gains in subsequent years. Their qualitative study revealed that students typically show cognitive and social benefits of affinity groups in later years of adolescence then followed by academic gains. The researchers indicated that these peer networks functioned in important ways to simultaneously foster school success and to provide a place for them to affirm their racial identities. Cooper and Datnow's study also found that student peer connections increased over time in these affinity groups or peer networks. As students spent more time together, they increased their own self-concept and racial identity as well as academic achievement. Again, the conclusion could be made that while the



academic gains have not occurred yet with the study participants, perhaps they could in future years.

Despite the fact that qualitative measures showed increased self esteem and racial identity development, a realization discovery was made during this research. The research revealed that the quantitative measures utilized in this study were perhaps not the most effective measure of the affinity group success. Other measures could be explored such as: social and psychological ratings, behavioral ratings or behavior rates in schools, or formative based classroom assessments. These alternate forms of assessment or evaluation could show more immediate effects of the groups, unlike the summative, formal assessments.

In conclusion, the research from this study seemed to support much of the research from the literature review related to racial identity development, self esteem, and school connectedness. It can be concluded from the qualitative data collection that the affinity groups do seem to have a positive impact on the students that participate. The research does not fully answer the study's major question, which was "*Do racial affinity groups in the elementary school setting have an impact on African American student achievement?*" It cannot be concluded from the quantitative data set that academic gains are present. While parents and group leaders overall felt that academic gains were present, the students were not as sure that the group provided them with academic gains. The students indicated connectedness to school and other social and emotional benefits. While the academic gains cannot be supported with this study, many additional benefits were noted by parents, staff, and students.

### **Implications for Educational Leaders**

The Achievement Gap continues to be one of the nation's largest and most frustrating educational reform topics (Lewis et al., 2010; Singham, 2003; Singhman, 2005). Many school

districts utilize countless hours and resources investigating and implementing strategies to close the Achievement Gap and create schools that educate all children regardless of ethnicity. With a thorough understanding of current research and issues surrounding race in schools, educators can collect more information to assist with implementation of quality programs that bridge the gap between races and cultures. This research study can assist the following educational stakeholders in the pursuit of educating all students regardless of race or ethnicity.

### **Principal**

In schools and school districts across the country, alternative learning initiatives have been formed to assist in eliminating the Achievement Gap of African American students (Mitchell, 2004; Ratteray, 1994). These programs may be during the day programs or after school enrichment programs (Mitchell, 2004). As principals begin to explore the use of affinity programs in schools this study could serve as a resource for additional information related to racial identity development, self efficacy of African American students, and the impact that affinity programs can have on academic achievement. Wyngaard (2007) summarizes that “the educator, whether the building administrator or teacher, must be personable, caring, trustworthy, and have an interest and understanding of the lives of their African American students” (p. 122). This study could help principals understand that affinity groups might not have immediate results in their schools that can be measured in academic gains. This might help to eliminate frustrations that leaders might have if they find the program is not bringing academic gains. This research study found that academic gains at the elementary and early middle school level were not visible, however students and parents indicated immediate gains in self-esteem levels and racial identity levels.

## **Superintendent**

The role of a district Superintendent is to serve as the instructional leader and to guide other district leaders. As schools struggle with the achievement gap it will continue to be important for district leaders to understand the role that race plays in academic achievement. Districts need to provide all teachers the necessary knowledge and skills to be able to meet the needs of all students regardless of race. Specific training should be offered to teachers in the area of racial identity development and critical race theory. If educators understand the importance of the research from this study they could utilize these same methods in classrooms. Superintendents need to understand the current methods that are being utilized across the country to reduce the achievement gap and their effectiveness. As schools begin to utilize affinity groups, Superintendents need to be aware of district implications for such programs. North Carolina currently does not have explicit policies related to affinity groups. Although equal access laws could be applied, it could be important for districts to have specific guidelines and policies for these groups. Policy review is an important aspect of having any kind of specialized interest group in a district. Superintendents need to know and understand the current policies that are in place or needed as they might apply to affinity groups. Many school districts have created their own policies for student enrichment groups and co-curricular clubs referencing the Equal Access Act of 1984.

## **State Leaders**

Although this study was only conducted in one district in North Carolina and cannot be generalized, there are lessons to be learned from the study. State leaders need to be aware of the achievement gap and the impact that it has on local education agencies. State leaders need to

ensure that there are policies that govern the equitable access of programs and resources for all schools and all students.

### **Teachers**

Teacher attitudes and level of caring for students can play a vital role in achievement according to Thayer and Bacon (1996). In their book, *Cultural Proficiency*, Lindsey et al. (2003), suggested that in the educational landscape today, teachers must not only understand their pedagogy, but must also utilize culturally proficient teaching strategies. Gay (2002) states, “Culturally responsive teaching can be defined as using 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. It teaches to and through the strengths of these students. It is validating and affirming” (Gay, 2002, p. 29). This research study collected a variety of research relating to culturally proficient teaching strategies. Teachers could use the information in the literature review to better understand African American achievement and racial identity development for students. Teachers could use this information to plan classroom instruction or assist school leaders in planning academic or social programs to address the achievement gap.

### **Parents**

Although this study was designed to assist school and district leaders specifically, parents could also benefit from the information provided in this research study. The information collected in the literature review could provide families with information regarding the use of culturally proficient strategies in classrooms as well as information related to the development of racial identity. During the qualitative data collection process, the researcher revealed that many families did not know the connection between racial identity development and achievement.

Parents could learn more about affinity programs and their use in educational programming. This information might help parents make informed decisions about participation in the district or school programs.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There is a plethora of research that documents the educational experiences of African American students. As the literature review in Chapter 2 revealed, early research mainly focused on the failure of African American students to achieve at the same academic level as their White counterparts (Coleman et al., 1966; Jencks, 1972). More recently, the emphasis in research has shifted from studies of academic failure to studies of the factors that contribute to African American student success (Ladson-Billings, 1990; Lee et al., 1991; Lewis et al., 2010).

Despite the surplus of information related to the Achievement Gap, there is very little research on the use of affinity groups as a mean to close the Achievement Gap particularly at the elementary school level. Although this research study can add to the existing literature on racial affinity groups, there are several limitations that should be noted and could be expanded on in future research. The limitations for the study are:

1. This study focuses on African American students despite the fact that other groups could also benefit. A great deal of research was uncovered in the area of Asian and Hispanic student racial identity development.

2. When looking at student achievement data regarding standardized tests, there could be multiple factors contributing to the level of achievement. For example, student involvement in other school programs such as tutoring, mentoring, enrichment clubs, or other special programs could also increase student achievement.

3. Other school factors such as teacher effectiveness, school climate, effectiveness of

administration, and current curriculum choices could also determine the level of student achievement.

4. Overall effectiveness of each affinity group was not measured. The researcher did not measure the quality of each program and no standards are set by the district for affinity groups. Each school affinity group did have to meet some general standards to be included in the study, but this did not measure the quality of the programming. Each school was required to participate only if the following conditions had been met: the affinity group had been established more than one full school year, the group has a formal schedule and meeting format, the group has an established leader, the group is dedicated to speaking about race as it applies to the educational setting, and the groups must follow all district policies regarding equal access.

5. Although the researcher made every attempt to obtain quality data, it should be noted that the researcher has a close connection to the school and district. While writing and conducting this study, the researcher was a principal at one of the targeted schools. Other schools were included in this study in an attempt to reduce the level of bias. The researcher also established the racial affinity groups at two of the targeted schools, and therefore has an established belief that these groups are effective. The researcher is passionate about minority student achievement and entered the research study in hopes that the research would provide information that would be helpful in her mission to educate all children effectively.

6. During the data collection period the sample size was impacted due to alternate forms of testing. Many African American students in the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School District take an alternate form of the North Carolina End of Grade Assessment. These alternate forms of the test could not be compared to the data from the regular test administration. There was not a way to standardize the results in a way that would allow for comparisons to be made. This took

approximately 50 students out of the sample n=230.

7. Sample size was also impacted particularly for the growth analysis to determine if years of membership impacted students over time. In order to measure group membership effectiveness, students had to remain in a group for multiple years and have test data for each of those years. This cut the sample size by about 50% from a n=97 to a n=56 to 70 depending on the test conducted. Chapel Hill Carrboro City school district has a highly transient population, so this particular analysis had a reduced sample size.

8. Participation in the qualitative data collection was only 32% of the sample population. Despite efforts made by the researcher, families did not respond to the focus groups or phone interview requests. This level of participation is typical of the sample population in the Chapel Hill School district. For this reason the data collected cannot be generalized outside of the Chapel Hill School district.

9. The data collection method did not include interviews or focus groups from the control population. This could have given additional insight to the affinity group benefits. Additional comparisons could have been made if the same questions were asked of the control sample.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While this study was able to contribute to the existing literature related to African American achievement and the use of racial affinity groups, there are additional areas in need of research that were uncovered during this study. Additional research is needed to:

- It is recommended that additional research be conducted in the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School district over time to determine longitudinal effects of this cohort of students. Research conducted by Phinney (1989) indicates that the stage of group

affiliation called internalization, happens in the later years of adolescence. If this is the case, the achievement gains might not currently be known for this group of students.

- Currently the Chapel Hill Carrboro City School district does not have any methods to evaluate the racial affinity groups taking place in the district. Further research could compare individual school group effectiveness. This research did not examine achievement or interview data in relation to any specific school. This level of examination could have implications for the district and school leaders.
- Although this study adds to the current research related to affinity groups, it is suggested that additional research be conducted from a wider sample across multiple school and district settings so the findings could be used to make generalizations about affinity group effectiveness.
- An area that was not discussed or examined in this study is the impact that socio-economic status could have on the effectiveness of affinity groups. The data for this analysis was not permitted by the district but could bring significant insights to the research.
- While student voices were utilized somewhat in the qualitative data collection for this study, further analysis of student attitudes and beliefs could benefit this study and future studies of this kind. The motivation and student efficacy levels of students according to this study, have a greater outcome as a result of the affinity groups. A case study analysis of this particular cohort over time would be of particular interest to see if their levels of self efficacy and racial identity development continue to rise over time.



- Many studies have shown that standardized tests are not effective in measuring academic achievement of African American students. If this is the case, additional research could be needed to measure academic achievement in a different way. This study only utilized standardized achievement levels to determine academic change. It could be that additional research could reveal that African American students in affinity groups have other areas of academic change or growth.

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## APPENDIX A: PHONE SCRIPT FOR CONSENT

Hello, good morning/afternoon \_\_\_\_\_ (parent name).

I am calling you to take part in my research study entitled, A Problem of Practice: The Effects of African American Affinity Groups in the Elementary School Setting. I am currently a doctoral student at East Carolina University.

The purpose of this research is to determine if the use of racial affinity groups has an impact on school achievement. By doing this research, I hope to learn if our current groups are effective and learn ways to help make our groups successful in the future. Your participation is voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this research because your child is a member of a school affinity group for African American students. I would love to have about 5-10 minutes of your time to answer some questions.

Because this research is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board, some of its members or staff may need to review my research data. However, the information you provide will not be linked to you in any way. Therefore, your responses cannot be traced back to you by anyone, including me. Your child can also participate in answering these questions with your verbal permission and his/her verbal consent. Once all data has been transcribed, all recordings will be destroyed and all identification of participants will be removed.

Are you willing to participate in my research study? \_\_\_\_\_ wait for parent response here and record response.

Would you be willing to also allow your child to answer questions about the affinity groups? \_\_\_\_\_ wait for parent response here and record response.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the UMCIRB Office at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of UMCIRB Office, at 252-744-1971

You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, please contact Amanda Hartness at (910) 270-4039 or ahartness@chccs.k12.nc.us

I appreciate your willingness to participate in my study. We will now proceed to the questions for my study which should only take about 5-10 minutes of your time..... or thank you for your time if they say no.

\_\_\_\_\_ Script for students \_\_\_\_\_





## APPENDIX C: WRITTEN CONSENT FORMS

Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student at East Carolina University in the Educational Leadership department. I am asking you to take part in my research study entitled, A Problem of Practice: The Effects of African American Affinity Groups in the Elementary School Setting.

The purpose of this research is to determine if the use of racial affinity groups has an impact on school achievement. By doing this research, I hope to learn if our current groups are effective and learn ways to help make our groups successful in the future. Your participation is voluntary.

You are being invited to take part in this research because your child is a member of a school affinity group for African American students. You are being asked to participate in a focus group session to discuss your feelings about the school group that your child participates in currently. The focus group session should only take 30 minutes to one hour of your time.

Because this research is overseen by the ECU Institutional Review Board, some of its members or staff may need to review my research data. However, the information you provide will not be linked to you in any way. Therefore, your responses cannot be traced back to you by anyone, including me. A focus group facilitator will conduct the discussions and no names will be utilized in the recording of the responses. The focus group sessions will be recorded so notes can be taken after the group is completed. Your child can also participate in answering these questions with your written permission and his/her verbal consent. Please sign below if you will allow your child to participate.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the UMCIRB Office at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of UMCIRB Office, at 252-744-1971

You do not have to take part in this research, and you can stop at any time. If you decide you are willing to take part in this study, please contact Amanda Hartness at (910) 270-4039 or [ahartness@chccs.k12.nc.us](mailto:ahartness@chccs.k12.nc.us)

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my research.

Sincerely,

Amanda J. Hartness, Researcher

---

I agree to participate in the research focus group and understand that my name will not be used in any research. \_\_\_\_\_ Parent signature \_\_\_\_\_  
date

I agree to allow my child to participate in answering questions during the focus group. I understand that my child's name will not be used and understand that my child must also give verbal consent to participate. \_\_\_\_\_parent  
signature \_\_\_\_\_ date

## APPENDIX D: AFFINITY GROUP FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

### *Focus Group 1: Parents of African American Students in Affinity Groups*

1. *How many years has your child participated in the group?*

Facilitator would record number of years for each parent in the session.

2. *In your opinion are there benefits of having these groups? If so what are they. If not, why?*

Facilitator would record and take notes from responses. These would then be coded into quantitative data as well as then narrative data. The list of benefits, if any, would then be coded into various themes that emerge.

3. *Do you think the groups assist your child with racial identity development? If so how? Racial identity is defined as the process by which individuals come to understand their race and accept their own race.*

The facilitator would code first the yes or no responses and then would take the responses from individuals who think the groups do help with racial identity development and would categorize themes that emerge. These themes would then be tied back to the research in the literature review.

Which phase of racial identity do you think your child might be in?

African Americans typically progress through the following stages of identity development: Pre-Encounter, Encounter, Immersion, Internalization, Integrative (Helms, 1995).

**Pre-Encounter:** A white racial reference group orientation and rejection of African Americans as such and obliviousness to socioracial concerns. Ex. Child might rather have a white doll than a black one or might ask for blonde hair.

**Encounter:** Ambivalence and confusion regarding racial identity and repression of anxiety-provoking racial information. Ex. Might ask many questions about their race, but does not seem to understand racial discrimination when it occurs.

**Immersion:** An African American racial reference group orientation and rejection of whites, an externally defined racial identity and hyper vigilance toward racial stimuli. Ex. Beginning to accept own race, but rejects the other race. Very in tune with racial injustice.

**Internalization:** An African American racial reference group orientation without rejection of whites, internally defined racial identity, and flexibility and objectivity regarding racial information. Ex. Identifies with African Americans but also values other races. Identifies self as being black. Can look at racial issues around them and understand they are not defined by what happens around them.

**Integrative Awareness:** Valuing of one's own collective identities and empathy and collaboration with other oppressed groups. Ex. Identifies with own race, accepts other races, and begins to have feelings for other oppressed groups. Begins to be an advocate for others.

4. *Did your child enjoy the group? Why or why not?* Facilitator would record the yes or no responses and would then write down themes from the narrative responses. These would be coded by themes and connected back to research from the literature review.

5. *Do you think your child has shown higher self-esteem as a result of the group? Why or why not? Define self esteem*

The facilitator would first record the quantitative yes/no responses and would then record and categorize the narrative themes. The themes that emerge would be connected back to the research from the literature review.

Which level do you think best describes your child's level of self esteem?

Low- Stereotype threat level- Students might think lower of themselves based on social norms around them. Ex. If told that African American students do poor in school the student might believe this and actually perform lower than their capability.

Medium- Acting White level- Student might be capable of high quality work and performs high but worries about being called "white" by peers.

High-Integrative awareness and achievement. Student is proud of race and is able to share it with others. Shows leadership in advocating for others or helping others.

6. *Has your child shown academic progress or improvements since being in the groups? Explain?*

The facilitator would record responses and would then code the responses back to the literature review research.

7. *Do you wish for your child to continue in the affinity group at school? Why?*

The facilitator will record quantitative data and will then record narrative comments, which will be coded by theme and response type.

8. *Do you have any additional comments or thoughts to share with the facilitator?*

These responses would be recorded and then coded by themes that emerge. Responses could be moved to individual questions that the comments address or can be utilized as narrative data to be included in the qualitative section of the data analysis.

## APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP 2

### **Focus Group 2: Group Leaders and administrators of the Racial Identity Affinity Groups and Schools.**

2. *In your opinion are there benefits of having these groups? If so what are they. If not, why?*  
Facilitator would record and take notes from responses. These would then be coded into quantitative data as well as then narrative data. The list of benefits, if any, would then be coded into various themes that emerge.

3. *Do you think the groups assist students with racial identity development? If so how? Racial identity is defined as the process by which individuals come to understand their race and accept their own race.*

The facilitator would code first the yes or no responses and then would take the responses from individuals who think the groups do help with racial identity development and would categorize themes that emerge. These themes would then be tied back to the research in the literature review.

4. *Do you think your students enjoy the groups? Why or why not?*

Facilitator would record the yes or no responses and would then write down themes from the narrative responses. These would be coded by themes and connected back to research from the literature review.

5. *Do you think the students show higher self-esteem as a result of the group? Why or why not?*

The facilitator would first record the quantitative yes/no responses and would then record and categorize the narrative themes. The themes that emerge would be connected back to the research from the literature review.

6. *Have students shown academic progress or improvements since being in the groups? Explain?*

The facilitator would record responses and would then code the responses back to the literature review research.

7. *Do you want to continue the affinity group at your school? Why?*

The facilitator will record quantitative data and will then record narrative comments, which will be coded by theme and response type.

8. *Do you have any additional comments or thoughts to share with the facilitator?*

These responses would be recorded and then coded by themes that emerge. Responses could be moved to individual questions that the comments address or can be utilized as narrative data to be included in the qualitative section of the data analysis.

## APPENDIX F: ORAL RESPONSES

### Questions for Students in Grades 3-5 who participate in African American affinity groups. Oral Responses.

1. *How many years have you participated in an affinity group?*

Facilitator would record number of years for each student in the session.

2. *In your opinion are there benefits of having these groups? If so what are they. If not, why?*

Facilitator would record and take notes from responses. These would then be coded into quantitative data as well as then narrative data. The list of benefits, if any, would then be coded into various themes that emerge.

3. *Do you think the groups assist you with racial identity development? If so how? Racial identity is defined as the process by which individuals come to understand his/her race and accept their own race.*

The facilitator would code first the yes or no responses and then would take the responses from individuals who think the groups do help with racial identity development and would categorize themes that emerge. These themes would then be tied back to the research in the literature review.

4. *Did you enjoy the group? Why or why not?*

Facilitator would record the yes or no responses and would then write down themes from the narrative responses. These would be coded by themes and connected back to research from the literature review.

5. *Do you think you have higher self-esteem because of the group? Why or why not? Self-esteem is defined as how you feel about yourself as a student within the school.*

The facilitator would first record the quantitative yes/no responses and would then record and categorize the narrative themes. The themes that emerge would be connected back to the research from the literature review.

6. *Do you think the group causes you to have higher school achievement Explain?*

The facilitator would record responses and would then code the responses back to the literature review research.

7. *Do you want to stay in the affinity group at school? Why?*

The facilitator will record quantitative data and will then record narrative comments, which will be coded by theme and response type.

8. *Do you have any additional comments or thoughts to share with the facilitator?*

These responses would be recorded and then coded by themes that emerge. Responses could be moved to individual questions that the comments address or can be utilized as narrative data to be included in the qualitative section of the data analysis.

**APPENDIX G: PRINCIPAL PERMISSION LETTER**

December 12, 2011

Dear Principal,

I am currently working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. I am working with our district office to collect testing information for my research. I will also be conducting focus groups with some families at your school who currently participate in the African American affinity groups. I hope to conduct these focus group sessions after the winter holiday break. Please see the abstract for my study below, so you are aware of the project information. I appreciate the opportunity to include your school in the research study.

**Study Abstract:**

“Closing the Achievement Gap is one of the nation’s top education reform topics today. Despite many education reform efforts, the academic achievement of students of color continues to lag behind that of white students. In efforts to improve minority student achievement, some schools and organizations have created affinity groups to increase student self-efficacy and connectedness to school. This research study will examine the potential impact racial affinity groups can have on student achievement at the elementary school level in one district.”

-Amanda J. Hartness, Cc: Diane Villwock, ECU IRB

**Principal’s Signature and Date:**

I am aware, and I give consent for Amanda J. Hartness to conduct graduate research at my school in coordination with the district testing and accountability office’s approval.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature Date

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX H: GROUP LEADER PERMISSION LETTER**

December 12, 2011

Dear Group Leader

I am currently working on my doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at East Carolina University. I am working with our district office to collect testing information for my research. I will also be conducting focus groups and phone interviews with some families at your school who currently participate in the African American affinity groups that you lead. I hope to conduct these focus group sessions after the winter holiday break. Please see the abstract for my study below, so you are aware of the project information. I appreciate the opportunity to include your school and group in the research study.

**Study Abstract:**

“Closing the Achievement Gap is one of the nation’s top education reform topics today. Despite many education reform efforts, the academic achievement of students of color continues to lag behind that of white students. In efforts to improve minority student achievement, some schools and organizations have created affinity groups to increase student self-efficacy and connectedness to school. This research study will examine the potential impact racial affinity groups can have on student achievement at the elementary school level in one district.”

-Amanda J. Hartness, Cc: Diane Villwock, ECU IRB

**Group Leader Signature and Date**

I agree to participate in the above mentioned study.

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature Date

Name of School: \_\_\_\_\_



# APPENDIX I: INSITTUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



**EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY**  
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office  
11-09 Brody Medical Sciences Building, Mail Stop 682  
600 Mays Boulevard - Greenville, NC 27834  
Office 252-744-2914@ - Fax 252-744-2284@ - [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

## Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

**From:** Social/Behavioral IRB  
**To:** [Amanda.Crisp](mailto:Amanda.Crisp)  
**CC:** [Marlene.Singler](mailto:Marlene.Singler)  
**Date:** 3/6/2012  
**Re:** [UNCIRB 11-001264](#)  
A Problem of Practice: The Effects of African American Affinity Groups in the Elementary School Setting.

I am pleased to inform you that your (Expedited) Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 3/6/2012 to 3/5/2013. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 5, 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UNCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UNCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UNCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
<a href="#">Amanda.Hartness.July.16.097   History</a>	Study Protocol or Grant Application
<a href="#">focus.group.questions.hartness.docx   History</a>	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
<a href="#">parent.permission.for.focus.group.doc   History</a>	Consent Forms

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.